

Three Knocks on the Door

A Tramp Knocks on the Door

It was Christmas morning in the late sixties in a small town in the Midlands of Ireland. The streets were busy with families making their way home from Mass. The children excitedly told the friends they met in the street about the wonderful gifts they had received. Meanwhile the adults sought to demonstrate the Christmas spirit of friendship, courtesy and kindness as they chatted with their neighbours.

In most homes the Christmas morning routine was basically the same. Upon arriving home from Mass the mother changed out of her best clothes, donned her apron and set about preparing the Christmas dinner. The children kept themselves occupied playing with their new toys. The father put some more fuel on the fire he had lit earlier that morning. He then relit the Christmas Candle before opening a bottle of Guinness and settling down in his favourite armchair. According to tradition, the lighted Christmas candle in the window represented an invitation to weary travellers who sought refuge, and it assured them of a warm welcome.

Paddy, his wife Kathleen and their children lived in a terraced council house. They were working-class people and could be described as being a refined, religious and respectable family. They did not realise it, but on this particular Christmas morning, while they eagerly awaited the turkey and all the trimmings, an unexpected visitor was making his way to their home.

Suddenly there was a knock on the door. When he opened the door Paddy was very surprised to see his brother standing there, offering a friendly handshake and wishing him a Happy Christmas. It had been many, many years since they had last met, and now Paddy was once again face-to-face with his unshaven, undernourished and poorly-dressed brother.

Jack was the 'rake' of the family. Their mother had died when Jack was young, leaving her husband to rear a large family. Times were hard and money was scarce. There was very little employment in the area, so Jack left home in the 1940s as a young man. Like multitudes of his fellow countrymen, he 'took the boat' to England in search of employment and a new life. And like many of the Irish emigrants, Jack soon discovered that in order to be able to afford even reasonable accommodation you needed to be earning plenty of money. Thankfully, work was plentiful at that time and wages were good.

The building contractors, McAlpine, Wimpey and Laing were each involved in major construction projects, as the Second World War had just ended and much rebuilding had to be done. These contractors employed countless Irish men like Jack, mainly as labourers. Many of these labourers, also known as navvies, knew what it was to have calloused hands as a result of spending day after day shovelling sand, cement, gravel and lime into cement mixers. The mortar was then tipped into wheel barrows, which usually had timber creels on them to ensure a maximum-capacity load. The barrows were then wheeled, usually over planks, to where foundations were being filled or walls were being built or plastered. Each bricklayer had a labourer whose job it was to keep him supplied with the mix.

The bricklayers also each had a labourer who was responsible for keeping him supplied with bricks. This man carried the hod, a wooden tray with a long, straight handle designed to hold a certain number of bricks. The hod was filled with bricks and carried on the shoulder, sometimes up several flights of scaffolding to the waiting bricklayer. The hod carrier could spend eight to ten hours each day climbing ladders, holding on with one hand and holding the handle of the hod with the other, as he balanced the heavy load of bricks on a painful shoulder. The 'pick and shovel

brigade' was a band of labourers involved in digging out the foundations on the building sites, or digging trenches for laying cables, water and sewage pipes.

The foremen, also known as gangers, were tough individuals who made no apology for using the tactics of fear and intimidation as they sought to extract the maximum performance from each member of their crew. The gangers did not care if the navvies lost blood, sweat and tears. Their only concern was that the job should be completed on time. If there was any delay the ganger incurred the wrath of the boss, otherwise known as the gaffer.

Most of the building contractors gave their employees the opportunity to work seven days a week. Many of the Irish navvies availed of this opportunity to earn good wages. However, this meant that they no longer attended Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. As their lifestyle changed, so too did their adherence to many of the traditions and customs they had practised back home in Ireland. These included the recitation of the Angelus and the Rosary, attendance at confession and communion at least once a month, abstaining from eating meat on Fridays and observing days of fast and abstinence, particularly during the season of Lent.

Many of the emigrants worked long hours and earned plenty of money. This enabled them to send money home each week to their wives and families in Ireland. Some of them also had the habit of saving a few pounds with a view to accumulating enough for them to travel back home to Ireland a couple of times each year. This usually meant they could visit their families for two weeks in the summer and a week at Christmas.

Shortly after arriving in England, Jack got a taste of hard work and good wages. But unfortunately he also got a taste of the 'demon' drink. At one stage a few pints of beer would satisfy him, but this soon changed and his consumption of alcohol greatly increased. This resulted in a large proportion of his hard-earned money being handed over to the publicans. After he had paid for the digs and the drink it seemed to Jack that there was very little money left, definitely not enough to send any home to his father, who was struggling to rear the rest of the family. In fact, Jack did not seem to even have enough time to write a letter and post it home. Eventually, Jack's father, his brother Paddy and the rest of his family in Ireland lost track of him. For many years none of them knew where he lived, so it was not possible to contact him when his father died. When Jack finally returned to his native shores he made his way to the town of his birth. By this stage he was on 'skid-row', with not a penny to his name and nowhere to lay his head. And now, on this Christmas morning, he arrived unexpectedly at the door of his brother Paddy's home.

Jack was not even allowed into the hallway, but was left standing at the door. Paddy spoke to him for a few minutes and then went into the kitchen to discuss the matter with Kathleen. After a while he came back out and spoke to Jack again. Then Paddy closed the door and life returned to normal for this respectable family. Paddy could return to his comfortable armchair and the warmth of the fire. The children could continue to play excitedly with their presents, while the religious Kathleen could continue with her preparations for the dinner. Hopefully there would be no more unexpected or unwelcome interruptions. The welcoming Christmas candle glowed brightly in the window as Jack turned and sadly walked away from the closed door.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER.....

