

My Dwelling Place a Modern Day Parable

“Is Benny here?” the teacher asked. Class was beginning. A new school year. The first day is always untidy. Just taking role can be a difficult task at the start of a new year, but especially in a new school. The teacher called louder, “Is Benny present? Does anyone know Benny? Is he here? His last name isn’t on my roster. Maybe he doesn’t belong in this class.”

The teacher turned his back and began to write on the board. A soft, female voice replied from the back of the room, “Here! I am here! I’m Benny — I’m a she, not a he.” The teacher spun around. “What? Where are you?” Benny slowly walked toward the front of the class. She had been trying to blend into the bookshelves in the back of the room. “I am here!” she called a little louder.

“Welcome!” the teacher smiled. “I didn’t see you there. Why isn’t your last name on my roster?” he asked. “Please take a seat so we can begin,” he continued not giving the shy girl a chance to reply.

Benny had replayed this scene of her first day of middle school in her head dozens of times. It was the story of her life. There were no empty chairs, no place for her. People always assumed she was a boy judging by her name. She just didn’t fit in — right from her very first breath. Her birth mother had abandoned her on the steps of a Mercedes Benz dealership. The young woman couldn’t handle raising a baby and she thought folks with money would find her there and give her a good life. The social worker who picked her up called the baby “Benny” before even checking to see she was a girl. The name just stuck with her somehow. But it was confusing and sometimes embarrassing — like that first day of middle school.

From her earliest memory, Benny knew the people she lived with were not her real family. This was her foster family — people caring for her until her real parents returned to take her home. Her foster mother said her birth parents did a very loving thing by trusting someone else to feed and clothe and care for their baby because they couldn’t at that time.

Benny fabricated a fairy tale story of a tall, strong father and a beautiful, loving mother who prayed for their baby every day and worked tirelessly to be able to bring her home again one day. She imagined them lurking around the corner, watching her walk to school, just so they could know their daughter was OK.

The foster family who had been caring for Benny since birth were very nice. They took great care of her. But, they had three children of their own and Benny felt like she never fit in. They didn’t look like her, so the mirror was a constant reminder that she just didn’t belong

here. She deliberately took the extra seat at the dinner table. It had to be brought in from another room. It didn't match and didn't belong either.

Every night, Benny cried herself to sleep praying that her real family would come back for her. But now, in the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic, she felt it would never happen. What if her birth parents got the virus and died? She would never even know! For now, she was stuck and felt more out of place than ever before.

Unknown to Benny, her foster parents prayed and wept for her every night. They tirelessly discussed ways to help her feel more a part of the family. They had quickly grown to love Benny as their own, and hoped she would feel the same way. They really were family. The twins had agreed to share a bedroom so that Benny could have her own private space and feel special. They all wanted Benny to love them as much as they loved her. But, Benny had always kept them at a distance. This night, something prompted her foster father to try to connect with her once more.

He gently knocked on Benny's bedroom door. She invited him in. He could see his daughter had been crying. He said, "Benny, don't let your heart be troubled or afraid. Have faith in God, have faith in Jesus, and have faith in me. This is my house, and there are many rooms. We have prepared this place just for you. We are here to help you know the way to your future."

Benny looked at him and replied, "You have been very nice to me, but I have no idea where my real parents are, where I came from, or where I am going. How can you know the way?" He said, "I tell you the truth. As your father, I will show you the way."

She lowered her gaze and said, "I want you to show me my real family. That is all I want." He reached out to hold Benny's hand and said, "Have you been with us for so long a time and you still don't know? We are your family. I am your father. Believe me, no one could love you more like a father than me."

Benny looked at this man, and for the first time realized she had all she could ever ask for in an earthly father. He taught her to believe in his love, and in the love of her Heavenly Father. What greater family could she possibly ask for than these?

Amen. Amen. I say to you, Benny now believed! 