

Where Love Is, God Is Also



In a Russian city there lived a shoemaker, Martin Avdyeitch, whose home was in a basement, a little room with one window that looked out on

the street. Through the window he used to watch the people passing by, and although he could only see their feet, Martin recognized people by their boots. He had lived for many years in one place, had many acquaintances, and few pairs of boots in his district had not been in his hands at least once. Some he would half-sole, some he would patch, some he would stitch around, and occasionally he would also fit them with new uppers. Consequently, he often recognized his work through the window.

Martin had plenty to do, because he was a faithful workman, used good materials, did not charge exorbitantly,

and kept his word. If it was possible for him to finish an order by a certain time, he would accept it; otherwise, he would not deceive—he would tell the person so beforehand. Everyone knew Martin Avdyeitch, and he was never out of work.

Martin had always been a good man; but as he grew old, he began to think more about his soul and getting nearer to God. Martin's wife had died and had left him to raise their boy of three years old. As Kapitoshka grew older, he began to help his father. He would have been a delight to Martin, but a bad sickness fell on him, and he died a week later. Martin buried his son and fell into despair so deep that he began to complain to God, and more than once he prayed to God for death. He reproached God because He had not taken him who was an old man, instead of his beloved only son.

Once a little old man came from Troitsa to see Martin. Martin talked with him and began to complain about his sorrows.

“I have no desire to live any longer,” he said. “I only wish I was dead. That is all I pray God for. I am a man with nothing to hope for now.”

“You don’t talk right, Martin,” said the little old man. “We must not judge God’s doings. You are in despair because you wish to live for your own happiness.”

“But what shall one live for?” Martin asked.

“We must live for God, Martin. He gives you life, and for His sake you must live. When you begin to live for Him, you will not grieve over anything, and all will seem easy to you.”

Martin was silent for a moment, and then said, “But how can one live for God?”

“Christ has taught us how to live for God,” the old man replied. “You know how to read? Buy a Testament, and read it; there you will learn how to live for God. Everything is explained there.”

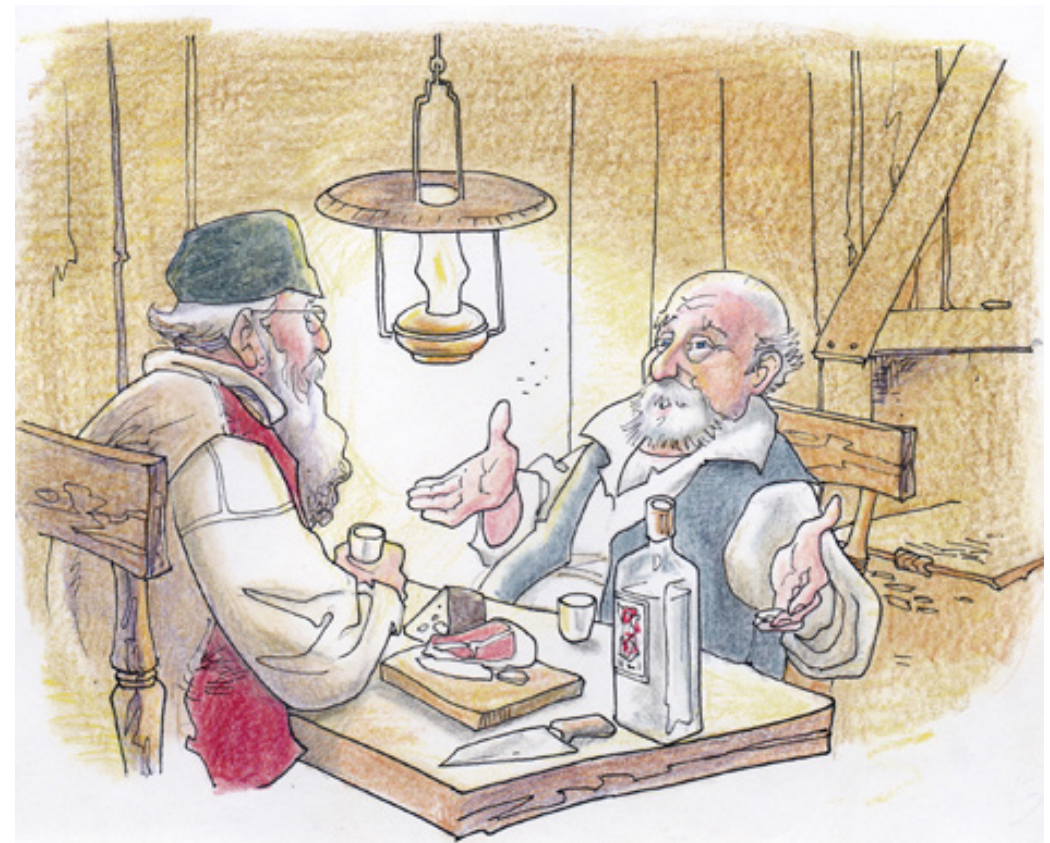
These words kindled a fire in Martin’s heart, and that very same day he bought a large-print New Testament and began to read.

