

**SERMON**  
**By: Gail Fricker**

**Humbug to Humble!**

**ADVENT 2, December 10, 2017**

**Bah Humbug! (Part 1)** *(with the children)*

**Luke 12:13-21**

Do you like stories? Jesus liked to tell stories – he sometimes called them parables – what does that mean? (A story with a message). Our first scripture reading today is a parable that Jesus told, called the Parable of the Rich Fool – what do you think is the message of it?

Jesus told this story because:

*“<sup>13</sup>Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” (Luke 12:13)*

It would be a bit like you saying to your parents – “my pocket is not enough - give me half of all your savings right now!” This man wanted more money. We don’t know why, we don’t know what he wanted to spend it on, but that doesn’t matter. He just wanted more! And before Jesus tells them the story, he says a warning to the man, and to all the crowd. Jesus says:

*“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”*

And then he tells them the story to explain the warning. And, I’d like you to meet someone that might help you understand Jesus’ warning. I’d like you to meet a character from a story – his name is Scrooge, and he is from a story called A Christmas Carol, but Charles Dickens. The story was written 175 years ago – that’s a long time ago. But just like Jesus’ parables, the story can still teach us something today. See what you think the character Scrooge can teach us.

(Scrooge enters – moaning & complaining about giving to **charity**, complains about Christmas, bah humbug, counts his money, tells the children to get to work and stop hanging around, exits)

So, what do you think of the character scrooge?

What words would we use to describe him? (greedy, selfish, mean, materialistic .....)

Is it just money that he is selfish about? (love, kindness, thoughtfulness,)

Scrooge doesn’t like charity. And we think of charity about giving to organizations. But the word actually comes from the Greek word *agapē*, which also means “love”. Scrooge was selfish about giving love.

Are we sometimes like that?

Are we sometimes so concerned about ourselves, that we forget about acting in a loving way towards others?

**To Children:** Perhaps this week, when you are at school or at home, you can think about things that you can do to show that you love others; ways that you can show that you are not selfish with your love. You can chat and think about that with your teachers as you head to Adventures with God, and I'll see you after the service to practise our play. *(children leave)*

**To congregation:** And as the children leave, I invite the rest of us to take a moment to pause and ask ourselves what is God teaching us in this moment? Reflect on a time when perhaps you have been financially, emotionally, or spiritually selfish. A time when you have failed to reach out with charity and love. Take some time to jot it down on the sheet provided, or silently reflect.

## **Humbug to Humble (Part 2)**

### ***1 John 1:5-10***

Charles Dickens was writing in England during the 19th century. It was a time when London was transformed into the world's largest city. While the city grew wealthy, it also became a city of great poverty, where millions lived in overcrowded and unsanitary [slums](#). Raw [sewage](#) was pumped straight into the [River Thames](#) and polluted drinking water that was sourced from the Thames, brought disease and epidemics to London's population. Dickens was an outspoken social critic in general, but especially about poverty. He sought to help the poor by highlighting the social inequality in his country, and he did this through his writing. Life for the poor was immortalized by his novels such as [Oliver Twist](#), and [The Christmas Carol](#).

But The Christmas Carol, which has become a classic favorite each Christmas, is not just a commentary of the social conditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is also a story about finding hope in the darkness, about second chances and forgiveness, and about finding the love and grace of God when all seems lost.

The central character, Scrooge, was living in the darkness. He was selfish, mean, and conceited. He thought only of himself, and he was guilty of greed - financially, emotionally and spiritually. Some looked at him with envy, thinking that he had so much with a successful business, a big house, and a healthy bank account. But Dickens is also careful show us a Scrooge that was lonely, that had no friends, and that lived a life without Joy and love.

Most of you probably know the story: one Christmas eve, the mystical Spirits of Christmas past, present, and future, visit Scrooge, and he is given the opportunity to look back on his life, and at what his life may become. As he does so, he sees how the young Scrooge once was happy, dancing surrounded by friends, in love with Belle, and nurtured by his boss Feziwinkle. But slowly, Scrooge's love of money and power takes over his life. He is warned by the Spirit of Christmas Future to beware of "want" and "ignorance". Just like Jesus warned his listeners to "be on guard against all kinds of greed." Greed becomes an idol for Scrooge. And with greed as his idol, there is no room for the love of God, or the love and charity of others. We see Scrooge as a man that is walking in darkness.

