

On Sunday morning, I was up and dressed an hour before I needed to be. Mama had breakfast ready because we had to leave earlier than usual to pick up my friend. We didn't have our usual big breakfast. We only had oatmeal, fried sausage, fried apples, and skillet bread. My new friend Lacy will be coming to church with me today. I was excited but a little afraid this might be the day I'd be committed. I still don't understand how this works, but Lacy said she thinks you must admit you've sinned. How can I do that since I never got the sin list?

Daddy got the wagon ready, and we all piled in. Instead of going toward the church, he cut back toward the schoolhouse and then turned to go down by the river. Mr. Arlo Higgins lived on a little hill overlooking the river. I worried Old Jenny wouldn't be able to pull us up the hill, but when I looked, I saw four people standing by the road. I leaned over to see, and I would have fallen out of the wagon if Henry hadn't grabbed me. I saw Mr. Arlo, another man, a woman, and my friend, Lacy.

"Whoa!" my Daddy had old Jenny stop. "Good to see you, Arlo. This must be Della and her husband." Daddy held out his hand, and the man took it.

"Hudson Cleaves. You remember my wife, Della?"

"Sure I do." Daddy tipped his hat. "Here, let me help you." And Daddy stood to help everyone get in the wagon. Mama had taken a chair in the wagon so Mr. Arlo could ride on the seat with Daddy. Mr. Hudson and Miss Della found a chair, and Lacy ran to sit in a chair by me. When everyone was seated, Daddy clicked his tongue against his teeth, and Old Jenny started walking to church.

As usual, Reverend Simpson greeted everyone who entered the church. He stood on the steps, shaking hands and laughing. Sometimes, he would say, "Praise God," and hold his hands up toward the sky. I looked, but I never saw anything. I think Reverend Simpson was, as my Ma'am would say, full of himself. Ain't nobody as happy as he is about seeing everybody. He was thrilled to see Mr. Arlo, Miss Della, Mr. Hudson, and Lacy. I thought this might get me off the hook with him, but it made it worse.

"Well, look who it is." He said with a loud voice.

I turned to look, but no one was behind me, so he meant me. I forced a grin to be polite.

"Did you speak to your mother and father like you promised?" He leaned down so I could smell his aftershave and Doublemint gum.

"I didn't promise. I just said I would." He chuckled and patted me on my shoulder.

"And?"

"And I talked to my Mama." That wasn't a lie.

"And?"

"Why do you keep saying 'and'?" He was starting to make me mad.

"I want to know what your mother said." He smiled his strained smile. Church or me must make his tummy rumble because he gets that funny look on his face almost every time I talk to him.

"Why don't you just say, what did your mother say instead of 'and' all of the time?"

I got a very stern look from the always-happy Reverend Simpson. Thankfully, someone rang the church bell, and we had to go inside.

We all sat together in two rows. We sat in order: me, Henry, Edward, Robert, James, Mama, and Daddy. The row behind us was Mr. Arlo, Miss Della, Mr. Hudson, and my friend Lacy. The church was almost full. I heard Daddy say once that the entire county comes to church when someone mentions food. I hope we are having pie and coffee. I can't have coffee at home, but I can sneak a cup with lots of cream when we have pie at church.

Miss Edna Lawrence was sitting across from Reverend Simpson. She stood up and said, "Let's make a choir." About ten people from the congregation went up front and sat behind Miss Edna

and Reverend Simpson. When everyone in the choir was seated, Miss Edna said to stand and sing Holy, Holy, Holy, found on page six of your hymnal.

I sang loud, and I heard Lacy singing, too. After the song, Miss Edna prayed, and then we sang, Standing on the Promises. I wondered what it meant to stand on the promises. What if you don't know the promises? Is that another list I need? Sometimes, this religious stuff confuses me. We got to sit down while they passed the plate. I dropped the plate once, so now I have to hold it with two hands when it comes around, and Mama and Daddy are leaning over to watch me. I smiled at them as I stood and handed the plate to my friend Lacy.

Reverend Simpson took the plates and placed them on the altar. He walked to the pulpit, clapped his hands, and said, "The Holy Ghost is in the house. I can feel it."

I looked everywhere but under my pew but didn't see any ghosts. I can tell you right now, I better not see a ghost. I was turning and twisting, looking for his Holy Ghost, and the next thing I knew, my arms were being pulled, and I was moving down the pew toward Mama.

"Andrea, what are you doing?" Mama's whisper was close to being really mad. "Sit here and sit still."

"I'm looking for that Holy Ghost, Mama." I tried hard to explain, but the look I got told me to sit still and listen, so I did.

I was thinking about how much trouble I was in and what I would do after church when I heard Reverend Simpson shouting, "He's moving among us, folks. He is here looking at you. Have you talked to Jesus today? Have you told Him about your troubles and about your sins?"

Maybe Lacy is right, and I have to tell about my sins.

"Have you asked Him if your name is written in the Book of Life? Have you committed your life to the only one who can save you?"

I was wondering if this was my time. Was that ghost going to come get me? Oh no! If it comes today, I'll miss pie and coffee, and what if he keeps me past Thanksgiving.