WOULD YOU INVITE HIM IN?

Two Strangers Knock on the Door

Many years previously, an innkeeper was busily attending to his guests. Little did he realise that the events surrounding the next knock on his door would be recorded in history. When he opened the door he saw two strangers standing there. The man at the door introduced himself and his wife and then explained that she would soon give birth to a baby. He sought to impress upon the innkeeper the fact that they needed accommodation urgently. Imagine his disappointment when the owner of the Inn informed him that there was no room. Surely this man and his wife were not demanding or expecting luxury. Under the circumstances, they would have settled for the most basic accommodation. How could the innkeeper turn away a woman in this condition, knowing full well that there were no other houses in the town in which she could get lodgings? But he insisted that there was no room for them in the Inn: 'She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them'.¹

This couple had travelled many miles in order to register in a census which was being taken at that time. The young woman was pregnant and was within hours of giving birth to her baby. The town was crowded and accommodation was scarce because of the influx of people who had arrived to register in the census. This man and his wife did not have any friends in the town upon whom they could call. They did not have any contacts who could accommodate them or even inform them as to where they might find shelter for the night. The busy town of Bethlehem must have seemed a very lonely place for this young couple.

Who were these two strangers?

MARY was a young virgin who, during her engagement to Joseph, had been visited by the angel Gabriel. "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favour with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus."² The angel explained to Mary that the child would be conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and would be the Son of God. Mary willingly submitted to God's plan for her life: 'Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her'.³

JOSEPH was a carpenter but could trace his ancestry right back to King David. An angel had also appeared to Joseph in a dream: "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins."⁴

Now Joseph and his wife Mary, who would soon give birth to her son, were standing at the door of the Inn, seeking admission. But they were not allowed in. They were told there was no room for them.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER.....

WOULD YOU INVITE THEM IN?

A Friend Knocks on the Door

A Friend is standing at the door.

Questions and Answers:

➤ Q: What is He doing at the door?

A: He is knocking.

➤ Q: Why is He knocking?

A: Because the door is closed, and He wants it opened.

➤ Q: Why does He want the door opened?

A: He wants to come in.

This Friend is not only knocking, but He is also calling.

➤ Q: Why is He calling?

A: He wants to make sure He will be heard.

➤ Q: If the door is not opened, will He remain standing outside?

A: No!

➤ Q: If His knock and His call are heard but the door remains closed, will He come back another time?

A: There is no guarantee He will ever knock on that door again.

➤ Q: Does that mean He wants the door to be opened today?

A: Yes!

➤ Q: If the door is opened today, will He come in?

A: Yes, but only if He is invited.

➤ Q: But who is this Friend?

A: His name is Jesus. He said, "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends."⁵

➤ Q: Whose door is He standing at?

A: He is standing at your door.

➤ Q: Who is He calling?

A: He is calling you, by name.

➤ Q: What does He want me to do?

A: He wants you to open the door of your heart (your life) and invite Him in.

➤ Q: Why does Jesus want to come in?

A: He wants to rescue you from danger. He said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."⁶

➤ Q: What kind of danger does Jesus want to rescue you from?

A: The danger of suffering conscious everlasting punishment in the fires of Hell! 'As the Scriptures say, "No one is righteous—not even one."⁸ As sinners we are all subject to sin's penalty: 'For the wages [penalty] of sin is death.'⁹ "But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral,

those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”¹⁰

➤ **Q: How can Jesus rescue you from this danger?**

A: The Lord Jesus Christ decided to rescue us by becoming our substitute and sin bearer. By doing this, He willingly made Himself liable to the punishment we deserve. He was willing to suffer and die on our behalf so that we could be forgiven and saved: ‘**But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners**’.¹¹ Jesus took upon Himself the guilt of our sins, and by suffering and dying upon the cross at Calvary He paid in full the Penalty we should have paid. The prophet Isaiah, writing about Christ, says, ‘**But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed**’.¹²

By paying this Penalty as our substitute and sin bearer, Jesus purchased for us a Pardon. This Pardon will be put to our account when we repent of our sins and put our faith in Christ. Because our Penalty has already been paid, we are freed from judgement and condemnation. We are forgiven and justified. The apostle Paul writes, ‘**And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation**’.¹³

This then is why Jesus is standing at your door. This is why He is knocking and calling. He wants you to open your heart and invite Him into your life. He wants you to repent of your sins and to put your faith in Him. He wants you to depend upon Him alone for your salvation.

Friend, you may have thought Jesus came into your life when you received the Church Sacraments? However, the Scriptures make it clear that the Lord comes in by personal invitation only.

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER.....

Jesus said,
“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.”

WILL YOU INVITE HIM IN?

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Scripture References

1: Luke Ch.2 v. 7
3: Luke Ch.1 v. 38
5: Revelation Ch.3 v. 20
7: Romans Ch.3 v. 10
9: Romans Ch.6 v. 23
11: Romans Ch.5 v. 8
13: Romans Ch.5 v. 9

2: Luke Ch.1 vs. 30, 31
4: Matthew Ch.1 vs. 20, 21
6: Luke Ch.19 v. 10
8: Romans Ch.3 v. 23
10: Revelation Ch.21 v. 8
12: Isaiah Ch.53 v. 5