

HOPE HIGHLIGHTS

December 2023

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Dear Members of Hope,

“The Farmer’s Gift”

This is my version of Leo Tolstoy’s, “The Cobbler.” I hope you enjoy my story and have a wonderful Christmas! Pastor Rhea

Once there was a farmer who lived just outside of Cedar Rapids. He had retired from farming, but he still loved to help his renter with the planting and the harvest. His wife had died the day after Christmas the year before. His children lived scattered around the country. The children their spouses and the grandchildren came every other year for Christmas. This was the year they would all be with their in-laws. They had come so often the year before to help him care for his wife as she became more and more sick with cancer, they didn’t need to come again. They all had a sad Christmas last year, knowing she could leave them any moment. He could hardly blame any of them for not wanting to spend Christmas in this house that death had so recently visited. He didn’t want to spend Christmas in the house alone either. The memories of those last days seemed to come back to him in detail as Christmas grew closer. “Last year at this time I was sitting and holding her hand with hospice workers and children and grandchildren hovering around us. Now the house seems so empty and lonely,” he said to his dog. He knew his friends would take him in for a few days if he asked, but they had their own families to celebrate with, he didn’t want to intrude. As he went to bed that night before Christmas Eve, he prayed; “Jesus, just come and take me home to be with my wife. I can’t take this loneliness and sadness any longer.” As if in response to his prayer, he heard a voice talking. At first he thought he had left the TV on, but no, the voice was right next to him, talking softly in his ear. He was so startled he jumped and frighten the dog off the end of his bed. The dog began barking, thinking it

needed to protect him. But the voice was still at his side. It said, “I am with you, you are not alone. I am always with you, I am Jesus. I will come to visit you tomorrow and we will celebrate Christmas Eve together.” The farmer tossed and turned all night. Maybe he was dreaming or losing his mind. But no, he had been wide awake when he heard the voice. He finally dozed off toward morning, but awoke early, eager to discover what the day would bring.

The farmer was afraid to leave the house in case Jesus came, but he needed to cook a feast. He couldn’t serve Jesus the left overs in his refrigerator. He decided that even Jesus wouldn’t come this early in the morning, so he got in his truck drove into town to Hyvee, filling his cart with food, not caring about the cost. He chatted and laughed with other shoppers and the woman who checked out his groceries, as he hadn’t done in a long time. He gulped when he looked at his bill, but then remembered that no expense was too great for Jesus. The farmer wished everyone around him a Merry Christmas and hurried to his truck and rushed to get home.

The farmer could see his road from the kitchen window, his living room window looked out over all his land. He unloaded groceries and began preparing a huge meal. He had learned to cook when his wife was diagnosed with cancer. She was so tired from all the chemo that he decided to learn to cook so she didn’t feel as though she needed to cook for them. With the help of the food network he had become a pretty good cook, if he did say so himself. While he was in front of the kitchen window, washing and chopping vegetables he noticed a car driving too fast for the icy roads. As he watched, the car began sliding all over the road, and finally went into his ditch. With a sigh, the farmer put on his jacket and warm gloves, found his chains in the garage, and drove his truck down the long driveway to the car in the ditch. Kids! He thought as he slid down into the ditch to see if they were alright. He opened the driver’s door to find 4 young people rubbing their heads and looking confused. He asked them their names and discovered that he knew the families of two of them. They were college students trying to get home for Christmas. He told them to go into his house to rest and warm up while he pulled their car out of the ditch. Then he called the two families he knew from his cell phone to tell them what had happened. He went in the house to find the four on the couch huddled around the fire in his fireplace. They were embarrassed at what had happened and wanted to hurry away, but because they had bumped their heads he didn’t want them driving home. They looked hungrily at all the food

he had cooking, so he told them to sit down and wait for a parent to arrive, than he gave them some of the soup he was cooking, and the homemade bread he had made for Jesus. About 20 minutes later he had not just one parent picking up the kids, but the parents of all the kids standing in his living room, thanking him and hugging him. He felt he needed to be a good host, so he offered them the snacks and apple cider he had made for Jesus. Soon they were all laughing and telling stories about harrowing drives in the snow as they traveled to relatives' homes for Christmases, over the years. As The farmer watched everyone go out his door and get in their cars he looked at the clock. It was 2:00 in the afternoon and his food was depleted. He better begin cooking more food. Surely Jesus would come as most guests would come for a dinner party, probably an hour or so before dinner.