The church choir started singing Almost Persuaded, and then I heard my Mama start singing with them. "Almost persuaded, harvest is past! Almost persuaded, doom comes at last; Almost persuaded cannot avail; Almost persuaded is but to fail! Sad, sad, that bitter wail— "Almost—but lost!"

"If you need to confess your sins, come and stand before our Lord. Come to the altar and free yourself of your burdens. Come, won't you come. If you've cheated, stolen, cursed, or lied, come." I think Reverend Simpson knows. I've done two sins, and he is almost begging me to come. What if I go? Will I be committed right then?

"Mama," I looked up at her with tears in my eyes. "Mama, I've lied twice, and I think I'm going to be committed." I couldn't stop the tears from falling.

Suddenly, the only voice I heard was my Mama's. I think the church was now singing Just As I Am, but I couldn't be sure. Everything seemed to stop in place and get very quiet.

"What lie did you tell?" Mama looked like she does when she is tucking me into sleep.

"I told Reverend Simpson I had been thinking about being committed, then I told him I talked to you about it, and I really didn't." I wiped my nose on the sleeve of my coat. That didn't please Mama, but she said nothing to me. "Don't you talk to Jesus every night when you say your prayers?"

"Yes." I started to wipe my nose again, so Mama pulled her hankie from her sleeve and handed it to me.

"Did you tell Jesus you told a lie?"

"I told two lies." I was crying, and I said that louder than I wanted.

"Do you remember us talking long ago about praying to Jesus and asking Him to forgive us our misdeeds and watch over us?"

“Yes, I remember.”

“Do you remember what I said after that? Mama pushed my hair back away from my face.

“You said Jesus will forgive me if I ask Him to.” Reverend Simpson was getting all wound up about the Holy Ghost and kept talking louder and louder.

“Good, and tell me, what do you know about Jesus?”

“He is God’s son, and He forgives people, even bad people if they really mean to be good people, and when I need a friend that no one can see, I can talk to Jesus.”

I don’t know why, but suddenly, Mr. Otis Lester, sitting in the corner a few pews behind us, started shouting “Amen” over and over again.

“That’s right, but didn’t I say something else about when you are old enough to understand what this means and are ready to make a change in your life.”

I heard the Reverend shouting that the Holy Ghost was moving through the crowd. He is waiting for you to come to the altar to be forgiven. If you are ready, come just as you are. I didn’t know if I was ready, but Reverend Simpson said to come just as you are to be forgiven of your sins. He said to come just as you are, so that is just what I did.

I walked up to Reverend Simpson and pulled on his coattail so he would bend down. I told him I had sinned twice, but I ain’t ready to be committed just yet. I told him I for sure wanted to be forgiven and that I needed the sin list so I could be careful not to do any more sinning. I also needed that list of promises. And, if he could think of any other lists, I’d be pleased to have them. I told him that when I got those lists and studied them really hard, maybe I could be committed. Then I stood up there, smiling my very best smile while secretly looking for that Holy Ghost the Reverend said was still in the building.

Thanksgiving

Those three days between Sunday and Thanksgiving were pretty exciting. Lots of people came up to me after church to shake my hand and tell me how proud they were that I went forward.

All I did was walk up to Reverend Simpson, but that must have made a lot of people really happy. Mr. Otis Lester told me he felt the Holy Ghost and bet I felt it, too. I should have turned around when Mr. Otis was shouting to see that Holy Ghost, but I didn’t. And, I didn’t tell him that Holy Ghost must have stayed over by him and didn’t come nowhere around me.

Every day, walking to school, I watched for the ghost in case he was lurking behind the trees, but I never saw him. I did see a deer, two rabbits, and at least a dozen squirrels. When I sat on the church steps after school like I always do, I noticed how pretty everything looked, and for the first time, I thought how pretty God made things around here.

Monday, at school, Lacy said my Mama invited them to come to Thanksgiving dinner, and she might bring her baby doll. I told her okay, but I don’t play much with dolls, but I would try. Then I told her I could show her my favorite fishing hole unless it was too cold or raining. I think she was excited, but I couldn’t tell. Even if she don’t like fishing, we can still be best friends.

Thanksgiving was a wonderful day. It was almost like Sunday, but we didn’t have to hear no preaching. Our house was full. Ma’am and Pap came. Granny, Pa, Mr. Arlo, Mr. Hudson, Miss Della, and my friend Lacy. Miss Della came early to help Mama, and she brought two pies. Of course, my brothers are here and, for once, didn’t scuffle and fight. When it came time to pray, I asked Mama if I could. She smiled and nodded her head.

God, it’s me, Andy. Remember, I told ya my name is Andrea, but my friends call me Andy, so you can too. I ain’t done this kind of praying before, but Mama said it don’t matter how you pray, just so you do. So, God, bless this food. My Mama and Miss Della worked hard, and it smells really good/ Bless Mama and Miss Della, too. Bless all my family, my new friend Lacy, her

Daddy, and Granddaddy. God, I ain't been committed, but I'm gonna be, and when I am, I'll let you know so you can let that Holy Ghost fellow come back to church so that He can touch me. I hope you are having a good day. And, God, happy Thanksgiving. Love and Amen, your friend Andy.

I raised my head, looked around the table, smiled, and said. Happy Thanksgiving. Now, let's eat.: