

2. Stories about finding Jesus in other people

A. The new King

David's day began as all his days had begun, meandering through the countryside in search of a breakfast of bountiful blackberries. This was his favourite time of the day, the only pleasure in his poverty stricken life. Suddenly, he came to an abrupt halt, his attention held by a wooden notice, written in bold handwriting and hanging precariously on a magnificent oak tree.

It was common knowledge throughout the kingdom that the reigning king had no heir and was frantically searching for a successor, as he was now in his eighty fifth year. The sign on the tree showed that he was trying for a different approach, now every qualified young man should apply for an interview with the king. The qualifications were very specific, love of God and love of neighbour.

David thought long and hard about the notice and even though he was a very modest young man, considered that he indeed loved God and his fellow human beings. He decided there and then that he would go to be interviewed by the king. However, there was one obstacle, which had to be immediately overcome. He was so poor that he had no clothes, which would be presentable in the King's palace. Worse still, he had no money to buy the food and clothes he needed. His journey was almost complete when he came upon a poor beggar sitting feebly on the side of the road. His haunted eyes, his ashen face, his outstretched arms pleaded for help, much more loudly than any words ever could have.

David's heart was so moved with tender compassion at this picture of vulnerability and suffering that he immediately stripped off his new clothes and swapped them for the beggar's rags. He gave all his food to the beggar without the slightest hesitation. The beggar smiled in grateful appreciation as David headed off uncertainly to the king's castle. David felt completely out of place as he waited what seemed like an eternity, to be presented to the king.

When the moment arrived, his heart was in his mouth as he bowed before the king. When he raised his eyes, he was shocked to see the king's face. 'But you . . . you were the poor beggar by the side of the road.' 'Yes', answered the king 'I was that shabby beggar'. 'But, why did you put me through all this?' asked David.

'Because I had to find out if you really do love, if you really love God and your fellow human beings. I knew that if I came to you as king, you would have been so dazzled by my crown and robes that you would have bent over backwards to do anything I wished, but I would never have known what was really in your heart. So I came to you as a simple beggar, with no claims on you except for the love in your heart. Now I know that you truly do love God and your fellow human beings. You shall be the new king.'

B. Christmas Guests

Sarah's Christmas dinner was a very simple one of eggs, hot cocoa, biscuits and butter.

Tears came to her eyes, not for the first time that day, as she thought of her late husband. How quickly those marvellous months melted away when they were so happily married.

Sarah woke from her afternoon slumber with a start. A crashing sound boomed through the still air. Somebody was knocking at the door. Sarah's heartbeat accelerated; nobody ever came her any more, but last night she had the strangest dream that the Lord himself would visit her on his birthday. Sarah herself had been born on Christmas day seventy years ago. Her face fell when she saw a shabby old beggar standing on the doorstep. 'What a foolish old woman I am becoming' she thought to herself. The stranger's clothes were ragged and threadbare and his shoes were badly worn out. Sarah brought him inside, sat him beside the fire, gave him a mug of steaming tea and went off to look for her late husband's old coat and boots. They fitted the stranger perfectly. With tears in his eyes the old man bade farewell. Sarah started to tidy up. Within moments, through the clear frosty air, there came a faint knock. This time it was a bent old woman. She had curly white hair, a very haggard face, brown eyes and a sad smile. 'Could you give me some money and God bless you ma'am'? Sarah shook her head regretfully. 'Come in anyway'! The old woman sat beside the fire while Sarah made her some hot tomato soup and gave her two slices of brown bread. The woman looked at the "feast" with delight and savoured every mouthful. Then after a short chat she left warm and contented. Sarah thought how strange it was that she should be visited by two strangers in such a remote place. An hour and a half later there was another knock. This time it was a beautiful, slim, pale-faced young woman. 'I'm really sorry to trouble you but would you mind if I came in and sat down for a few minutes because I think I have twisted my ankle'. Sarah bathed the ankle and bandaged it expertly to prevent any swelling. The young woman thanked her sincerely and Sarah walked her to the door and they exchanged goodbyes.

Sarah shut the door and went back inside. What an extraordinary Christmas day it had been! Suddenly she walked over to the mantelpiece and picked up the old book. It was covered in a sheet of dust. After a short search she found the lines she was looking for:

For I was a stranger and you gave me welcome,
I was naked and you gave me clothes,
I was hungry and thirsty and you gave me food and drink,
I was in pain and you gave me comfort.

A sudden twinkle came back into Sarah's eyes. Dreams come true after all!

