



Minister's Ponderings:

This week Harry Campbell sent me a story that he had found and wondered if I would include it in our weekly update. It is at the close of this update and it a reminder of what the spirit of Christmas is all about. It also reminded me that we need to do

more than just give at Christmas. We can make Christmas for many throughout the year as the Christ within us calls us to live our faith.

Worship:

This coming Sunday, Dec. 12th, is our **Children/Youth Musical, "Away in a Mango"**. It is a fun new take on Christmas that will make you laugh as you tap your toes to the music. A special thank you to Victoria Warwick and all the youth who have taken time to learn the music, their lines and video tape their parts. Food donations are welcome and can be dropped off on **Sunday mornings when you come for worship**. We will get them to the Salvation Army Food Bank.

The following Sunday, Dec. 19th, is our **Christmas Cantata, "Winter's Grace"** the St. Paul's and Friends Virtual Choir. A beautiful work of art, this has lovely music and singers and is always a favourite service each year. Worship with us with these special Advent services, either in-person at the church or on-line! Food Donations can be dropped off **Sunday morning** and we will get them to the Salvation Army Food Bank.

Christmas Eve Services – 4:30 and 7:00 p.m.: Thank you to all of you who let us know that you were thinking of attending in person our Christmas Eve service. It was so valuable to get an idea of our numbers. What we learned is that, due to the numbers, we are going to need two Christmas Eve services to fit everyone in. So, on **Christmas Eve at 4:30 p.m.** we will be having an **All Ages Worship service** with in-person children being part of our pageant. Any children who would like to be part of this must pre-register with Rebecca Amadei ahead of time. On **Christmas Eve at 7:00 p.m.** we will have a second service with Lessons and Carols and candlelight.

Please note, **everyone, must pre-register**. We need to know which service you plan to attend and how many people will be with you. If you do not pre-register, we cannot guarantee you a space. Email the church office stpaulsunited@rogers.com anytime or **only** on **Tues. Wed. Thurs.** or phone Louise 705-526-1640, to let her know which service and how many are coming. If you helped us out earlier by letting us know that you were planning on coming out on Christmas Eve, we now need you to email or phone **again** to let us know which service you want to attend and your numbers.

Sunday, December 26th will be an **on-line Worship service only**. There will not be in-person worship that day.

2021 Advent Services 10 am

Advent 3 – December 12 - Children's Musical "Away in a Mango"

Advent 4 – December 19 - Choir Cantata "Winter's Grace"

2021 Christmas Eve Services - Pre-register now and get a seat!

Dec. 24 4:30 p.m. In-person All Ages Christmas Eve service,

Dec. 24 7 :00 p.m. In-person Carols/Readings/Candlelight Christmas Eve service

Dec. 26 On-line service only

Join our on-line worship service at www.stpaulsmidland.org



St. Paul's policy requires that all eligible congregants, volunteers, user groups and visitors be fully vaccinated against Covid-19 and show proof of vaccination before entering the building. Those who wish to claim a Human Rights-Code exemption (such as a medical exemption), should notify the office of their accommodation request and guidance will be provided about how to proceed. Children not eligible for vaccination are welcome to attend! One member of the party will complete contact information for those attending with them. Masking, physical distancing and hand sanitizing is still required and singing will not resume.

We are required by the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit to continue active screening, therefore the COVID screening questionnaire is attached. **Please review it before you attend church on Sunday**, as the ushers will be asking you about your current health status.

Visit our website at www.stpaulsmidland.org and use the direct YouTube link at the top of the page, or simply go to YouTube and subscribe to our channel. Just type in "St. Paul's Midland" and you will find us. If you are on Facebook, you can get St. Paul's updates that way as well.

Discovery Kids/Youth Group:

Discovery Kids: We will offer **in-person DK** at 10:00 a.m. this coming **Sun. Dec.12th** at 10:00 a.m. Come join us. We will then be in the church on January 2, 16, 30. Dec. 19th will be a Zoom gathering.

Our **Youth Group** will gather on Sunday **December 12 at the Church from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.** for a Gingerbread House building competition. Any youth in grades 6-12 is welcome to

attend and may invite their friends. Please contact Rebecca to RSVP by phone/text 226 339 8218 or by email rebeccaamadei@gmail.com

St. Paul's Zoom Coffee Hour:

Our next ZOOM Coffee Hour is this **Sun. Dec. 12th at 1:00 p.m.** We invite you all to join. We are also planning to still have our fourth Sunday coffee hour on **Sunday, Dec. 26th as well.** You can use the same link as before:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89969004401>



Foodgrains Campaign:

Our Canadian Foodgrains Campaign ended on November 30th. We received a few late donations and our final total, including the \$2500 matching from our Trust Funds is **\$10,825.**

Congregational News/Updates:

Our condolences to Louise Therrien, our church Administrator on the death of her mother, Marie Rose Laurin, on Mon. Dec. 6th. Please keep Louise and her family in your thoughts and prayers. Please note that she normally **works in the church office from 9:00 am to noon on Thursday mornings only** however this week she is on bereavement leave and will not be there. The balance of the time she works from home. She can be reached at stpaulsunited@rogers.com, or 705-526-1640 Tuesday to Thursday. She does not work Mondays or Fridays.

