

*A Wee Story for United Methodist Women
Christmas Meeting on December 15, 2013*

“Welcome to your new home,” Brenda said to Mr. Smith.

Bud Smith stood, and sat, patiently (and sometimes impatiently) supervising the workers who were moving his life’s accumulations into his new apartment at the retirement home.

Actually to call it his “life’s accumulations” is a bit of a misnomer. More accurately it was the “remnant of his life’s accumulations.” He had had to winnow down the stuff which had filled his 3,500 square foot adult life home, into what would fit into this little two bedroom apartment.

At first it had been very painful to part with all those accumulations. But, as the process lingered on, Bud had finally felt a certain liberation – to be freed from all those “things” that once had been luxuries and fineries, but which had for some time become pieces of a jail that bound him, tied him down, and caused him great worry over who might try to trick or steal him out of his

treasure. As he began to watch them go, his loss turned slowly into a sense of relief.

Now he was feeling that he was left with his essentials. It was like the time he had gone to Antigua – such a beautiful island where all the oceans were as clear as the sky. 365 beaches on this tiny island – a different one for each day of the year (if you counted the topless ones, too.) He had taken roll after roll of pictures (back in the day when pictures were taken on rolls of film and not on little plastic disks.) When he had gotten home, he discovered upon picking up the pictures from the photo developing shop, that his camera had picked up a grain of sand or something which prevented the shutter from ever fully opening. Every single picture was only half a picture. Whatever was on the right side of the frame was captured; the left half was only a black wall.

Bud learned from that time on: never rely upon camera, film, or any kind of machine to capture what is an important memory. He learned to be fully present, to pay attention, and to allow the lingering moment of special times to be recorded in the camera in his heart

and his head. He no longer had to carry photo albums, nor burden his family and friends with all those wonderful memory photos that did almost nothing for anyone else.

One of the hardest things for Bud to do in packing his whole house into a few boxes was the selection of Christmas decorations. He and his wife, Tess, had always made a big deal out of Christmas – a tree in every single room. For the “main tree” in the living room, there was not theme decorating as in the other room. No “patriotic tree.” No “NFL tree.” No “cookie cutter ornaments tree” in the kitchen. No, the tree in the living room was filled with ornaments from all of his and Tess’ travels. Each ornament told a story, had its own memory. Every year the decorating of this tree was a treasure trove of memories, as the story behind each ball and bauble was remembered in its touching.

That was the hard part – winnowing down those ornaments and memories to the few number of ornaments that his little apartment tree would hold. He tried to give the rest of the ornaments to the children, and tried to tell the story behind each ornament to its

new recipient. But, he knew, that it would never be the same for any of them.

That was hard to let go of these things. But, even in this, he had found a special grace, a new freedom. He intended to put these ornaments on the tree in his new home – in just a few days now – as it was already the first of December when he made this move – he intended to put these ornaments on the tree so that it would only cover about 75% of the tree. He was going to leave one fourth of the tree conspicuously bare. He wanted to send a message - to himself and others- that he was still leaving space to collect new memories.

He wanted to be able to tell people about the empty space on his tree, so as to let them know that he wasn't finished yet. His wife had gone to her eternal home. His many and beautiful treasures accumulated had been pared down and given away. But HE WAS NOT DONE LIVING. He knew that God still had plans for him.

Then, as if in the tinkling of a tiny bell on the top of the door of old fashioned stores, Bud Smith realized that he had heard something, but didn't quite realize what it was. It vaguely stuck out in his memory as the

sound of a human voice. You know – how someone tells you something and you say, “What?” and when they don’t immediately respond, you hit “reverse” and play the tape again, and this time hear what they said. Well, he hit reverse and play, but all he could recover was that it was the sound of a human voice.

So, he said, **“Sorry. What did you say?”** at the same time as he turned his head toward the direction from which the noise had come. And once again, Brenda Stanley, his new across the hall neighbor said to him, **“Welcome to your new home.”**

And, Bud chewed on that greeting for a very fast split second – although doing it in slow motion inside his head:

“Welcome” – what a pleasant word. A greeting AND an invitation. An offering of hospitality and an extension of human relationship. He WAS still alive and able to be in relationship.

“new home.” Yes, that’s what it was, alright. Not just a painfully small version of what had been. No, THIS was his NEW HOME, a place where he was going to LIVE – not just put in time until the funeral home

came to gather him up. This really was going to be his **NEW HOME.**

“Why, thank you Ma’am,” he responded after finishing up that rapid analysis and realization down in the depths of his soul. **“I believe that you are exactly right. And, as soon as I get some of these boxes unloaded, and things sorted through, I would hope that I could return your kind hospitality with a cup of tea.”**

“I’d be happy to do that,” Brenda said. **“And please let me know if you need any help. I’m just right across the hall.”**

As she turned to leave, Bud Smith realized that his life was different now. He realized that it was like when Jesus told Mary, on that Easter morning, not to embrace Him. She had to learn how to deal with Him in a new way – with His resurrected body. He, too, had to learn how to deal with life from a new perspective. But Easter, he remembered, was what transformed pain into glory. So, he wanted to hold onto that promise in these circumstances.

And he also remembered about the time Martha had tried to scold her sister Mary through Jesus. And Jesus

had lovingly told Martha that she needed to put more flour on her hands. He told her that she needed to not allow all of the “things to do” to stick to her like dough on unfloured hands. She needed to do her things, but keep focused on the MAIN THING. Bud, too, needed to allow the things gone by to not stick to the unfloured hands of his heart. Now, with the fewer distractions around him, it was going to be easier to focus his attention on the MAIN THING.

And then his eyes fell upon the one box of Christmas ornaments, and he chuckled as he thought about **Joseph and Mary riding his ass all the way from Nazareth to Bethlehem.** (He always liked that wise crack that a preacher had told him once upon a time.) And he realized that he too was now getting ready to be like Joseph and Mary, and give birth to something new in his life, as well.

He didn't have a clue what it would entail, any more than those two saints, Joseph and Mary, who were content to say, **“Behold the servant of the Lord. Let it done unto me, according to Your purpose.”**

And, in that, he now could find solace and purpose and a sense of peace – perhaps more than he'd ever felt in his whole, very full life, prior to this.

But, that was then, and this is now. And perhaps all of his life had been meant as a prelude to this new thing that God had in store. Yes, **“Behold the servant of the Lord. Let it done unto me, according to Your purpose.”**

And, then the very next thought was: **“I wonder where is that box with my tea maker and cups.”**

Some people spend a great deal of time praying to go to heaven, after they've taken their last breath. Bud Smith just now realized that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, even right here, right now.