

The Gifts We Bring

Ephesians 3: 1-12

Matthew 2: 1-12

January 3, 2009 - Epiphany

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Will you join with me in a moment of prayer?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer, amen.

This has been a season for many of us to give and receive gifts.

Some big, some small.

Some meaningful, some just goofy.

In our gospel reading we hear of the wise men bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

These were gifts that were traditionally offered only to a king.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians we hear him speak about being made a servant of God through God's special gifts.

The dictionary defines gift as something that is given; or a natural endowment or talent.

But I think the greatest gifts are those of the heart.

Those gifts that may not be worth much in a monetary sense, but because of what they are or who they came from touch us in ways that are powerful and meaningful.

One of the best gifts I ever received was at the end of a study program, where each of the participants received a piece of paper with our names written across the top.

Then we were invited to pass them around and write down on each person's paper the gifts that that person had brought to us.

What a wonderful exercise.

Not only did we each have an opportunity to express our sentiments to each other.

But each one of us took home our sheet of paper that highlights how others in the group see us.

I plaque mounted mine, it hangs in my spare bedroom over my desk at home and it encourages me when it seems as if nothing I do is effective.

We as a society and as a church do not often offer positive reinforcement or affirmation of each other nearly often enough.

We, as parents and especially grandparents wouldn't think of withholding praise or affection from a child.

But it seems as if we think we outgrow that need for positive reinforcement and affirmation of who we are.

But we don't.

If anything, we as adults need it more than ever.

Often in churches or in community development work we will do a needs assessment.

You folks completed one before you could search for a new minister.

And so often we look at what we do not have rather than what we have.

And that assessment highlights what we do not have.

This can lead to discouragement and despair.

Doesn't it make more sense to think of what we do have in our faith community or our family or our workplace rather than what we lack?

As the work of the Visioning Team unfolds, I hope to have someone lead us through an exercise of what is called Asset Mapping.

It is a process by which we look at what we have... in physical assets, such as this building.

Our financial assets... but most importantly, our human assets... what are the gifts that are inherent in this faith community.

And out of that, we build our ministry on that.

To give you an example of how we are already doing that.

We gathered folks together who had an interest in pastoral care, after some discussion about what being part of a Pastoral Care Team might involve, eight people committed to increasing their knowledge and comfort with pastoral care and now we have a well trained and effective team that brings the message of God's love and our continuing presence to those who are not able to be in church each week.

And you will all have an opportunity to participate.

If we only look at what we lack, we can easily lose sight of what we do have.

It is the old seeing the glass half full rather than half empty.

This is a memo that I received from God by the miracle of email:

I am God.

Today I will be handling all of your problems.

Please remember that I do not need your help.

If life happens to deliver a situation to you that you cannot handle, do not attempt to resolve it.

Kindly put it in the SFGTD (something for God to do) box.

It will be addressed in My time, not yours.

Once the matter is placed into the box, do not hold on to it or remove it.

Holding on or removal will delay the resolution of your problem.

If it is a situation that you think you are capable of handling, please consult me in prayer to be sure that it is the proper resolution.

Because I do not sleep nor do I slumber, there is no need for you to lose any sleep.

Rest my child.

If you need to contact me, I am only a prayer away.

Be happy with what you have:

Should you find it hard to get to sleep tonight, just remember the homeless family who has no bed to lie in.

Should you find yourself stuck in traffic, don't despair, there are people in this world for whom driving is an unheard of privilege.

Should you have a bad day at work, think of the person who has been out of work for years.

Should you despair over a relationship gone bad, think of the person who has never known what it's like to love and be loved in return.

Should you grieve the passing of another weekend, think of the woman in dire straits, working twelve hours a day, seven days a week to feed her children.

Should your car break down, leaving you miles away from assistance, think of the paraplegic who would love the opportunity to take that walk.

Should you notice a new gray hair in the mirror, think of the cancer patient in chemo who wishes she had hair to examine.

Should you find yourself at a loss and pondering what is life all about, asking, "What is my purpose?", be thankful.

There are those who didn't live long enough to get the opportunity.

Should you find yourself the victim of other people's bitterness, ignorance, smallness or insecurities, remember: things could be worse.

You could be them!

Love, God.

We don't often think of troubles as being a gift, but they are.

They are an opportunity to do something different.

An opportunity to think in a new way.

An opportunity to take stock of what we have.

We are rich in gifts and talents and opportunities to live the message of God's call.

So what makes many of us hesitant to respond to that call.

Is it fear?

Is it feelings of inadequacy?

Is it lack of guidance?

I have used these words, written by Marianne Williamson, that Nelson Mandela spoke at his inaugural address as president of South Africa before, but I think that they bear repeating:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light not our darkness, that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be?

You are a child of God.

Your playing small doesn't serve the world.

There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within all of us.

It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Have we not been blessed and given unique gifts and talents that no one else has?

Not that we have been given the same gifts as everyone, we only need to look around us to see that that is not so.

But we are all equally loved by God and we are all equally as deserving of love and care and compassion.

On this first Sunday of the New Year, I would encourage all of you to reflect on the gifts you have.

To have some conversation in your families and group activities about the gifts each of you have brought to this world.

And to give thanks to God for them.

To God be all honor and glory, world without end, amen.