

Chimwemwe to the World!
A Christmas Story
John 1:6-18, Isaiah 21:6-8
Christmas Eve, 2018
The First U.P. Church of Crafton Heights
Pastor Dave Carver

*To hear this story as told in worship, please click on this link:
<https://castyournet.files.wordpress.com/2018/12/ChimwemweToTheWorld.mp3>*

Chimwemwe rushed into the room. Although the small home was lit only by candles and kerosene lamps, her face made it light up as though there were floodlights! This thirteen year old girl, whose name means “Joy” in their local language, was the embodiment of light.

“I’m ready, **Daddy**,” she said. “Can we go?”

“We can go when your sister and brother are ready,” replied her father, as he put down a newspaper.

She jumped into his lap – which was not as easy as it had been a few years ago. “Madala, I can’t wait! This is my favorite night of the whole year!”

Although he knew the answer, her father played the game. “Why is that?”, he asked.

“Because!” she exclaimed. “It’s almost time to see if we were right! Tonight we will know the truth about what we thought we saw! We will know if we’ve been good watchers!”

The girl’s mother called from the other room. “Oh, you four and your watching. What will you see tonight?” she asked.

Chimwemwe concentrated for a moment, and then said, “Well, Dalitso noticed that the old woman who lives across from the maize-flour mill has had the thatch from her roof blow off. He thinks she needs new-”

She was interrupted as her ten year old brother burst into the room and completed the sentence, saying, “he *knows* that new iron sheets will keep her dry for the entire rainy season.” Dalitso, whose name means “blessings”, sought to join his sister in their father’s lap.

Chimwemwe continued as if there was no little brother. “Chikondi has selected some new books for the teacher’s library that was burnt in the fire, and we have some chickens to deliver to Mr. Mphatso, the watchman. While he was at work a few weeks ago, the baboons came and took all of his chickens and now there are no eggs for his children.”

The father hugged his children tightly and said, “You know that I’m always proud of you, but this year it means even more to me. You have touched me deeply.”

The children looked at him quizzically, and he said, “You don’t know this, but a long time ago – before you were born – I was a watchman myself.”

The kids were incredulous. “You? How could that be? You run a newspaper!”

“I do now, but I have not always. Listen, since it seems as though your sister will be a while, let me tell you a story.”

“When I was a child, life was very, very difficult.”

The children chimed in as if in chorus: “Yeah, yeah, yeah. We know. You lived in the village. There was no electric, and you had to fetch water-”

Now it was father’s turn to interrupt. “Yes, that’s true,” he said, “but that’s not what I’m talking about.”

He held up his right arm, and there where his hand should have been was something that looked as though it could have been the idea for a hand, or maybe the rough draft of a hand, but it was not a hand such as you are accustomed to seeing on folks every day. There were only three parts of it that might conceivably have been called “fingers”, and even then, the bone structure was quite different.

“When I was born,” he went on, “there was a problem. Even before the midwife was called to help my mother, she knew that my birth would be difficult. And while usually the first part of a baby to be born into the world is the head, with me it was this arm that came out first. I obviously don’t remember this part, but I’m told that there was a lot of yelling and crying, and that people were afraid of this baby to be born.”

Chimwemwe took her father’s hand and said, “Madala, it’s just your hand. It was just a little baby hand. Sure, it looks different, but it’s fine!”

Her father said, “Well, we know that now, but this was a long time ago, and in the village. There were not as many doctors. People thought differently. And so it was that when I was born, my father took one look at me and called me ‘Mabvuto’, which means ‘trouble’ in the local language. And for

a long time, everyone – including me – thought that the name was perfect. Because I *was* trouble.”

“Can you imagine growing up with a hand like this? Can you think how the other children would have teased me? Do you know that they made fun of me and even ran away from me? On my inside – I wanted to help, I wanted to be a friend – but they could only see my different hand.”

“Now in those days there was a company that was called Secure-Corps or something like that. When I saw them, I saw athletic young men wearing matching uniforms driving fast trucks. They were guards hired by rich people, and when an alarm sounded, truckloads of these men would rush through the streets in order to save a home from being robbed or a person from being beaten. I wanted to work for them. I just *knew* that if I was a Secure-Corps guard, people would be happy to see me coming!”

