



My mom was pretty much my designated chauffeur for the vast majority of my younger years: taking me to and from little league practice or piano lessons or choir rehearsals or friend's houses or whatever else; and the usual radio station we listened to out of Columbus would always bring about this soft-spoken man, who had a knack of reeling us in for a few minutes amidst the chaos of comings and goings of life. Paul Harvey had a way of an indirect connection to the Matthew verse of giving us rest to our souls, even for a short while, as we heard "the rest of the story."

And yet, I firmly believe there is even more power behind the "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" than we realize. And yes, Paul Harvey has a story to drive the holy point home; not with one of his famous "rest of the story" segments, but something he shared over the radio waves almost 60 years ago now. Now, I should warn you the setting is a certain holiday about five months and twenty or so days away, which I am sure we would much rather not think about the day after the Fourth of July, but nevertheless: Paul Harvey brings the Gospel to life in a way only he could pull off to radio listeners across the country long ago and still to this day. The story goes like this:

*The man to whom I'm going to introduce you was not a scrooge, he was a kind, decent, mostly good man. Generous to his family, upright in his dealings with other men. But he just didn't believe all that incarnation stuff, which the churches proclaim at Christmas Time. It just didn't make sense and he was too honest to pretend otherwise. He just couldn't swallow the Jesus Story, about God coming to Earth as a man.*

*"I'm truly sorry to distress you," he told his wife, "but I'm not going with you to church this Christmas Eve." He said he'd feel like a hypocrite. That he'd much rather just stay at home, but that he would wait up for them. And so, he stayed and they went to the midnight service.*

*Shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall. He went to the window to watch the flurries getting heavier and heavier and then went back to his fireside chair and began to read his newspaper. Minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound...then another, and then another. Sort of a thump or a thud...At first, he thought someone must be throwing snowballs against his living room window. But when he went to the front door to investigate, he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. They'd been caught in the storm and, in a desperate search for shelter, had tried to fly through his large landscape window.*

*Well, he couldn't let the poor creatures lie there and freeze, so he remembered the barn where his children stabled their pony. That would provide a warm shelter if he could direct the birds to it. Quickly he put on a coat, galoshes, tramped through the deepening snow to the barn. He opened the doors wide and turned on a light, but the birds did not come in. He figured food would entice them in. So, he hurried back to the house, fetched breadcrumbs, sprinkled them on the snow, making a trail to the yellow-lighted wide-open doorway of the stable. But to his dismay, the birds ignored the breadcrumbs, and continued to flap around helplessly in the snow. He tried catching them...He tried shooing them into the barn by walking around them waving his arms...Instead, they scattered in every direction, except into the warm, lighted barn.*

*And then, he realized that they were afraid of him. To them, he reasoned, I am a strange and terrifying creature. If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can trust me... That I am not trying to hurt them, but to help them. But how? Because any move he made tended to frighten them, confuse them. They just would not follow. They would not be led or shooed because they feared him.*

*“If only I could be a bird,” he thought to himself, “and mingle with them and speak their language. Then I could tell them not to be afraid. Then I could show them the way to safe, warm...to the safe warm barn. But I would have to be one of them so they could see and hear and understand.”* At that moment, the church bells began to ring. The sound reached his ears above the sounds of the wind. And he stood there listening to the bells – *Adeste Fidelis* – listening to the bells pealing the glad tidings of Christmas. And he sank to his knees in the snow.

Yes, Jesus most certainly becomes one of us, to somehow convince us *not* to be afraid of God, not to consider the Almighty as a *terrifying* figure, a God out to severely hurt us for our sin or lack of trust. Jesus immerses the Almighty power into our humanity, our pain, our fear, on our mortal level to make us whole-heartedly believe and trust, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” We would not have been able to believe those words, unless the true power of the Gospel came to reality. In the end, it isn’t about us coming to him.

The true power of Christmas, Easter, every day as a child of God, is that He, in Jesus Christ, comes to us. So, that even if there are days when we wonder if we truly can come to God with all our shortcomings galore, all the deep and agonizing frustrations with the comings and goings of life; even if we’re not so sure we can turn to this God of the entire universe, Jesus already made the decision to come to us anyway: in a car, in a parking lot, in any sanctuary, in a living room, absolutely anywhere. And he’s never, ever going to leave: no matter how weary our soul, no matter how burdened we are all our days. After all, God is still Emmanuel in July as God is in December and will be forevermore, lest we forget...the rest of the story. Amen!