About an hour later the farmer heard his phone ringing. What now? He thought. The kids have already called to wish me a Merry Christmas. They won't call again until tomorrow. Who could this be? He answered his phone to a woman crying. He knew who she was, that young girl who lives two miles down the road. She's a single mother with 5 kids who never seems to have enough food, or needs a ride because her car broke down again, or needs help for countless other reasons. She was a bit of a problem in the area, and often fodder for gossip: Who was the latest boyfriend? Was she pregnant again? Why didn't someone do something about her? She rented an old farm house that always needed repair and she was often behind in rent. When the farmer heard her crying voice, he braced himself and asked; "What's wrong this time Sara?" She tearfully told him how she thought she had finally met a nice guy, but she came home from work today to discover a Christmas break-up note, and he had stolen all her kids Christmas presents. She didn't know what to do. She had called other neighbors for help but they had politely hung up on her. She begged him not to hang up on her. The farmer didn't know what to do. The kids with no presents pulled at his heart strings, but Jesus was coming. He couldn't leave. He told Sara he would see what he could do and hung up the phone. He tried to forget her, but all he could see were the faces of those cute kids crying because Santa didn't come. He couldn't stand it. For the second time that day he got into his truck and drove to Walmart. He filled a cart with toys as he tried to think what ages the kids were and what they might like. After consulting a few sales clerks and discussing what kids today like. He took his overflowing cart to the check out and again found himself chatting with the other people in line and

the sales clerk. Everyone wondered why he had saved so much of his shopping to the last minute. The clerk heard him explain what he was doing, and gave him a discount on the toys. He still gulped when he saw the total on the register screen. For the second time that day he wished everyone around him in the store a Merry Christmas and hurried home. On his way he thought about Sara and the kids, and figured they didn't have much food for a Christmas celebration, but he wasn't going back to the store. He stopped at his house and packed up much of the food he had been cooking and took it all to Sara's house. He helped her hide the toys and fill the kitchen with food. Sara was crying again and hugging him in gratitude. He awkwardly hugged her back and hurried home. He hoped he hadn't missed Jesus.

The farmer began cooking dinner again. His supplies were getting low, but he managed to put together a pretty good feast for Jesus. He looked up at the clock surprised that it was 7:00 by now, where was Jesus? Maybe he liked a late dinner. The farmer anxiously watched out the window, no one came by. If Jesus had come early enough he was hoping to take him to the candlelight service at church. That would give his neighbors and even the pastor something to talk about. He day dreamed about walking with Jesus into the church and seeing everyone's astonished reaction. I bet the pastor would let Jesus do the preaching, he thought. He'd probably have to, she would be in shock.

The doorbell rang and woke the farmer from his day dreams. He looked at the clock. It was 8:30! Finally Jesus was here! He was so excited he couldn't get to the door quick enough. He eagerly opened the door, but it wasn't Jesus. A very dirty, partially toothless man stood there with a back pack, shivering, barely able to stand and almost frozen to death. The farmer was so surprised it wasn't Jesus at his door, that he didn't think about his safety or the kind of person he was letting into his house. He helped the man into his house, took off his back pack and sat him in front of the fire. The man was so cold he was in danger of going into hypothermia. The farmer peeled off his frozen layers of clothes and put him in a hot shower. He put out a clean towel and some of his clothes for the man to wear when he got out of the shower. The farmer went to his kitchen to warm up the food he had been cooking. The man smiled when he came out of the bathroom, looking better, but still shivering. The farmer looked at the clock. It was 9:30, it was so late, Jesus must not be coming. He had the man sit down at his table and the two of them ate the feast he had prepared for Jesus. The man was so grateful, it embarrassed

the farmer. He learned the man had wanted to see his sister for Christmas, they hadn't been together for years. He had been a homeless alcoholic for a long time, but had finally beat the booze thanks to the help of a social worker who took him under his wing, seeming to really care about what happened to him. The man was still homeless, but he finally found the courage to go see his sister, even if she turned him away. The farmer asked him where his sister lived and where he had walked from. The man said his sister lived in Manchester and he had been walking for the past 2 weeks from down south. The farmer sighed, asked the homeless man if he had an address or phone number for his sister. The man shuffled through his back pack and found the address and phone number. The farmer decided he better call the sister to see if she wanted to see her brother.

The farmer was surprised as he talked to the homeless man's sister. She was relieved and excited that her brother was alright. She had worried for years that he would die in a gutter and she would never know what happened to him. The farmer offered to drive the man to her house. So for the 3th time that day, he got into his truck and drove the grateful, tearful, homeless man to his sister's house in Manchester. As the farmer watched the reunion of the two siblings he was moved to tears himself. The sister invited the farmer into her family's Christmas celebration. He almost said no, but looked at his watch, it was about 11:00. Jesus had stood him up! He went in the house and was surrounded by happy, grateful people who treated him like a king. He felt he made some lifelong friends by the time he left, about 1:00 in the morning. He drove home slowly and carefully. Any other day he would have thought, this has been a good day, a surprising day, an amazing day! But all he could think about was his disappointment. Why hadn't Jesus come as he promised? As he drove into his driveway, he prayed; "Jesus, why didn't you come visit me? Did I miss you when I was away from the house? Did I do something wrong by helping those people? Why? As the garage door opened there was a light so bright it almost blinded him coming from inside his garage. He opened his truck door and fell on the ground in terror. When he found the courage to look up, the light had become warm and comforting, it surrounded him. From around him in the light he saw the images of all the people he had helped that day. Then he heard Jesus's voice say, "I did come to visit you today, I came 3 times. I was the 4 college students whose car slid into your ditch. I was the young woman who needed food and gifts for her children, and I was the homeless man who came to your door. The things you did for these, my beloved people, you did for me."