At first, he intended to read the book only on holidays; but as he began to read, it so cheered his soul that he read it every day. At times he would become so absorbed in reading that all the kerosene in the lamp would burn out, and still, he could not tear himself away.

The more he read, the clearer he understood what God wanted of him, and how one should live for God; and his heart grew light. Formerly, when he lay down to sleep, he used to sigh and groan, and always thought of his Kapitoshka; and now his

only exclamation was, “Glory to Thee! Glory to Thee, Lord! Thy will be done.”

And from that time, his whole life was changed. In the morning, he would sit down to work, finish his allotted task, then take the little lamp from the hook, put it on the table, get his book from the shelf and sit down to read. The more he read, the more he understood, and the brighter and happier words grew in his heart.



Once it happened that Martin read until late into the night. He was reading the verses in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Luke.

“And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.”¹

He read farther also, those verses where Jesus says, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: he is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it; for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.”²

As Martin read these words, joy filled his soul. He put his spectacles down on the book, leaned his elbows on the table, and became lost in thought. He began to measure his life by these words, and wondered, *Is my house built on the rock or on the sand? 'Tis well if on the rock. Help me, Lord!*

Thus ran his thoughts; he wanted to go to bed, but he felt loath to tear himself away from the book, and so he

began to read farther in the seventh chapter. He read about the centurion, he read about the widow's son, he read about the answer given to John's disciples, and finally he came to that place where the rich Pharisee desired Jesus to sit at meat with him; and he read how the woman that was a sinner anointed His feet and washed them with her tears, and how He forgave her.



¹ Luke 6:29–31 KJV.

² Luke 6:46–49 KJV.

Martin reached the forty-fourth verse and began to read:

“And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.”³

Martin finished reading these verses, and thought.

Thou gavest me no water for my feet, thou gavest me no kiss. My head with oil thou didst not anoint.

Again, Martin put his spectacles down on the book, and again became lost in thought.

It seems that Pharisee must have been such a man as I am. Apparently, I have thought only of myself—how I might have my tea, be warm and comfortable, but never to think about my guest.

He thought about himself, but there was not the least care taken of the guest. *And who was his guest?*

The Lord Himself, he presumed. If He had come to me, should I have done the same way?

Martin rested his head upon his arms, and did not notice that he fell asleep.

“Martin!” a voice sounded in his ears.

Martin started from his sleep. “Who is here?”

He turned around, glanced toward the door—no one.

Again, he fell into a doze. Suddenly, he plainly heard, “Martin! Ah, Martin! Look tomorrow on the street. I am coming.”



Martin awoke, rose from the chair, and rubbed his eyes. He could not tell whether he heard those words in his dream or in reality. He turned down his lamp and went to bed.

At daybreak the next morning, Martin rose, prayed to God, lighted the stove, put on the *shchi*⁴ and the *kasha*,⁵ put the water in the *samovar*,⁶ put on his apron, and sat down by the window to work.

While he was working, he kept thinking about all that had happened the day before. It seemed to him at one moment that it was a dream, and at another that he had really heard a voice.

Sitting by the window, he was looking out more than he was working. When anyone passed by in boots which he did not know, he would bend down and look out in order to see not only the feet, but also the face.

³ Luke 7:44–46 KJV.

⁴ Cabbage soup.

