

You may have heard that this is the 50th – yes , 5-0 – anniversary of the Charlie Brown Christmas Special. And, you can probably tell by looking at this mug, that I was around to enjoy the very first broadcast.

Yet Charlie Brown's Christmas remains a timely tale. Our church school kids – children the age I was when it first came out -- paid homage to it a couple of weeks ago during our St. Nicholas Celebration.

They dragged out this scrawny Charlie Brown Christmas tree and with their handmade ornaments transformed it into something called a Jesse Tree – from the Biblical Jesse, father of King David. A Jesse Tree is Jesus' family Tree. Among the various ornaments included was this one, my personal favorite, representing the people of St. Paul's (three stick figures holding hands above our parish name).

Because by the grace of God, by the joy of the Word made flesh we celebrate this night, we too are members of Jesus' family.

But there's a hitch. No offense to the kids, but many of their ornaments have fallen apart.

The tree at Rockefeller Center it ain't. And neither are we.

Don't get me wrong.
You look great in your holiday finery.
My goodness sitting in this gorgeous setting
listening to this beautiful music only helps.
And for this we are grateful.

But we know that this is only part of story.
Deep down, many of us only wish we could carry this feeling with us
through the rest of the year.
We wish we could be more like the tree at Rockefeller Center
and less broken and frayed around the edges.
And, we may even be like Charlie Brown himself who confesses that
he's "just not happy" at Christmas
(or maybe ever).

Actually, you may recall, that comes at the beginning
of the Charlie Brown special.
Sure, Charlie has his sad-sack encounters with Lucy and Pigpen and
the rest of the gang.
Even Snoopy disappoints him by winning the
best decorated doghouse contest.
But then something amazing happens.

Linus reads the same gospel we heard tonight.
Linus "processes" out to the center of the room and
reads from St. Luke's gospel.

"That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown," he says.
And of course he's right.

After all these years I'd somehow thought it ended there.
But no -- this is when Charlie and Linus go out and find
that humble Christmas Tree.
And once again it's Linus,
who has just read the passage from Luke's gospel we celebrate tonight,

who looks at that underwhelming tree and says,
“It just needs *a little love*.”

Is there any living thing for which this isn't so?

Being Charlie Brown, of course there's a mishap
thinking he's ruined the tree.

But now – now after the reading of the gospel –
the whole Peanuts gang comes together
using the stuff at hand,
literally, found objects right off the doghouse,
to transform the humble tree into something to behold.

No, it's not as grand as the tree in Rockefeller Center,
but it doesn't need to be.

It does the job. It's beautiful in its own way.
It's graced in community, with love.

The story which Linus read,
which we read tonight,
is the story of God reaching out to us with a little love.
No, it's God reaching out to us with a LOT of love,
infinite and unconditional.

It's about God loving us so much as to take our humble human form
to show us how to live and to love.

To bring us from solitary figures
into a community that upholds one another in order
to love and serve one another
and this whole world God so loves.

That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.
That's what Christmas is all about.

