

Sermon Carol Service 2022

In the early 1800s a young boy about 14 years old named John lived in an orphanage in England. Orphanages were dreaded. Orphan meant unwanted and unloved. The orphanage was administered by a master and his wife who were the results of meagre backgrounds themselves and were short on love but not discipline.

Every day of the year was spent working. They worked in gardens, cleaned, sewed and cooked. They were up at dawn and worked until dark and usually received only one meal a day. John had absolutely nothing to call his own. None of the children did.

Christmas was one day of the year when the children did not have to work and they received a gift, something they could call their own. This special gift was an orange. They looked forward with huge anticipation to this gift. This orange they received has a special aroma for them something they only smelled at Christmas. The children prized it so much that they kept it for several days, even weeks, protecting it, smelling it, touching it and loving it. Usually they tried to savour it and preserve it for so long that it often rotted before they ever peeled it to enjoy the sweet juice.

John usually slept with his orange next to his pillow. He would put it right under his nose and smell its goodness. He would dream of children all over the world smelling the sweet aroma of oranges. It gave him a feeling of security and a sense of wellbeing, hope and dreams of a future filled with good food and a life beyond the meagre existence of the orphanage.

This year John was overjoyed by the Christmas season. He was becoming a man and soon would be old enough to leave. He was filled with anticipation.

Christmas Day finally came. The children were so excited as they entered the big dining hall. In his excitement and because of his big feet, John tripped, fell against a table and caused a pile of plates to crash to the floor. Immediately, the master roared, 'John, leave the hall and there will be no orange for you this year.' John's heart broke. Tears welled up in his eyes. He turned and went swiftly back to his cold room, threw himself on his bed and sobbed.

A little while later his door opened and in came several of the children. One of the girls handed him something wrapped up in an old rag. 'Here, John,' she said, 'this is for you.' John reached for the bulge in her hand. As he lifted the edges of the rag, he saw a big juicy orange all peeled and quartered, and then he realised what they had done. Each had sacrificed their own orange by sharing a quarter and had created a big, beautiful orange for John.

John never forgot the love, sharing and personal sacrifice his friends had shown him that Christmas Day. John soon left the orphanage and his work ethic was rewarded by wealth and success.

In memory of that day, every year he would send oranges all over the world to poor children everywhere. His desire was that no child would ever spend Christmas without a special Christmas fruit.

Giving, in whatever form, but especially the giving of ourselves, is the basis of for a meaningful life. Mother Teresa said, *'A day without doing good for others is a day not worth living.'*

Giving also lies at the heart of all that Jesus stood for and must surely be the vehicle that carries us through life and also underpins all our goals. H W Beecher, American preacher and reformer, who lived in the late 19th century, said, *'Every charitable act is a step towards heaven.'*

Christmas is a time of giving. In the truest sense of the word we must take the message of giving that Jesus brings into our world and carry it with us into our lives beyond Christmas. That is both the message and the challenge of Christmas.

I wish you all a very happy Christmas and may the new year bring you many blessings.

Rev Warner Wilder