⁵ Gruel.

⁶ Metal container traditionally used to heat and boil water in Russia.

The *dvornik*⁷ passed by in new felt boots, the water-carrier passed by; then there came up to the window an old soldier of Nicholas's time, in an old pair of laced felt boots, and holding a shovel. Martin recognized him by his felt boots. The man's name was Stepanuitch, and he was required to assist the *dvornik*. Stepanuitch began to shovel away the snow in front of Martin's window. Martin glanced at him, and took up his work again.

"Pshaw! I must be getting crazy in my old age," he said, and laughed at himself. "Stepanuitch is clearing away the snow, and I imagine that Christ is coming to see me. I was entirely out of my mind, old dotard that I am!"

Martin sewed about a dozen stitches, and then felt impelled to look through the window again. He looked out and saw that Stepanuitch had leaned his shovel against the wall, and was warming himself and resting. He was an old, broken man; evidently, he had not enough strength even to shovel the snow.

"I will give him some tea," Martin said to himself.

Martin laid down his awl, rose from his seat, put the *samovar* on the table, and poured out the tea. He tapped on the glass, and Stepanuitch came to the window. Martin beckoned to him and went to open the door.

"Come in, warm yourself a little," he said. "You must be cold."

"May Christ reward you for this!" said Stepanuitch. "My bones ache."

Stepanuitch entered and shook off the snow, but staggered while trying to wipe his feet so as not to soil the floor.

"Don't trouble to wipe your feet," said Martin. "I will clean it up myself; I am used to such things. Come in and sit down. Here, drink a cup of tea."

Martin lifted two glasses and handed one to his guest, while he poured his

tea into a saucer and began to blow on it.

Stepanuitch finished drinking his glass of tea, turned the glass upside down, put the half-eaten lump of sugar on it, and began to express his thanks. But it was evident he wanted some more.

"Have some more," said Martin, filling both his own glass and his guest's. Martin drank his tea, but from time to time glanced out into the street.

"Are you expecting anyone?" his guest asked.



“Am I expecting anyone? I am ashamed even to tell whom I expect. I am, and I am not, expecting someone; but one word has kindled a fire in my heart. Whether it is a dream or something else, I do not know. Yesterday, I was reading the Gospel about Christ; how He suffered, how He walked on the earth. I suppose you have heard about it?”

“Indeed I have,” Stepanuitch replied.

“Well, now, I was reading how He walked on the earth, how He came to the Pharisee, and the Pharisee did not treat Him hospitably. Suppose, for example, He should come to me, or anyone else, I said to myself, I should not even know how to receive Him. While I was thus thinking, I fell asleep, and I heard someone call me by name. I got up. The voice, just as if someone whispered, said, ‘Be on the watch; I shall come tomorrow.’ And this happened twice. Well! Would you believe it, it got into my head? I scolded myself—and yet I am expecting Him.”

Stepanuitch shook his head, and said nothing. He finished drinking his glass of tea and put it on the side; but Martin picked up the glass and filled it once more.

“Drink some more for your good health. You see, I have an idea that—when Christ went about on this earth—He disdained no one, and had more to do with the simple people. He always went to see the simple people. He picked out most of His disciples from among folk like such sinners as we are, from the working class. He said that whoever exalts himself, shall be humbled, and he who is humbled shall become exalted. He said that you call me Lord, and I wash your feet. He said that whoever wishes to be the first, the same shall be a servant to all. Because, He said, blessed are the poor, the humble, the kind, the generous.”

Stepanuitch forgot about his tea. Being an old man, he was easily moved to tears, and as he was

listening, they rolled down his face.

“Come, now, have some more tea,” said Martin, but Stepanuitch made the sign of the cross, thanked him, turned down his glass, and arose.

“Thanks to you, Martin Avdyeitch, for treating me kindly and satisfying me, soul and body.”

“You are welcome,” said Martin. “Come in again—always glad to see a friend.”



Stepanuitch departed; and Martin poured out the rest of the tea, drank it, put away the dishes, and sat down again by the window to stitch on a patch. He kept stitching away while looking through the window. He was expecting Christ, and was all the while thinking of Him and His deeds, and his head was filled with the different speeches of Christ.