The next morning the farmer was up early and went to the Christmas morning service at Hope. He walked happy and confidently into church knowing Jesus was with him, but now he had no need to show Jesus off to the congregation, because now he understood Jesus was with them too!

CHOIR

Choir meets for practice every Wednesday afternoon at **3:00pm**. We also have started a tone chime choir that everyone is welcome to participate in. Practice for chimes is on Wednesday also, at **4:00P**.



December Birthdays

2	Cameron Weitnauer
10	Shane Dyson
15	Cody Techau
18	Richard Hartgrave
21	Emma Schmidt
29	Pam Evans
31	Mary Richeson, Kris Kessell

MEN OF HOPE

The Men of Hope will meet on Saturday, December 9th at 8:30 for breakfast and meeting. All men are welcome and invited to come.

Confirmation class will resume on Wednesday, December 27th at 6:30.



Pastor Rhea's Thursday morning Bible Study will return on Thursday, January 18th at 11:00am. They will not meet on the 2nd Thursdays of the month as Pastor has Conference meetings.

SPIRITED SENIORS

Spirited Seniors meets every Wednesday at noon for lunch and cards. Bring your own lunch (unless Jim says not to!)

Phill and Pam Evans would like to thank everyone for their thoughts and prayers during and after his knee replacement surgery. Phill is now 5 weeks out from surgery and is doing well with physical therapy and recovery.

Advent Schedule

This year we will have **Wednesday Evening Advent Services starting on December 6th at 6:00P. This will be along with our regular Sunday morning worship at 9:00A**

FALL CRAFT FAIR – Thanks to all who participated in this years Craft Fair; Cooks, Bakers, Crafters and a special thanks to Tami Rairdin for heading up the fair and Mary Richeson for getting out the advertising. The Women of Hope made a total of \$1,298.00 (after expenses).

Journeys:

Journey's is a social group that meets monthly at the Legacy Center at Murdoch-Linwood to provide support to those in the community who have experienced the loss of someone they love. The monthly programs vary from carts to selfcare tips, seminars and presentations by community experts. It is a safe space to tell your story and try new things. All are welcome. Meetings are the second Monday of the month at 2:30P. There is a brochure on the kiosk in the church entry way.

PLEASE REMEMBER TO TURN IN YOUR TIME AND TALENT SHEETS! Did you know that without your "talents and time" many of the daily things that go on at Hope would not get done! Hope only has 5 paid employees on staff but we have **LOTS** of volunteers. Please remember to fill out your Time and Talent sheets so that when needed projects come up, we know who might be willing to do them. Thanks.

HOPE NOW HAS an outdoor food/toiletry box that is open to the public. This is a project put together by Abbi, a student at Kirkwood and several of her classmates. They will be stocking it for a week and then we will take over the project. This box is outside by the sign. You are welcome to put items in the box (things that won't freeze) and you are also welcome to take anything you might be in need of. **SPECIAL THANKS TO CODGE JONES** for installing it on such a cold day.



THE MITTEN TREE IS UP! If you have good, gently used hats, mittens, gloves, or scarves you would like to donate, please start bringing them after today and hang them on the tree. You are also welcome to purchase these items. They will all be donated to a local charity.

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HOPES GIVING TREE is ALL OUT OF TAGS!! This year we have adopted one family and two residents of Heritage Rehab Center. With the cost of groceries and gifts you are still welcome to bring in \$10-\$20 gift cards to either Walmart or HyVee. Just bring them to Kris' office. We like to be able to give the family time to purchase things for Christmas. We have been given a specific list from the people at Heritage and which will be delivered. **DON'T FORGET TO DELIVER** your gifts for our Giving Tree on or before December 11th. Please do not wrap them.

THE ADVENT TENT



Sharon Taylor, Bev Dougherty & Betty Nelson



Sherri Fox, Pastor Rhea



Donna Fugate

THE ADVENT TENT was designed by Sharon Taylor and Pastor Rhea with Sharon doing all of the machine stitching. Thanks to Donna Fugate, Sherry Fox, Bev Dougherty and Betty Nelson for hand stitching all of the bells and trim on them. Aren't they Beautiful? Make sure to thank them for a job well done.