

## Lessons From Shoemaker Martin

Presented by Tressie Gade, with reference to “Shoemaker Martin” by Leo Tolstoy

At Crossroads United Methodist Church  
Waunakee, WI

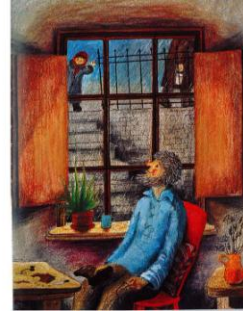
Scripture: Matthew 25: 31-40

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”

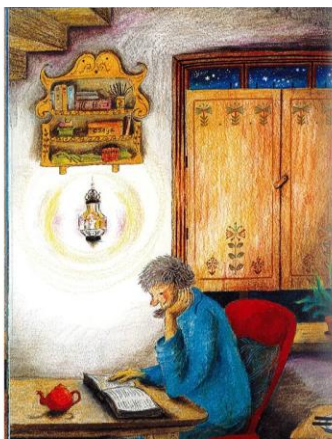


I was always taught that books and reading were very important. I was read to at an early age, and I have continued the tradition of books and reading with my daughter. Molly loves books. She loves flipping through her books and looking at the pictures or cuddling up on my lap to hear a story. Books and stories are some of the best teaching tools in the world. Jesus used stories or parables to teach and I thought today I would follow his example. The story I want to share with you today is based on a story written by Leo Tolstoy. Let's begin.

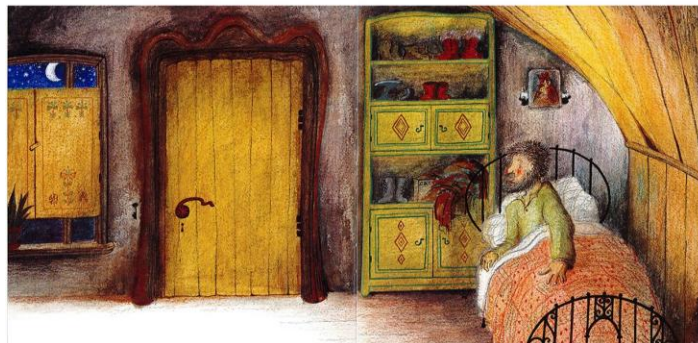
## Lessons From Shoemaker Martin



In a small town in Russia there once lived a man called Martin, who earned his living mending shoes. He lived and worked in a basement room. Through the window, all he could see of people passing by, were their legs. But he still recognized most of them, as there was scarcely a pair of boots or shoes in town that he had not mended at one time or another.



Martin worked all day until it became too dark for him to see his work. Then he would make a pot of tea, light the lamp, and take down his big Bible from the shelf. He read many pages, and the more he read the happier he felt. One winter evening he went on reading till it was very late, and he reached the story of rich man who invited Jesus into his home. Martin thought hard. "If Jesus comes to visit me, what would I say? What would I do? How would I welcome him?" Still thinking about this, Martin fell asleep.



"Martin!" Called a voice suddenly. Martin woke up. But no one was there. Then he heard the voice again. It said, "Make sure you watch the street tomorrow, because I shall be coming!" Martin sat up and rubbed his eyes. Had he really heard those words or was it

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just a dream? He looked carefully around the room but saw nobody. He turned out the lamp and soon when back to sleep.



The next morning, Martin got up very early, before dawn. He lit the stove and put the kettle of water on it. As he ate his breakfast, he looked out the window, wondering whether it had been a dream last night or whether he really would see some unfamiliar shoes belonging to a very special stranger. Still pondering, he set to work. Just as he was cutting a piece on leather, Martin heard footsteps outside. He looked up but only saw poor old Stefan the street sweeper. Stefan was stamping his feet and blowing into his freezing hand in an effort to get warm.



Quickly Martin opened the window and called, “Come on in Stefan, and warm up a bit. The kettle’s just boiling!” Stefan staggered in. “Don’t bother to wipe your feet. Sit down by the stove!” Stefan sipped the hot tea that Martin gave him, and when he felt warm, again he thanked Martin gratefully before leaving. “Don’t mention it! Come anytime,” replied Martin.