Two soldiers passed by. One wore boots furnished by the crown, and the other one wore boots that Martin had made. Then the master of the house next door passed by in shining galoshes, followed by a baker with a basket. Now a woman in woolen stockings and rustic *bashmaks*⁸ on her feet passed by the window and stood near the window-case.

Martin saw she was a stranger, dressed in shabby summer clothes, and with a child. She was standing by the wall with her back to the wind, trying to wrap up the child, but she had nothing to wrap it in. From behind the frame, Martin could hear the child crying, but the woman was unable to pacify it.

Martin went to the door, ascended the steps, and cried, "My good woman. Hey! My good woman!"

The woman turned around.

"Why are you standing in the cold with the child?" Martin asked. "Come into my room where it is warm and you can manage it better. Here, this way!"

Astonished, the woman descended the steps and entered the room.

"There, sit down, my good woman, nearer to the stove where you can get warm, and nurse the little one."

"I have no milk for him. I myself have not eaten anything since morning," said the woman.

Martin spread a towel on the table, upon which he put bread and a dish of *shchi*.

"Eat, my good woman; and I will mind the little one."

The woman crossed herself and began to eat, while Martin sat on the bed near the infant. The little one kept crying, and in an attempt to silence him, Martin waved his finger in front of the child's mouth. The little one looked at his finger, and became quiet; Martin withdrew it, because his finger was black and soiled with wax. Then the infant began to smile, and Martin was glad. While the woman was eating, she told Martin about herself.



⁸ Ankle-high shoes made of soft leather.

“I am a soldier’s wife,” she said. “It is now seven months since they sent my husband away and there have been no tidings. I worked as a cook, then the baby was born and no one cared to keep me with a child. This is the third month that I have been struggling along without a place. I used up all I had. I wanted work, but no one would take me. They said I am too thin. I have just been to the merchant’s wife, where a young woman I know lives, and so they promised to take us in. I thought that was the end of it. But she told me to come next week, and she lives a long way off. I got tired out; and it tired my darling child too. Fortunately, our landlady takes pity on us for Christ’s sake and gives us a room, else I don’t know how I should manage to get along.”

Martin sighed. “Have you no warm clothes?”

“Yesterday I pawned my last shawl for a twenty-*kopek* piece.”

The woman took the child and Martin went to the partition, rummaged round, and found an old coat.

“It is a poor thing,” he said. “Yet you may turn it to some use.”

The woman took the coat and burst into tears.

“May Christ bless you, little grandfather!” the woman said. “He must have sent me to your window. My little baby would have frozen to death. When I started out, it was warm, but now it has grown cold. And He, the *Batyushka*, led you to look through the window and take pity on me, an unfortunate.”

Martin smiled. “Indeed, He did that! I have been looking through the window for some wise reason.”

Then Martin told the soldier’s wife his dream, and how he heard the voice—how the Lord promised to come and see him that day.

“All things are possible,” said the woman. She rose, wrapped her little child in her coat, and, as she started to take leave, she thanked Martin again.

“Take this, for Christ’s sake,” said Martin, giving her a twenty-*kopek* piece; “redeem your shawl.”

The woman made the sign of the cross. Martin did likewise and accompanied her to the door.



Once the woman left, Martin ate some *shchi*, washed the dishes, and returned to his work. He still remembered the window, and when the window grew darker, he looked out to see who was passing by. Acquaintances and strangers passed by; nothing out of the ordinary.

Suddenly, an old woman selling apples stopped in front of his window. Only a few apples were left in her basket, as she had evidently nearly sold them all. Over her shoulder, she also had a bag full of wood chips that she had gathered and she was on her way home. The bag being heavy, she lowered it onto the sidewalk and she suddenly noticed a little boy in a torn cap snatch an apple from the basket. He was about to make his escape, but the old woman caught the youngster by his sleeve. He struggled to tear himself away; but the old woman grasped him with both hands, knocked off his cap, and caught him by the hair.

Martin threw his awl upon the floor, sprang to the door and rushed out into the street. The old woman was threatening to take the screaming youngster to the policeman, and the boy was defending himself.

“I did not take it,” he said. “What are you beating me for? Let me go!”

