THE MISSIONARY PICTURE

A missionary story for children by Lorella Rouster

Can a picture talk? It did for Dorothy.

Dorothy was a Navajo girl. Her family belonged to a tribe that lived in America long before others came to live there. Her family followed the old ways of the Navajo. They were afraid of the missionaries who had come to tell them about the One True God. Dorothy’s family felt they had their own ways. Old ways. Good ways, they thought. They did not listen to the missionaries, and they told Dorothy she should not listen, either.

However, her father, Little Horn, knew that if his daughter could just learn to read and write, it would help her in many ways. He thought about it a lot, and finally he decided to send Dorothy to the school of the missionaries. He had listened for a long time to the talk of the neighbors. He heard that the missionaries treated the children kindly and taught them well.

Before Dorothy left for school, 25 miles (50 km) from her home, her parents talked to her over and over again. They tried to get her ready. They told her to listen well when the teachers taught the children how to read and write. They also told her to close her ears and her heart whenever the missionaries talked about their God. They reminded her over and over that the Navajos have their own religion that is just for them.

Dorothy did what her parents told her. She was very happy to learn to read, and soon she was able to write, too. She did well in school and learned many things, but always she closed her ears whenever the missionaries talked about the One True and Living God that they served.

The missionaries’ words could not get inside Dorothy’s heart because he had made it so hard. After all, she wanted to make her family proud of her. However, her family had not told her anything about not looking at pictures. There was a very interesting picture on the wall of the dormitory. It was a picture of a man with some sheep. He was gently carrying one little lamb, and looking at it with love in his face. Dorothy liked the picture because her family had sheep, too. She herself had often had the job of watching over the newborn lambs. The missionaries called the man in the picture the “Good Shepherd.” Dorothy did not understand what that meant. She just knew that the man in the picture was good, kind. She like him and found herself drawn to him. She spent a lot of time staring at the picture.

Dorothy kept turning off her mind every time the missionaries talked about their God, about Jesus. When vacation time came, she went back home. There, she found her own wooly little lambs waiting for her. How she loved them! Her father gave her the job of caring for them and making sure they were all safely in the home corral every night.

One night, as the lambs came into the corral, she suddenly had a terrifying realization. One of them was missing! Oh, no! What could have happened to that lamb? What terrible danger might it be in?

Dorothy was scared. Many dangers might await the little lamb, out in the cold night all alone. What could she do? How could she ever find it in the dark?

Suddenly she remembered something she had heard about the missionaries’ God. She had tried hard not to pay attention, but she remembered hearing that God was all powerful and knew everything. She knew the spirits her people worshiped did not know everything. Maybe the missionaries’ God could help her.

Quickly, desperately, Dorothy began her prayer. “Great God who knows everything,” she began. “You know everything, so I know you must know where my little lamb is. Please help me find it,” she prayed.

As she prayed, a picture came into her mind. A certain thorny bush up on the hill. Maybe that was where the lamb was! Without even calling to her mother to tell her where she was going, Dorothy ran up the hill. She knew exactly where that thorny bush was. Her legs ached and her heart pounded, but she hurried on.

At last Dorothy spotted the bush. Under it, in the low, thorny branches, her little lamb was caught. It was so happy to see Dorothy! And she was so happy to see it! Gently she pulled the thorny brances from the lamb’s thick wool until it was freed. Gently she cradled the little lamb in her arms and took it home.

As Dorothy placed the little lamb safely into the corral, suddenly she understood the picture. The picture was Jesus, and all of us are the lambs. We are lost, but Jesus loves us so much that He came to save us. He went after us, looking for us. He wanted to bring us all safely home to God’s corral.

Dorothy was amazed. “Jesus wants me,” she thought. He wants me to be His lamb. He wants to find me.” Dorothy’s heart was not hard and closed any more. Her heart was open now to God. Right there in the moonlight by the corral gate, she knelt down and asked Jesus to find her and let her be His lamb.

Dorothy’s heart was changed, changed by Jesus, the Good Shepherd. She began to listen when the missionaries talked about Jesus. After awhile she publicly confessed her faith in Him. After awhile she was able to become a helper to a woman who was translating the Bible into the language of her people, the Navajo language.

Dorothy’s parents had told her not to listen to the missionaries’ words, so God sent her a missionary picture.

(Adapted by missionary Mama Lorella Rouster of Every Child Ministries from parts of “God Speaks Navajo” by Ethel Emily Wallis)