



When did we see you a stranger?

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An EMBRACE NI resource for advent

A Play with discussion questions, relating to Bible passages.

PAPA PANOV'S CHRISTMAS

Adapted from an original story by Leo Tolstoy

Bible Ref. Matthew 25; 31 - 46

Narrator Papa Panov, an old shoemaker, was not very rich - all that he owned in the world was one small room looking out onto the village street, but neither was he very poor for he earned enough to buy bread from the baker's, coffee from the grocer's, and cabbage to make his favourite soup (*enter Papa Panov*). But on this Christmas Eve, Papa Panov stood sadly at the window of his little cobbler's shop.

Papa So many years now since my dear wife died and all our children grew up and moved away. Now just to see all those windows bright with candles and lamps and Christmas trees takes me back to those days so long ago. And just listen to the laughter of the children (*shakes head and sighs*). On Christmas Eve I used to read to the children from our old family Bible (*reaches for the book opens it and reads*). Let's see. Ah yes. And so it was that while they were in Bethlehem, the days were accomplished that Mary should be delivered and she brought her first born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn (*Looks up*). Dear me, if they had come here they could have slept on my good bed and I would have covered the little boy with my patchwork quilt. I should like some company and a little child to cheer me (*returns to book*). And behold there came wise men from the East and when they saw the young child with Mary his mother they fell down and worshipped him and when they had opened their treasures they presented unto him gifts, Gold and Frankincense and Myrrh (*looks up*). If Jesus came here I shouldn't have anything to give him. But wait, (*he puts down the book and lifts up the shoes*) these are the best shoes I ever made. These are what I would give him...Ah yes... (*sighs*) No matter, it's time I was asleep (*lies down*).

Voice Papa, Papa Panov

Papa Who is it?

Voice Papa Panov, you wish that you could see me, that I could come to your little shop and that you could give me a gift. Look out onto the street from dawn to dusk tomorrow and I will come. Be sure you recognise me for I will not say who I am.

Papa (*jumps*) It was him, that was Jesus...perhaps it was a dream. No matter. I will watch and hope that Jesus will indeed visit me this Christmas Day. But how shall I know him? He was not always a little boy. He grew up to be a man, a king. He was God himself. I shall have to look very carefully. I'll just make a nice cup of coffee for my Christmas breakfast (*looks out of his window*). There's someone now. Is it Jesus? Ah no, it's the poor road sweeper. He does look cold and fancy having to sweep roads on Christmas Day. Hey, would you like a nice warm cup of coffee? You look frozen to the marrow. (*pause, then enter road sweeper*)

Sweeper Don't mind if I do. It's very kind of you.

Papa It's the least I could do. After all it is Christmas.

Sweeper Well, this is all the Christmas I'll get today I should reckon. (*Papa looks out of the window*) Are you expecting someone? Visitors perhaps ... Eh, I'm not in the way am I?

Papa Oh no ... have you ever heard about Jesus?

Sweeper Why yes, of course.

Papa Well, he's coming to visit me today.

Sweeper Oh ... yeah?

Papa Yes, he came to me in a dream and said he would come some time between dawn and dusk today and that's why I'm watching out for him.

Sweeper Well, the best of luck to you and ... thanks for the coffee (*Papa nods and leaving the sweeper to the door, looks up and down the street greeting the passers by.*)

Papa Happy Christmas to you ... (*Then he sees a woman and her child*) Oh, you look so cold the pair of you. Won't you come inside for just a moment to warm yourselves?

Woman You know that would be so good. My child is frozen (*enter woman; who can be from any part of the world.*)

Papa Well I would hope someone would do the same for me if I was as cold looking as you. Are you travelling far?

Woman No - only to the next village, about four miles - I used to lodge at the mill, but I have no money to pay the rent so I must go and ask my cousin to take me in. I'm a single parent and have not been able to work for looking after my child.

Papa Can you stop long enough to have some bread and soup with me?

Woman Thank you so much. Only I can't stop long. I must get to the village before it gets dark. We'll just warm ourselves by your stove.

Papa I have some warm milk here. Give some to the child. Dear me ... the poor wee mite has no shoes.

Woman I've none to give her.

Papa Well I'm a shoemaker and I think I might have just the thing (*he gets the shoes and quilt*). There, you can have these and see they're a perfect fit. Take this quilt too.

Woman They're beautiful. You're so kind. (*Papa looks out of the window*). Are you waiting or looking out for someone?

Papa You've heard of Jesus who was born on Christmas Day? (*Woman nods*). He's coming today. He promised he would in a dream I had before dawn. (*Woman shakes head*.)

Woman Well, I hope your dream comes true. You deserve it for being so kind to me and Abela. (*Abela is a Tanzanian name; and the name can vary according to whatever part of the world you choose the pair to come from. They leave as Papa looks out of the door.*)

Papa Goodbye and God bless you both.

(*Sound - during the narration, play one verse of Silent night starting off softly and getting louder ending with "Christ the redeemer is here".*)

Narrator All kinds of people came by - young and old; cheerful people and grumpy people; busy people and people with nowhere in particular to go. To some he gave a smile, to some a nod, and to some a coin or a hunk of bread ... but by dusk, Papa Panov was feeling a bit disappointed. Jesus had not come and yet his heart felt strangely warmed.

Papa It was only a dream after all. I wanted to believe it so much. I wanted to meet Jesus.

Voice Didn't you see me? Didn't you see me, Papa Panov?

Papa Who are you? Who are you, tell me?

Voice I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me. These people you have welcomed today and what you did for them you did for me.

Papa So he came after all, and no wonder my heart was warmed with all the company I had today. Jesus came to visit me after all.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- What has been your own experience of being or welcoming a 'stranger/foreigner'?
- When has your/another person's accent; background (social; cultural; religious) or language made communication difficult? What has helped?
- What has helped you/me to be more open to people who are different?
- Have you ever experienced meeting people, like Papa Panov did, and thinking afterwards that you could have met Jesus?

Resources:

- *Inter-Cultural Insights - Christian reflections on racism; hospitality and identity from the island of Ireland*, downloadable from the EMBRACE resources page of the EMBRACE website.
- Hard Gospel resources available from <http://www.hardgospel.net> including the Good Samaritan Course.
- The Welcome Centre:
<http://www.stpeterscathedralbelfast.com/index.php?option=content&task=blogcategory&id=25&Itemid=79>
- The Law Centre:<http://www.lawcentreni.org>
- Simon Community:<http://www.simoncommunity.org.uk>

Resource Prepared for EMBRACE by Yvonne Naylor, Nov 2008