Dalitso – ‘Blessings’ – looked at his father and said, “So is *that* when you were a guard, Madala?”

“No!,” was his father’s quick reply. “I could never work for that company. I was never a guard; I never had a uniform or one of those fast trucks. You see, in order to be a guard for that company, you had to be able to read. My father wouldn’t pay to send me to school. He said, ‘Why bother, for such trouble? Mabvuto – look at him. Look at that hand. What can he do with a hand like that?’”

“For a long time, it was so hard. I was always angry. I was getting mean. But one day, it was my grandmother – Agogo – who helped me.”

“She surprised me in the bush one day. I was staring at my hand, and I had taken some small sticks and was trying to hold them there to see what my hand might look like if I had five fingers. She took the sticks and threw them and then grabbed me to herself. ‘Oh, Mabvuto,’ she cried. ‘Why do you keep on looking for something that is not there? Do you think that if you stare long enough or hard enough that those fingers will appear?’”

“We sat in the grass for a long time, and if we said anything, I don’t remember it. As the sun was setting, she asked me to help her back into her hut. It was getting dark, and she almost stepped on it, but at the last minute I saw it – a snake – a poisonous black mamba – and I pulled her back. I grabbed a hoe and I killed the snake.”

“My Agogo hugged me and she said, ‘That’s my Mabvuto – so observant.’”

“‘Observant?’ What’s ‘observant?’ She told me it meant that I was good at noticing things, and at watching.”

“And I was. I couldn’t be a guard, so I became a watchman, and I discovered that I think I liked that even better than being a guard. Guards, you see, were always rushing around in times of trouble, but watchmen were just always there. Guards were hired by rich people to protect them from bad things, but as a watchman I would see all kinds of things. I

noticed when the hippos left the river to eat and when they returned. I learned all about the stars. I would watch and listen as people ran into a house when a new baby was being born.”

“Do you see? As a watchman, I had to keep an eye out for problems, but I also got to observe – to watch - beautiful and powerful things that might have seemed small. Instead of looking only at bad things, or concentrating only on what was missing, I could tell stories about what I did see.”

“When I got home, my sisters and then my cousins would come around me and listen to me tell them about the things I’d seen. When I got older, I taught myself how to read and write. I wanted to share the stories that I had, and so I opened my own company...”

“The paper!” his children shouted. “*Nkani Yabwino!* The ‘good news’ paper!”

“Well, yes,” he said. “It wasn’t a newspaper at first. It was just copies of some of the good things that I saw – and it taught me how to be a better watcher.”

“And now, Chimwemwe and Dalitso, and even little Chikondi – you are all better watchers than I am! You see everything, and you look for ways to make things better or stronger. I know, you like tonight because we will go out and share some iron sheets, or books, or chickens... but every day we have the chance to look for things that no one else sees. We try to straighten what is bent, to point out what is great, and to share in people’s lives.”

“But why do we do this tonight, Daddy?” asked Chimwemwe.

“Because it’s Christmas Eve, my daughter! It’s your birthday! Do you remember what your name means when we say it in English? It is ‘JOY’ – because on that night there is always a lot of JOY. There is joy because we see that God watches with the people who watch-”

His children cried in unison: “the shepherds!”

“There is joy because God sends people to honor and bless the poor-”

“The Wise Men!”

“Mostly, there’s joy because we know God didn’t set out to guard the earth, but to be in it, to watch it, and to teach people how to see!”

The mood of the room changed quickly with the arrival of the youngest child, a girl called Chikondi. And you might want to know what happened next.

Well, I suppose that depends on what you were looking for.

The men down at the Secure-Corps headquarters who watched the surveillance camera footage could tell you that they saw a middle-aged man who appeared to be favoring one hand take 3 kids – later determined to be named Chimwemwe, Dalitso, and Chikondi - around town delivering parcels.

The families of a poor old woman, and a teacher, and a night watchman later said that they'd been visited by angels who came to them and said that God had noticed them in the midst of their trouble.

And me? I saw someone called Mabvuto who once thought that he had been born for trouble make a way for Joy, Blessings, and Love to shine in the darkness on Christmas Eve.

Well, that was a long time ago. And it was in a place that's pretty far away. But keep your eyes open. Watch. You never know what you'll see, and who you can tell about it. Thanks be to God, who watches over us, and invites us to do the same with each other! Amen.