

Gifts FROM ONE YOU DO NOT KNOW

Sermon, December 18, 2022

Text: John 1:1-14, 19-27

Would you like to know what you going to get for Christmas this year? Well, I can't tell you everything you're going to get, but I can tell you what God has given you. They are the same "things" He has been giving people since the very first Christmas: the gifts of **Glory, Grace and Truth**. *"The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

I remember my first Christmas as a widowed father ... that Christmas of 1999 there were so many gifts under the tree for the children. So many gifts from family, friends, from many of you, from many people they did not know, so many signs that they were cared for, that they were loved. It wasn't long before I started losing track of who gave what ... the kids just tore into the gifts, and quite often the "to/from" tag got lost in the piles of ribbons and wrapping paper strewn like confetti across the floor. My children were fairly typical of kids their ages; they weren't all that concerned with who gave them the gifts, they just liked the gifts! I was concerned about the givers; I wanted to acknowledge the gifts, and I wanted to acknowledge the right gifts with the right givers ... I didn't want to send a thank-you note to Aunt Barbara for the American Doll set that Mrs. Jones actually gave. To my consternation, I realized this was just one more of the thousands of things typical husbands don't realize and/or appreciate that wives routinely take care of ... keeping track of who received what from whom. That Christmas Lydia, Stephen and Hannah received quite a few gifts from people they did not know. Now, these people knew them; in many cases, these people knew all about them from the day they were born. Gifts came from relatives who lived far away, gifts from friends of my wife and/or me they either hadn't meet or didn't remember, gifts from former congregants of the church I served in Germany, and gifts from many members and friends of this congregation.

As each of my children grew older, they would go on to take much more of an interest in the givers of the gifts they received. They would take more of an interest in finding out more about family, friends and loved ones. They still loved tearing into the gifts ... and in spite of my best efforts, I know some "to/from" tags still got lost over the Christmases past ... but it was a sign of their growing maturity that they wanted to know more and more about the givers of the gifts they have received. Not only did they taking more of an interest in finding out about their family, friends and loved ones, they were keen on spending more time with them. They met all sorts of extended family at summer and/or holiday reunions, and they would count the days until the next family gatherings. As they grew, they were instant-messaging and emailing cousins, writing cards and notes to aunts and uncles, speaking more often with their grandparents over the phone. They were increasingly keen on learning more about the people who have loved them, people who have given tangible expressions of that love in gifts and cards and financial support.

As a person matures, he or she wants to know more about the giver. We still do enjoy the gifts! But the focus of our attention shifts from the gifts to the giver, from the blessings to the Blessor. In fact, the full extent of maturity, the fullest expression of gratitude and love, is when the gifts become almost superfluous, all you want to do is to be with the Giver of the gifts. To be sure, there are those who never seem to mature. Their attention never shifts from the gifts to the giver. Such people only seem to want to grab and hoard and consume the blessings; they quite often complain because they don't think they got enough, or too much is wrong with what they did get. Some even come to expect the blessings as their right, without ever taking any steps to better know the Blessor or giving any acknowledgement to Him. .

I find it interesting that John the Baptist refers to Jesus in this way: *"Among you stands One Whom you do not know."* This, after John the Gospel writer says things like, *"Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made."* It's as if both Johns were saying, *"Everything and everyone has been made through this One standing in your midst. Every blessing you enjoy in your life has come from him. He's right here standing among you! Yet, you do not know Him. And you should!"*

What an interesting way to introduce Jesus: *"One whom you do not know."* Just as an aside, this is a consistent theme in John's gospel. Throughout the gospel of John, Jesus remains somewhat of an enigmatic figure Whom people either do not know or do not understand. Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman understand His words but not their meaning. The high priest understands Him only as a threat to the status of the Jews in a Roman occupied state. Pilate gives Him the right title, "King of the Jews", but for all the wrong reasons. Even Jesus' disciples consistently reveal their misunderstandings. Even his own mother doesn't know or understand him. Throughout the gospel of John, Jesus remains "the one you do not know."

Remember John's words earlier: *"He came to his own people, and they did not receive him." "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him."* John the Baptist might have added, *"This one you do not know is the giver of every good gift in your life. Maybe it's high time you recognize that! Maybe it's high time you turn toward Him and acknowledge Him as the gracious God He is. Maybe it's high time to start living lives of holy gratitude to Him. Repent. Turn from your self-centered consumption of the gifts and direct your attention to the Giver. Turn to Him and find the glory for which your soul yearns!"*

What is glory? At Christmastime we hear that word a lot. In fact, it works its way into just about every Christmas song we've got: *"Lift up your heads, all ye gates, Behold the king of Glory waits."* *"Angels from the realms of Glory."* *"Hark the Herald Angels sing, Glory to the newborn king."* *"Gloria in Excelsis Deo."* And as the choir just sang, *"the Glory of the Lord shall be reveeee-eeee-eeee-eeeeel-ed!"* We've talked about this before, but in short "Glory" comes from the Hebrew "*kavod*," a root that means *"to be heavy, weighty."* The same word "*Kavod*" is often translated in English as "glory." Again, I've mentioned this in years past, but when the Old Testament Jew spoke of the Glory of God, he spoke of the *weightiness* of God. Now, that's not to imply that God is somehow a bit overweight, like your pastor. No; to the Jew, God was the epitome of *weighti-ness*, He was the ultimate Significance, the number one "Heavy." We use the same imagery today in English. Something that is laden with significance, something that is full of meaning and/or importance is *heavy*, weighty. Or, conversely, when something is fluffy, insignificant, frivolous, we say it is "light." When we are treated as if we were insignificant, when we are snubbed, we say we were treated *lightly*, as if we had no weight, no significance, no glory, nothing worthy of engendering respect. Biblically, glory and honor carry with it this idea of weight, "*Kavod*." One who has *kavod* is one who carries weight, one who is significant, one who is treated with respect and honor. Being THIS kind of a heavyweight is a desirable thing! To find glory is to find significance, meaning, weight, purpose.

How do we find that? How do we go beyond the blessing to commune with the glorious One Who is blessing us and allowing us to share in His glory? By receiving the other two gifts of God. John tells us these are the gifts of Grace and Truth.

The truth is that we have lost our way trying to find a little glory on our own. And we have darkened our world in the process. Receive the gracious *diagnosis* of truth. The truth is that along the way we committed sins by what we've done or what we've left undone. We hurt others and we hurt ourselves. And we've each help make our world a darker place; we have each turned out some lights. Yes, others have their part in it, but the Truth is that we deserve exactly the world we have created for ourselves. That is the truth. But the grace is that God will not necessarily give us what we deserve. The message of Christmas is that God is not out to GET you, but to GRACE you! Yes, God knows our sins, and frailty, and that is exactly why we were given opportunity to receive a Savior. In Jesus Christ, He insists on giving us what we need -- gracious forgiveness.

"Full of grace and truth." Because we need Grace; we need forgiveness and a fresh start. And we also need Truth; we need to be guided and taught as to how to live well, how to live fully, how to live as God designed us to live. We need Grace, we need Truth; we need Jesus ... the true Son of God, the true Prince of Peace, the God in the flesh Who, full of Grace and Truth, enters into the arena of our lives to give us life abundant and eternal and gloriously significant..

So, when you open a present under the tree this Christmas, you know it isn't really the present that warms your heart, but the person who gave it. Just as the amazing gifts of God's Grace and Truth draw us to the glory of the Giver, Jesus Christ. The more of His gifts we allow ourselves to receive, the better we will come to know Him, and the more His glory enters our hearts.