Scrooge's story is a lesson for us all. I don't believe anyone here walks in a path quite as dark as Scrooge; I don't believe I have heard anyone say "Bah Humbug!"

But perhaps there are times when we do not put God front and centre in all that we do. Perhaps there are times when we act in ways that are not full of "charity." It's easy to sometimes think that we are doing the right things – we come to church, we attend bible studies, we help with outreach events, we give financially. But if we do all these things without love, without Christ in the centre, then we are not walking in the light. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians he writes:

*"If I give all I possess to the poor ... but do not have love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3)*

As Scrooge looks over his life, he has chance to realize that he has lived without love. Without charity. Scrooge is humbled by what he sees. He begins to regret things, and he hope that things can change. He begins to realize the need to ask for forgiveness.

We also can look over our lives. We may not have the Spirit of Christmas past, present or future to sweep us away on mystical dreams, but we do have chance to take time to be still. To take time before God and recognize our failings. Our scripture reading from 1 John reminds us:

*"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But, if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us."*  
(1 John 1:8)

I encourage you now to take time to reflect. Take time to ask God if there are times when you have not had Christ in the centre of your actions, your words, your relationships. Take time to name those things before God now, jotting down your thoughts on the sheet provided, or silently reflecting.

### **Scrooge's Christmas Joy (Part 3)**

***Isaiah 35:5-10***

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T\\_ce\\_KbZw0E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_ce_KbZw0E)

I admit that this is my favourite part of the movie, A Christmas Carol. Scrooge is just so full of joy.

Scrooge recognises that he has been given a second chance. He is ready to admit that he has been wrong, and ready to say sorry and ask forgiveness. But more than that, he is ready to change the way in which he lives his life. It becomes more than just words for Scrooge – he acts on it. He rushes out to buy a fat goose for the Cratchit family, he raises Bob Cratchit's salary, he gives a hefty donation to the widows and orphans fund, and he reaches out to his nephew. Scrooge begins to live his life with love for others, rather than greed for self. And when he does this, he is just so happy and filled with Joy. He is almost delirious!

If you have ever recovered from a serious illness, or the almost break up of a relationship – then perhaps you can identify with Scrooge's joy. My sister-in-law is currently recovering from a

serious surgery following the discovery of a cancerous tumour in her lung. She is tired and in a lot of pain as she recovers, but she also says that she feels that she has been given a second chance. My brother-in-law actually described her like Scrooge on Christmas day!

Our final scripture reading today, is full of images of Spiritual Joy. The prophet Isaiah writes:

*“The eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. The lame will leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, and the thirsty ground bubbling springs.”* (Isaiah 35:5-7)

Our mid week Advent Devotional group looked at this passage, and we noted the images of joy, hope and renewal. There isn't the promise that everything is going to be easy. Sorrows and disappointments are part of our lives. It also isn't the promise that we won't make mistakes. Sometimes God can teach us a big lesson through our mistakes. But it is a promise of Joy that can come to us when we put Christ in the centre of all we do, in the centre of all we say, and in the centre of all the ways that we live our lives – then:

*“Gladness and joy will overtake us, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.”*  
(Isaiah 35:10)

This is the Joy, that I think Charles Dickens shows us in Scrooge at the end of the Christmas Carol. This is the Joy that we can experience this Advent through the Grace of God. And when we do experience it – when we are filled up to the brim with Spiritual Joy, when we are so full that we are bursting over – then we just want to share it. Just like Scrooge did.

So, take a moment to reflect one last time. If you don't have that Spiritual Joy deep inside you, then take the time to ask God right now to fill you with that Joy. And if you are bursting at the seams, then take the time to reflect on how you experience God's joy, and how will you share the Joy of Christ this Christmas. Jot down your thoughts on the sheet provided, or silently reflect.

Amen.