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Martin drank a cup of tea himself, then made some cabbage soup for later. When next he looked out the window, he saw a young woman standing huddled out in the bad weather with a baby in her arms. She was trying to wrap up the baby to shelter it from the cold wind, but she scarcely had anything to wrap it in except her thin shabby, dress. Martin went up to the door and called her in.



He gave her some of his hot soup and brought his old coat to put around her shoulders. It was big enough to protect her and the baby. Afterward he played with the baby and made it laugh. Finally Martin fetched some money from an old trunk and gave it to the mother to buy milk. The poor woman bowed and thanked Martin most gratefully before she left, feeling much better.



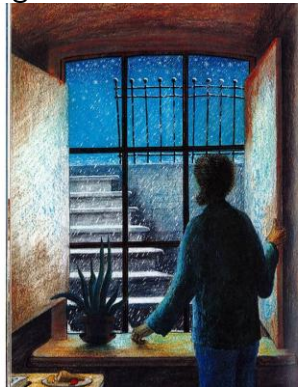
Martin finished off the soup and cleared away the dishes. Later, as he sat at work again, a shadow fell across the window, and Martin looked up eagerly; but it was just townfolk passing. Some of them he knew and some he didn't, but nobody in particular caught his attention or seemed like a special visitor. All at once he heard shouting outside

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on the street. A market woman was dragging along a poorly dressed boy who had stolen one of her apples. She tugged him by his hair and the boy protested and struggled to get away.



Martin hurried out and separated them. “Let him go, grandmother,” he begged. “He won’t do it again. If we punish someone so harshly for taking an apple, what punishment would we expect for our sins that are far, far worse?” The boy and the woman looked at Martin and then looked at each other. Quietly, the boy asked the woman to forgive him and offered to carry her basket along the road.



Martin wanted to finish stitching one of the boots that had to be delivered tomorrow. Soon it was dark. The lamp lighter passed by lighting the streetlamps. Martin finished the boot. Then he put his tools away and swept the scraps of leather from the floor. He took down his lamp from the nail on the wall and placed it on the table so he could read once again the passage from the Bible that had been so much on his mind since last night. Suddenly, he had a feeling that somebody was moving behind him. He looked around, and this time it really seemed there were some people in the room; but Martin could not make out who they were.

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Then the voice whispered in his ear, “Martin, did you recognize me?” “Who?” “Me!” And out of the shadow stepped Stefan, smiling. “This was me too,” the voice said again. And the woman with the baby came forward! She smiled and the baby laughed. “And this was me as well,” the voice said. And the old woman appeared, together with the boy who had taken the apple. Both of them were smiling! Martin looked at them all in amazement, and then each one vanished.



Then the shoemaker realized that his dream had come true after all. Jesus really visited him that day, and he, Martin, had taken him in. Martin was overcome with joy. He began reading the Bible from where it had fallen open. It was a different page from the one he had read last night. At the top of the page he read: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these brethren, ye have done it to me.” The End.

*Truly, I tell you,  
whatever you did for one of  
the least of these  
brothers and sisters of mine,  
you did for me.*  
~MATTHEW 25:40

That’s it. That simple story illustrates our scripture from today so beautifully and so simply. “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

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Martin expected to see Jesus, as stranger, but someone he would immediately recognize as the Lord. Maybe he expected him to have fancy shoes, or glowing robes, or a halo. Is that the image that comes to mind when you think of seeing Jesus? Martin never expected what actually happened. Instead he saw people who were down trodden or not having a good day and he treated them with kindness and compassion and gave what he could, and that was enough. All we have to do to see Jesus in our daily lives is treat others with kindness and compassion. Donate to a shelter, help someone in your family do a chore, smile at someone who looks sad, say a kind word to a friend or coworker. These little acts of kindness can change someone's world. Amen.