

**THEO 742: Theological Understandings of Jesus**  
**Proclamation of the Atonement**

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**Audience:** This story is written for children in early elementary school (6-9 year-olds). I enjoy creating relaxed atmospheres (playing the piano, gardening outside, working on a puzzle) where children feel comfortable enough to talk about God. The metaphorical story is embedded within the context of such a conversation.

Shiny Red Shoes

The magic of Christmas is found in peaceful reflection and gratitude. Even though those moments are generally hidden in amongst the energy of the season, in my house I can always count on that moment to make itself available in the enchanting time between Christmas dinner and Christmas desserts. The presents are opened, dinner is over, dishes are cleaned – but Christmas lingers for a few hours more.

It is within this space of time standing still, that I enjoy slipping away to the piano to play simple Christmas melodies and allow my spirit to stretch a little beyond myself to feel God’s very presence in the room.

This particular year I had just finished, “O Holy Night” and was thumbing through the piano book for my next song when my nine-year-old niece Sophie sat down next to me on the bench. Sophie sat quietly listening to me play. Mid-way through, “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear,” Sophie spoke up.

“Aunt Connie? Why did Jesus have to die?” Her abrupt question would dumbfound most people except that this wasn’t the first time Sophie had asked me this question. Year-after-year, Sophie would pick up on these magical moments and then ask me this seemingly simple question. Year-after-year, I would fumble through a theology lesson a child would be hard-pressed to understand and then leave the conversation feeling like I had confused her more than helped her. This year, however, I was ready. This year would be different. In anticipation of her question I was prepared with an answer, or should I say, I was prepared with a story.

“Sophie?”

“Yeah?”

“Have you ever worn a new pair of shoes that hurt your feet?”

“You mean like these?” Sophie lifted the leg of her jeans to reveal a beautiful, sparkly pair of red shoes. Her bright, shiny red Christmas shoes matched Santa’s sleigh in color and sparkle. “They’re pretty but look,” Sophie sad sadly. Sure enough on the sides of both her little toes were equally brilliant red blisters. “My mom says they’re not good for my feet.”

I smiled down at Sophie. “I’m going tell you a story about a little girl, about your age, named Lilliana.”



One year for Christmas, Lilliana got a brand new pair of sparkly red Christmas shoes. They were so pretty and so sparkly that she couldn’t help but wear them with everything. She

wore her sparkly shoes to the park with her red dress. She wore her sparkly shoes to the grocery store with jeans. She wore her sparkly shoes with her tights to walk the dog. She even wore her sparkly shoes to bed – if she could sneak them under the covers fast enough before her mom caught her.

Lilliana *loved* her new shoes. But the more she wore them, the more parts of her foot would turn red and hurt.

“Those shoes are not good for your feet.” Lilliana’s mom announced. “I don’t think you should wear them anymore. They’re causing you too much pain.”

Lilliana wouldn’t hear of it – she loved her shoes and she would wear them for the rest of her life – or so she thought.

Lilliana had been on winter break for the last few weeks, but it was time for school to start back again.

“Let’s lay out your clothes for tomorrow so we’re all ready for your first day back, okay?” Mom suggested. “What do you want to wear?”

“How ‘bout my unicorn sweater, jeans and my new sparkly red shoes.”

“Lilliana, you know how I feel about those shoes. They’re bad for your feet. I don’t mind you playing in them around the house, but they will hurt your feet too much if you wear them to school. I know what’s best for you – you need to trust me.”

“I know but-“

“We’re not going to discuss it. I said no. I don’t want you coming home with blisters all over your feet, not able to walk all because of those silly shoes.” Lilliana knew when her mom was serious and she knew she was serious about these shoes. What Lilliana’s mom didn’t know that she was equally as serious about wearing her beautiful new shoes to school.

“What do you know.” Lilliana mumbled under her breath. “You’re not the boss of me. I can wear whatever I want.” Lilliana’s mom hadn’t heard the mumble and carefully folded her clothes into a pile on her dresser for a quick change in the morning along with a comfortable pair of pink and grey checkered tennis shoes. The tennis shoes were nice and all – but they didn’t compare to the sparkles of the shiny red shoes.

“Hun?” Lilliana’s dad said to her mom as he peeked into her room. “Do you need help dropping the kids off tomorrow? I know you have your hair appointment in-between kids and work. Let me know.”

“I think I’ll be good. No wiggle-room, but if I keep myself on-time I should be able to get to all my appointments.”

“Okay, sounds good.”

Mom tucked Lilliana into bed with a snuggle, kiss and a prayer, her long hair tumbling around Lilliana making her giggle. “Going to be a tight day tomorrow, sweetheart. Let’s all work together for a peaceful day, k?”

“Okay, mom. And go get rid of all this hair,” Lilliana teased, pushing it off her pillow.

As expected, the next morning was a little crazy trying to get all four kids off to school. The busyness was a benefit to Lilliana as she hoped it might help her slip out of the house unnoticed with her shoes. She got up and got dressed, all except her shoes. She ate her breakfast, combed her hair and made her bed – all without shoes. When she heard the final call, “Everyone in the car, it’s time to go” she knew the time had come to dawn her new shoes and pray her mom wouldn’t see her feet.

Lilliana slipped on her shoes and ran down the stairs. Quickly grabbing her lunchbox and backpack, she headed toward the garage to get into the van.

“Lilliana?” Mom called at her. She froze.

“Yeah mom?” Lilliana turned to face her mom and quickly lowered her backpack onto her feet to hide her lovely shoes. Her mom looked at her carefully. Then with a sad but loving smile, she said, “never mind.” With that Lilliana’s heart rejoiced – she had made it past inspection while wearing her glorious shoes. Skipping off into the car, Lilliana was excited with what her day would hold.