St. Paul's UCW will meet in the Parlour on **Tuesday, December 14th at 2:30 p.m.** For those attending, please be sure to bring your proof of double vaccination with you.

Volunteers Needed: We are looking for **volunteers to work as ushers** at our Sunday services. At this time, we require seven ushers for each service. If you can assist, please call Sheila Thompson at 705-526-2186

A Christmas Story: *This is what Christmas is all about...*

"Pa never had much compassion for the lazy or those who squandered their means and then never had enough for the necessities. But for those who were genuinely in need, his heart was as big as all outdoors. It was from him that I learned the greatest joy in life comes from giving, not from receiving.

It was Christmas Eve 1881. I was fifteen years old and feeling like the world had caved in on me because there just hadn't been enough money to buy me the rifle that I'd wanted for Christmas. We did the chores early that night for some reason. I just figured Pa wanted a little extra time so we could read in the Bible.

After supper was over, I took my boots off and stretched out in front of the fireplace and waited for Pa to get down the old Bible. I was still feeling sorry for myself and, to be honest,

I wasn't in much of a mood to read Scriptures. But Pa didn't get the Bible, instead he bundled up again and went outside. I couldn't figure it out because we had already done all the chores. I didn't worry about it long though; I was too busy wallowing in self-pity. Soon Pa came back in. It was a cold clear night out and there was ice in his beard. "Come on, Matt," he said. "Bundle up good, it's cold out tonight." I was really upset then. Not only wasn't I getting the rifle for Christmas, but now Pa was also dragging me out in the cold, and for no earthly reason that I could see. We'd already done all the chores, and I couldn't think of anything else that needed doing, especially not on a night like this. But I knew Pa was not very patient at one dragging one's feet when he'd told them to do something, so I got up and put my boots back on and got my cap, coat, and mittens. Ma gave me a mysterious smile as I opened the door to leave the house. Something was up, but I didn't know what...

Outside, I became even more dismayed. There in front of the house was the work team, already hitched to the big sled. Whatever it was we were going to do wasn't going to be a short, quick, little job. I could tell. We never hitched up this sled unless we were going to haul a big load. Pa was already up on the seat, reins in hand. I reluctantly climbed up beside him. The cold was already biting at me. I wasn't happy. When I was on, Pa pulled the sled around the house and stopped in front of the woodshed. He got off and I followed. "I think we'll put on the high sideboards," he said. "Here, help me." The high sideboards! It had been a bigger job than I wanted to do with just the low sideboards on, but whatever it was we were going to do would be a lot bigger with the high side boards on.

After we had exchanged the sideboards, Pa went into the woodshed and came out with an armload of wood - the wood I'd spent all summer hauling down from the mountain, and then all fall sawing into blocks and splitting. What was he doing? Finally, I said something. "Pa," I asked, "what are you doing?" "You been by the Widow Jensen's lately?" he asked. The Widow Jensen lived about two miles down the road. Her husband had died a year or so before and left her with three children, the oldest being eight. Sure, I'd been by, but so what? Yeah," I said, "Why?"

"I rode by just today," Pa said. "Little Jakey was out digging around in the woodpile trying to find a few chips. They're out of wood, Matt." That was all he said and then he turned and went back into the woodshed for another armload of wood. I followed him. We loaded the sled so high that I began to wonder if the horses would be able to pull it. Finally, Pa called a halt to

our loading, then we went to the smoke house and Pa took down a big ham and a side of bacon. He handed them to me and told me to put them in the sled and wait. When he returned, he was carrying a sack of flour over his right shoulder and a smaller sack of something in his left hand. "What's in the little sack?" I asked. Shoes, they're out of shoes. Little Jakey just had gunny sacks wrapped around his feet when he was out in the woodpile this morning. I got the children a little candy too. It just wouldn't be Christmas without a little candy."

