

## **Traveling Companion: The Crooked Christmas Tree**

### **Fr. Michael Tracey**

Once upon a time, Jim, a farmer planted Christmas trees. He laid them out in rows, fertilizing them and waiting patiently for them to sprout and grow. Lovingly, he manicured them, shaping them so they could eventually assume their cone like shape. Some trees cooperated fully, digesting their food, sending their roots deep into the dark soil. Gradually, they flexed their muscles as they were drawn toward the heavens. Eventually, having reached their desired height, it was time to harvest the trees.

One day, Jim, the farmer arrived with his machinery and, methodically and surgically, cut down the trees. He blanketed each one in wire mesh to protect them on the eventual journey to some family home for Christmas.

I watched all this from my place at the end of a row of Christmas trees. Eventually, Jim arrived beside me. I could see he had a puzzled look about him as he stood with his hands on his hips and his mind befuddled with questions. I knew what he was thinking. He stood there for, what seemed like an eternity, pondering what to do with me. He glanced up and down at my figure. His head moved in unison with my crooked body. Obviously, I looked pathetic to him. Still, I wondered what he would do with me. Would he just cut me down and pulverize me into useless pulp. The possibility disheartened me. My heart began to weep and the weight of my tears sagged my branches.

When he saw my expression, his face dropped in sadness. It was as if, he knew what I was feeling. Maybe, he will feel sorry for me,” I thought to myself, and cut me down like he did the other trees. Then, I might have a chance to brighten some family’s Christmas.

He made his decision. I sensed it. Soon, I, too, got cuddled up in a wire mesh. Minutes later, I was hoisted on a flat bed truck and off to places unknown.

As the journey began, I got excited, first of all, knowing that I was not rejected because of my crooked trunk, and secondly, that, at last, I, too, would have the chance to grace some living room with my presence.

Some days later, we ended up in a Winn Dixie parking lot. Excited families came by, looked us all over and eventually bought most of us. As time went on, I began to feel sad again and wondered about my own fate. When people would see my crooked trunk, they would just pass me by and I would become an orphan. I dreaded the thought, but I still hoped I could make someone happy at Christmas.

Then, it happened. One Saturday evening, a group of teenagers from a local church came into the parking lot. All of a sudden, I began to hope again. I knew teenagers were not as critical as adults in choosing Christmas trees and maybe, just maybe, they might be attracted to my crooked trunk. I could sense their excitement as they looked at me. Somehow I knew they would find me a home. They did.

They bundled me into a SUV and off to a church rectory. When I arrived there, I just couldn’t believe my eyes. There were other teenagers there, some adults and even little children. They were really excited when I came in the door. I could sense it in their voices.

They gingerly placed me in a tree stand and adjusted my prosthesis to allow people to see that I wasn’t really ugly at all; just that I had a crooked foot. The teenagers didn’t seem to mind as they caressed me with colorful lights and garlands. They plugged me in and I was overwhelmed with joy. They placed a Nativity Scene at my foot, allowing me to give shelter to the Holy Family.

I feel truly blessed this Christmas because someone saw my potential, not my disability, just like a God who saw potential in a confused human race and sent the Christ Child to bring hope and possibilities to a waiting world.