

“The Lord Has Taken Your Hand”

Louis Cassels, in his famous parable of the birds, shared, “It was Christmas Eve and the man’s wife and children were getting ready to go to church. He wasn’t going.” **“I simply can’t understand what Christmas is all about, this claim that God became man,’ he told his wife.”**

“It had been snowing all day and it was beginning to snow harder as the man’s family rode off to church without him. He drew a chair up to the fireplace and began to read his newspaper.”

“A few minutes later, there was a thudding sound at the kitchen window. When he went to investigate, he found a flock of birds out in the back yard. They had been caught in the storm, and in a desperate search for shelter, were trying to fly through the kitchen window. He was a very kind man so he tried to think of something he could do so the birds wouldn’t freeze. ‘The barn!’ he thought. That would be a nice shelter. He put on his coat and overshoes and tramped through the deepening snow to the barn and opened the door wide and turned on the light. But the birds didn’t come in. Food will bring them in he thought. So he hurried back to the house for bread crumbs which he sprinkled on the snow to make a trail to the barn.”

“But the birds ignored the bread crumbs and continued to flop around helplessly in the snow. He tried shooing them into the barn by walking around waving his arms. They scattered in every direction except into the warm, lighted barn.” **“They find me a strange and terrifying creature,’ he said to himself, ‘and I can’t seem to think of any way to let them know they can trust me.’”**

“Puzzled and dismayed, he pondered this thought, ‘If only I could be a bird myself for the moment, perhaps I could lead them to safety.’ If only I could be a bird myself . . .”

“Just then the church bells began to ring, pealing the glad tidings of Christmas. The man stood silently for a minute, then sank to his knees in the snow.”

“Now I understand,’ he whispered as he lifted his gaze to the sky. ‘Now I see why You had to become man.’” (Louis Cassels, The Parable of the Birds)

It seems, the man in Cassels’ parable concluded that his experience with the birds on Christmas Eve was connected to God to which he responded by talking – praying to the Divine Parent, “Now I understand. Now I see why You had to become man.” **Speaking metaphorically, we might say God opened the man’s eyes or took him by the hand and led him to see the Truth.**

Looking at the Bulletin Cover today, you will find a portion of verse 6 from the Reading from Isaiah printed on it. Getting back to that metaphor, which I just suggested as being applicable to the reported experience of the man in Cassels’ parable, an important phrase of the quotation on today’s Bulletin Cover states God said, **“I have taken you by the hand”**. Frankly, I used the New Revised Standard Version of the Isaiah Scripture because our Pew Bible woefully translated verse 6 – left out the whole concept of God taking someone by the hand. I perceive that quote from Isaiah 42:6 provides a very important and powerful metaphor for how our **Creator relates to us and related to the Magi or Star Studiers.**

Before discussing the Magi further, let us recall our own experiences of how we have been taken by the hand or have taken someone else by the hand. Having two young grandsons, I have repeatedly taken them by the hand to protect them and watch out for them in potentially dangerous situations – such as moving to or from a car in a parking lot. In a like manner, I have also sought to metaphorically take

them by the hand by explaining something to them to aid their understanding or education. **In either of those situations, my taking them by the hand is largely a way of protecting or benefiting them.**

Our Scripture from Isaiah has been understood by many biblical scholars to be addressed to the Messiah or to the people of God, as the Almighty's Servant. Jesus clearly understood himself to be fulfilling those Suffering Servant texts in Isaiah. Indeed, he even paraphrased two of them in answer to John the Baptist sending messengers to ask Jesus if he was the Messiah or should he expect someone else. **So, assuming God promised to take the Messiah by the hand, the metaphor indicates how the Divine Parent cares about the welfare of and protects the Messiah – as well as, any of God's Suffering Servants.** Studiers with Mary and the child, Jesus. Those Magi were clearly portrayed to be Servants of God in the Gospel Reading from Matthew. January 6th is the actual day of Epiphany when the Coming of the Magi is celebrated annually. By the way, it is also the Birthday for Round Grove United Church. This congregation was born on January 6, 1901!

The Magi sought out the newborn King of the Jews because they had followed a special star – **I would say God took them by the hand to bring them to the Christ Child through the appearance of that star!** Unfortunately, instead of continuing to depend on the Almighty leading them, they decided to seek out the current King of the Jews to get a more precise location of the child. I say that was unfortunate because Herod was unhappy with this news of a replacement for himself and he sought to eliminate the potential rival by having all boys two years old or under put to death in Bethlehem and its neighborhood. Nevertheless, after leaving Jerusalem for Bethlehem, the Magi were once again guided by the star – again, metaphorically, taken by God's Hand. **Further, after their visit with Mary and the young Jesus, the Magi were again, metaphorically, taken by the hand, for the Lord warned them in a dream to not return to King Herod.** By taking the Magi by the hand to bring them to the newborn King of the Jews – the Messiah, the Creator opened up a special relationship between the Divine Parent and the non-Jews – so all people are invited to share in the New Faith Relationship with God! This was eventually, concretely, and sacrificially demonstrated through the Death of God's Son – Jesus the Christ – the Messiah on the Cross!

It is the Truth that God has taken us by the hand to welcome us into this New Faith Relationship with our Divine Parent for the Lord God sent the Only Son to show us the New Faith Relationship and the New Life in Christ – to protect us from self-destruction and to reconcile us with our Maker, one another, and all people! **Since we are to follow the example of Jesus Christ, you and I are also called to be instruments through whom our Agape Loving God takes many others by the hand to protect, lead, and love.**

Remember the man in Louis Cassels' parable? He sought to take those birds, who metaphorically stood for other people, by the hand or should I say by the wing and to lead them into the warm barn or the New Faith Relationship and Kingdom of God. **Has God taken you by the hand? Will you, metaphorically speaking, become God's Hand taking others by the hand to invite them to meet the Christ Child – the Son of God and to receive the invitation to live the New Faith Relationship with God as we live out Agape – Sacrificial and Suffering Love – the New Life in Christ relating and living with all people?** Let us unite in a great commitment to being God's Hands reaching out and taking others by the hand! Amen.