



Lutheran Church of the Master, 4800 Ramsey Road, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
Pastor Neal Buckaloo
Christmas Eve, December 24, 2010
Heart of the Awl, A Christmas Story

It has been a busy week here in Heart of an Awl valley. The wind has been gusting up across the lake, much to the ice fishermen's disappointment. But then it is too early for ice fishing anyway. Winter has barely even started, by the calendar.

Of course, you would expect the week before Christmas to be busy in Heart of an Awl. Pastor Buckvold had callers this week. First Father Elmer stopped by to give a little encouragement and share a bit Christian Brothers wine he happened to have with him. Then Pastor Ann from the Methodist Church stopped by for a chat and brought a half full bottle of Danish Cherry Kijafa. She asked that Pastor Buckvold not say anything to Methodist parishioners about the Cherry Kijafa. Finally the Baptist preacher invited Pastor Buckvold to stop by for a good word, a prayer, and shared a little sparkling grape juice. Amidst this and the interruptions (which is what real ministry is about) all the visits got made and the Christmas Eve sermon written, and even rehearsed a bit in an empty classroom in the Gathering Place.

Meanwhile, out at the edge of town, Billy was having a tough go of it. You see, he just couldn't bring himself to get into the spirit of the season. May, Billy's mother, had insisted that decorating the family tree should lighten his mood. Billy did decorate the tree by himself, sort of, over the course of three days, but it didn't have an effect on the cloudy outlook he was carrying.

It seems that May was a very organized and with it mother. She had planned ahead and bought presents ahead. By the time Billy thought about helping buy presents for sister Kate, his Mom, May, and his Dad, Frank, May had already bought everything and had them wrapped. So what was the point of his writing his name on the gift tag, he thought, if he didn't do anything at all but that. Then older sister, Kate, didn't think the Christmas tree looked right, even though Billy had spent three whole days on the project. So Kate had taken it upon herself to rearrange the decorated tree without so much as a word to Billy.

To top things off, Billy's best friend, who would have heard his tale of woe, had left town with his family to spend Christmas with relatives in Montana. So Billy was feeling alone and lonely in what was suppose to be a happy time of year. So he just felt worse.

Well, Christmas Eve morning arrived and the telephone rang so early that it woke Billy up. May answered the phone. Billy silently descended the stairs to listen in. This is what

he heard. "Good morning, Dad. This is early for you to call. Is everything alright?" . . . "Oh, my. That is early. Does it seem okay?" . . . Well, how about if Billy and I drive up and bring it here? That might be just the thing. In fact, everyone may get into the act." . . . "We will be up after Billy is up, dressed and has breakfast."

When May turned, there was Billy. "Get dressed, Billy. Once you have had your breakfast you and I need to drive up to Grandpa's farm and help him. So scoot along."

Billy was curious but didn't say a word. Once breakfast was done and he and May were in the car driving north on 95, May explained their mission. She said, "One of the ewes at the farm has given birth to a smaller than usual lamb. Grandpa had tried to help the lamb suck for nourishment and to bond with its mother. But the ewe would have nothing to do with the lamb. The lamb needs to be bottle fed. Grandpa asked if we could take the lamb, care for it and feed it till it gets a little bigger. Do you think we can do that, Billy?" Billy pictured it in his mind and a smile crept across his face. "Sure," he said.

The lamb was in the farm house, wrapped in a blanket, and Grandma was feeding it with a bottle of milk with a large nipple over the mouth of the bottle. When lamb had finished the bottle, Grandma handed the blanket and lamb to Billy. Next came the instructions on how to care for the little critter. May, Billy and the lamb were on their way back home after some milk and eating a fresh baked cinnamon roll or two.

The afternoon flew by for Billy, who gave his full attention to the lamb. He informed the inquiring Kate that this was his special job and Grandpa and Grandma had not said anything about Kate having a hand in this enterprise.

That evening the family gathered by the fireplace, the room lit by the lights of the Christmas tree. Billy sat facing the crèche with the Holy Family and the shepherds glowing from surrounding light. Frank, as was his custom, read the Christmas story in Luke 2. As Billy listened, he looked at the lamb nestled in his lap, snug in the blanket. Then he looked at the manger scene. All the figures, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, the donkey and the sheep were facing the manger and the baby Jesus.

As father read the song of the angels announcing Jesus' birth, Billy imagined being there, holding this lamb, amazed at the brightness of the angels. Billy could see himself carrying the lamb to the stable with the other shepherds. In his heart and in his mind he had a glimpse of the manger and the baby, God with Us, or Emmanuel. It was then that he knew it was Christmas. It was then that he knew Mom's efficiency with the presents, and Kate's abrupt rearrangement of the tree were not all that important. The lamb, born days too soon at Grandpa's farm, had carried him to the place that mattered – to the manger and the Christ child and to the meaning of Christmas.

“For unto us is born this day, a savior, who is Christ the Lord. You will find him wrapped in swaddling cloth and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a heavenly host praising God and singing, “Glory to God in the highest, and peace to the people of earth.”