We rode the two miles to Widow Jensen's pretty much in silence. I tried to think through what Pa was doing. We didn't have much by worldly standards. Of course, we did have a big woodpile, though most of what was left now was still in the form of logs that I would have to saw into blocks and split before we could use it. We also had meat and flour, so we could spare that, but I knew we didn't have any money, so why was Pa buying them shoes and

candy? Really, why was he doing any of this? Widow Jensen had closer neighbours than us; it shouldn't have been our concern.

We came in from the blind side of the Jensen house and unloaded the wood as quietly as possible, then we took the meat and flour and shoes to the door. We knocked. The door opened a crack and a timid voice said, "Who is it?" "Lucas Miles, Ma'am, and my son, Matt, could we come in for a bit?" Widow Jensen opened the door and let us in. She had a blanket wrapped around her shoulders. The children were wrapped in another and were sitting in front of the fireplace by a very small fire that hardly gave off any heat at all. Widow Jensen fumbled with a match and finally lit the lamp.

"We brought you a few things, Ma'am," Pa said and set down the sack of flour. I put the meat on the table. Then Pa handed her the sack that had the shoes in it. She opened it hesitantly and took the shoes out one pair at a time. There was a pair for her and one for each of the children - sturdy shoes, the best, shoes that would last. I watched her carefully. She bit her lower lip to keep it from trembling and then tears filled her eyes and started running down her cheeks. She looked up at Pa like she wanted to say something, but it wouldn't come out.

"We brought a load of wood too, Ma'am," Pa said. He turned to me and said, "Matt, go bring in enough to last awhile. Let's get that fire up to size and heat this place up." I wasn't the same person when I went back out to bring in the wood. I had a big lump in my throat and as much as I hate to admit it, there were tears in my eyes too. In my mind I kept seeing those

three kids huddled around the fireplace and their mother standing there with tears running down her cheeks with so much gratitude in her heart that she couldn't speak. My heart swelled within me and a joy that I'd never known before, filled my soul. I had given at Christmas many times before, but never when it had made so much difference. I could see we were literally saving the lives of these people.

I soon had the fire blazing and everyone's spirits soared. The kids started giggling when Pa handed them each a piece of candy and Widow Jensen looked on with a smile that probably hadn't crossed her face for a long time. She finally turned to us. "God bless you," she said. "I know the Lord has sent you. The children and I have been praying that he would send one of his angels to spare us."

In spite of myself, the lump returned to my throat and the tears welled up in my eyes again. I'd never thought of Pa in those exact terms before, but after Widow Jensen mentioned it, I could see that it was probably true. I was sure that a better man than Pa had never walked the earth. I started remembering all the times he had gone out of his way for Ma and me, and many others. The list seemed endless as I thought on it.

Pa insisted that everyone try on the shoes before we left. I was amazed when they all fit and I wondered how he had known what sizes to get. Then I guessed that if he was on an errand for the Lord that the Lord would make sure he got the right sizes.

Tears were running down Widow Jensen's face again when we stood up to leave. Pa took each of the kids in his big arms and gave them a hug. They clung to him and didn't want us to go. I could see that they missed their Pa, and I was glad that I still had mine.

At the door Pa turned to Widow Jensen and said, "The Mrs. wanted me to invite you and the children over for Christmas dinner tomorrow. The turkey will be more than the three of us can eat, and a man can get cantankerous if he has to eat turkey for too many meals. We'll be by to get you about eleven. It'll be nice to have some little ones around again. Matt, here, hasn't been little for quite a spell." I was the youngest. My two brothers and two sisters had all married and had moved away.

Widow Jensen nodded and said, "Thank you, Brother Miles. I don't have to say, May the Lord bless you, I know for certain that He will."

Out on the sled I felt a warmth that came from deep within and I didn't even notice the cold. When we had gone away, Pa turned to me and said, "Matt, I want you to know something. Your ma and me have been tucking a little money away here and there all year so we could buy that rifle for you, but we didn't have quite enough. Then yesterday a man who owed me a little money from years back came by to make things square. Your ma and me were real excited, thinking that now we could get you that rifle, and I started into town this morning to do just that, but on the way I saw little Jakey out scratching in the woodpile with his feet wrapped in those gunny sacks and I knew what I had to do. Son, I spent the money for shoes and a little candy for those children. I hope you understand."

I understood, and my eyes became wet with tears again. I understood very well, and I was so glad Pa had done it. Now the rifle seemed very low on my list of priorities. Pa had given me a lot more. He had given me the look on Widow Jensen's face and the radiant smiles of her three children. For the rest of my life, whenever I saw any of the Jensen's, or split a block of wood, I remembered, and remembering brought back that same joy I felt riding home beside Pa that night. Pa had given me much more than a rifle that night, he had given me the best Christmas of my life."

Blessings everyone. Till next week. Karen

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