Martin tried to separate them, and said, “Let him go, *babushka*; forgive him, for Christ’s sake.”

“I will forgive him so that he won’t forget it till the new broom grows. I am going to take the little villain to the police.”

“Let him go, *babushka*,” Martin pleaded, “he will never do it again. Let him go, for Christ’s sake.”

The old woman let the boy go and he started to run, but Martin kept him back.

“Ask the *babushka*’s forgiveness,” he said, “and don’t you ever do it again. I saw you take the apple.” The boy burst into tears, and begged forgiveness.

“There now! That’s right; and here’s an apple for you.”

Martin took an apple from the basket. “I will pay you for it, *babushka*,” he said to the old woman, and gave it to the boy.

“You ruin them that way, the good-for-nothings,” said the old woman. “He ought to be treated so that he would remember it for a whole week.”





All should be forgiven, and the thoughtless especially.”

The old woman shook her head and sighed. “That is so, but the trouble is that they are very much spoiled.”

“Then we who are older must teach them,” said Martin.

“That is just what I say,” said the old woman. “I myself have had seven of them—only one daughter is left.”

The old woman grew quite sentimental and pointed at the boy. “Of course, it is a childish trick. God be with him.”

She was about to lift the bag up on her shoulder when the boy said, “Let me carry it, *babushka*; it is on my way.”

The old woman nodded, put the bag on the boy’s back, and side by side they walked off down the street. The old woman even forgot to ask Martin to pay for the apple.

Martin stood gazing after them as they walked away. Returning to his room, he picked up his awl and sat down to work again.

“Eh, *babushka, babushka*,” said Martin, “that is right according to our judgment, but not according to God’s. If the boy is to be whipped for an apple, then what ought to be done to us for our sins?”

The old woman was silent, and she and the boy stood listening as Martin told the parable of the master who forgave a debtor all that he owed him, and how the debtor went and began to choke one who owed him.

“God has commanded us to forgive,” said Martin, “else we, too, may not be forgiven.

The old woman then began to relate where and how she lived with her daughter, and how many grandchildren she had.

“Here,” she says, “my strength is small, and yet I have to work. I pity the youngsters—my grandchildren—but what nice children they are!”



After a little while, it grew darker, so that he could not see to sew, and he saw the lamplighter passing by lighting the street-lamps.

“It must be time to make a light,” he muttered, so he prepared his little lamp, hung it up, and returned to his work. He had one boot finished, which he turned around and looked at, saying to himself, “Well done.”

He put away his tools, swept off the cuttings, cleared off the bristles and ends, set the lamp on the table, and took the Gospels from the shelf. He intended to open the book where he had yesterday put a piece of leather as a mark, but it happened to open at another place. At the moment Martin opened the Testament, he recollected his last night’s dream and it seemed he could hear someone stepping behind him. Martin turned and it was as though people were standing in the dark corner; he was at a loss to know who they were.

A voice whispered in his ear, “Martin—ah, Martin! Did you not recognize me?”

“Who?” Martin asked.

“Me. It was I.” And Stepanuitch stepped out from the dark corner. He smiled, and like a little cloud faded away.

“And it was I,” said the voice. And the woman with her child stepped out of the dark corner. She smiled, the child laughed, and they also vanished,

“And it was I,” continued the voice. And both the old woman and the boy with the apple stepped forward. Both smiled and vanished.

Martin’s soul rejoiced; he crossed himself, put on his spectacles, and began to read where it had happened to open. On the upper part of the page, he read:

“For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in.”⁹

And on the lower part of the page, he read this:

“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”¹⁰

And Martin Avdyeitch understood that his dream had not deceived him; that the Savior had indeed called on him that day, and that he really had received Him.

⁹ Matthew 25:35 KJV.

¹⁰ Matthew 25:40 KJV.



S&S link: Character Building: Personal Responsibility:

Service-2c and Christian Life and Faith: Witnessing and Missionary Training: Preaching the Gospel-2e

Adapted from *Where Love Is, There God Is Also* by Leo Tolstoy. Illustrated by Jeremy. Designed by Roy Evans.

Published by My Wonder Studio. Copyright © 2021 by The Family International.