

"The Christmas Communicator"

Several Christmases ago I met a man who was singularly unskilled in the smooth techniques of Christian communication.

Watching him in action, however, I saw that while great communication skills might be nice, there are things that are even more compelling.

It was a couple of weeks before Christmas and I was walking through the Seattle Center with my sister-in-law, Jeanie, and her children. We turned a corner and came upon a junior high school choir doing its best to perform *Handel's Messiah* for maybe 200 people in folding chairs. Clearly, the audience held mostly family members, because it seems like the *Messiah* must be a tough performance for a talented choir on a good day, but when every singer is standing in the cold, and each one's voice is changing it might be even harder.

There were still some chairs left far to one side in the front row, so, ready for a rest from shopping, we sat down.

Next to me, formerly alone in the front corner of the audience, was a middle-aged mentally disabled man who was clearly enthralled as he listened to the music.

The choir was nearing the end of Handel's masterpiece and their squeaky voices gathered for the glorious challenge of the *Hallelujah Chorus*. The man rose solemnly to his feet. I looked over at him casually, wondering if he was leaving. And then I remembered, so I stood up too. Then Jeanie and the children joined us.

None of the 200 people behind us moved.

I leaned over and whispered to the man, "You were the only one who remembered to stand up for the *Hallelujah Chorus*. Thank you for reminding us."

He seemed startled for a moment and then smiled broadly at me, obviously pleased that I had followed his example.

He began to look around to see if there was anyone else to remind.

Still seated, right behind us, were three Roman Catholic priests. I watched as crusading eyes fell on the three hapless men of God.

"Hey!" The man hovered over them, "You guys oughta know you're 'sposed to stand up when we get to this part." Then he lowered his voice and, leaning closer, whispered, "It's for Jesus."

The three priests rose sheepishly to their feet, and the man, now on a roll, scanned the rest of the crowd looking for more people to remind. He waved his arms and 200 more people stood up.

He just stood there grinning happily for a moment. And then he turned his solemn attention back to the adolescent music.

Nope. That guy was not the most skilled communicator I encountered during that Christmas season, but he was my favorite. I think he probably knew something about getting found by a Good Shepherd.