Who would have known they’d run during PE on the first day back? Who would have known Peter Johnson would pull the fire alarm and the whole school would have to march onto the grass and stand there for 40 minutes until the fire department gave them an all-clear. Who would have known that after a few hours of wearing her marvelous shoes, Lilliana’s feet would be burning with pain. Lilliana’s Mom knew - somehow she knew.

“Lilliana,” Emma shouted at her from across the blacktop, “want to jump rope?”

“Yes!” she exclaimed, jumping down from the bench. “Ouch, my feet.” Lilliana collapsed at her weight on her feet. Her reddened toes and bright red heel burned at the touch of her shoe. “Never mind. I can’t play.”

“Okay. Hey Neveah, what to play with me, Sarah, and Kailey?”

“For sure!” Neveah gleefully replied. The four girls skipped away to play jump rope leaving Lilliana alone on the hard blacktop rubbing her feet.

“I *want* to play, I just can’t –“ Lilliana’s voice cut out. A tear trickled down her cheek. She couldn’t walk and the blister on her heel was so bad it was oozing puss. She pulled her knees tight to her chest and let out a small cry, “I was wrong. I should have listened to my mom.”

Recess passed by so slowly as Lilliana watched all the other kids playing together. How she wanted to play with them, but her shoes made playing with her friends impossible.

At last, the recess bell rang and the students began lining up on the blacktop. Hobbling forward, Lilliana squashed down the back heel of her shoe and slid in her big toe while she scooted toward the blacktop. Her teacher, Mr. Sanchez, came out to pick up the class.

“Okay class. I hope you all had a nice recess. We’re going to head back to Room A to get ready for math. Tyron, lead the way.” With that the class began walking. Lilliana began to cry. She just couldn’t bear the thought of walking any further with her throbbing feet.

Mr. Sanchez turned around to see Lilliana still on the blacktop. “Hold on Tyron. Everyone have a seat in the line.” Obediently, the class sat down. With a quick pace, Mr. Sanchez walked toward Lilliana. “What’s the matter, Lilliana?”

“My shoes.”

“They’re very pretty.”

“Yeah, but –“ Lilliana pulled her hands off her feet to reveal her blisters.

“Ouch! I’ll bet those hurt!” Finding comfort in his compassion Lilliana began to cry. “You know what?” Mr. Sanchez proposed, “Your mom dropped something off for you earlier today. She told me you might need it by the afternoon. Want me to help you come inside to see?” With a little nod, Mr. Sanchez helped Lilliana back to class.

Sitting back at her desk, Lilliana waited for Mr. Sanchez to get the class working on Math Facts before giving her the bag from her mom.

“Here it is.” Mr. Sanchez said quietly, pulling out Lilliana’s comfy, pink and grey checkered tennis shoes, cozy pink socks, four band-aids and a tiny tube of Neosporin. “I think your mom

knew just what you'd need." Ever so carefully, Mr. Sanchez took off the horrible, scratchy red shoes, gently squeezed some Neosporin on a Q-tip and rubbed the ointment onto her blisters.

The ointment felt amazing – like an instant coolness had settled on her foot.

"Now let's cover up these blisters with some band-aids." Carefully folding the band-aids onto the wounds, Mr. Sanchez slid Lilliana's cozy sock up and over the band-aids. Her feet felt snug, cool and safe. "These tennis shoes look pretty comfortable and almost as pretty as your red shoes there. That was sure nice of your mom. Good thing she had time this morning to bring these to you."

Lilliana smiled and then thought of her mom. Time - Lillianna knew her mom's day was full – she had no wiggle room. How did she find time to deliver her shoes, she wondered. She suddenly felt a warm spot deep in her heart for her mom. Her mom had seen her shoes, but let her make her own choices out of love for her. Regardless of Lilliana's decision to wear her bad shoes, her mom was ready to love Lilliana and even offer healing to her foot whenever Lilliana was ready to admit she needed forgiveness, help and healing.

Her Mom worked later that night than usual – and Lilliana knew why. When she finally came in the door, Lilliana ran into her arms, "I'm sorry I didn't listen to you." She cried quietly. "Thank you for my tennis shoes."

"I love you, Lilliana," her mother enfolder her in her arms, her long hair tumbling around them both. Lilliana knew her mom had sacrificed her time – and hair appointment – for the band aid's her daughter needed and her heart felt warm and full.



"So why did Jesus have to die?" I returned to Sophie's question. "Just like Lilliana got herself into a bad place because of her decision, we have all made decisions to be in charge of our lives that have got us stuck in bad places. In bringing Lilliana her bag of supplies, her mom sacrificed her haircut appointment and even her morning work hours in order to provide healing for Lilliana's sore feet. Out of love, Lilliana's mom made a sacrifice for her daughter. In a much larger way, when Jesus died on the cross, he sacrificed everything – his life, his humanity and divinity - to carry the cost of bringing healing to our lives. But remember, Jesus didn't *just* die on the cross, he also came back to life to remind us that His way of living for others brings us life and heals our sores. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, He becomes that ointment, like the Neosporin, that brings healing, coolness and peace to our lives. And just like Lilliana realized that her mom really does love her and wants the best for her, so too God, through Jesus' life and sacrifice, loves us and wants the very best for us.

"Hmm." Sophie sat thinking. "What kind of pie are you going to eat?" Sophie inquired. And just like that our moment had ended. Did I summarize the entirety of Jesus' atonement in my little story, no. But I hope someday when Sophie thinks about God and the work of Jesus on the cross, she thinks about the healing coolness of Neosporin on a wound – and the healing, loving presence of Someone who loves her very much.