



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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December 28, 2008

Christmas 1

Colossians 3:12-17

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Isaiah 45:20-25

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 111

Second Lesson: Colossians 3:12-17

Gospel: Luke 2:25-40

Cherish the Christ-child's Gifts

His peach to rule our hearts

His Word to make us wise

I am assuming that all of you received some kind of gift this past week, and I'm guessing probably more than one, right? What do you do with them? Are they still sitting underneath the tree? Have you started using them? What do you do with the ones you don't really like? Do you just let them sit there? Do you hide them some place? Put them away in the closet and wait for the appropriate time to take them out of the house and get rid of them? What do you do with the ones you really like? I suppose if its clothes you really like, you wear them. If it's a toy you really like, you play with it, until it breaks. If it's something else you really like, you put it in a place where you can enjoy it and treasure it.

As I sit at my desk in my office, I have various gifts that I've received over the years that sit in the window across from me. The problem right now is that it's too crowded. The ones in back I can't see anymore. I kind of need to weed it out, but there are pictures of different things or gifts that were given to me that are special to me. I can look up there and see them and some of them remind me of why it is I do what I do.

The Word of God we are looking at this morning from Paul's letter to the Colossians really reminds us to cherish, to treasure, to put into use the gifts the Christ-child came to bring to us. He tells us the effect of what the Christ-child did for us, of who the Christ-child is and what he does for us. So this morning, let's focus on how you and I, as Christians living in this world, can cherish the Christ-child's gifts. It comes about as we let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, and we'll see what that means as we look at what Paul writes. Then also, something I'm guessing at times we aren't all that good at, we cherish his gifts by letting his Word make us wise.

Paul was writing to a congregation in Colossi he had never been to, and isn't it interesting the words he uses as he addresses them here? "As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved," those words fit for any Colossian who was a Christian. Those words fit for those of us here this morning that believe that Jesus is our Savior. Because when this has happened, the Holy Spirit has worked in our hearts, and he has brought peace to us; not the peace that's the sentimental kind of peace that is often in greeting cards at this time of the year, but the peace between us and God.

Jesus came to this earth to fulfill every aspect of the Law in our place because we don't. That's what we read about in the Gospel. Even in his being named in his circumcision, he did all the things that were required for him to keep the Law in our place. Not only the ceremonial law, which is what those were, but the moral law, what God has said is right and wrong for all times and all places. Jesus was absolutely perfect where you and I have failed to be perfect. Because where you and I fail to be perfect, there isn't peace between us and God. By nature we are enemies of God. And by nature, God's wrath should rest upon us; his anger, his judgment, his condemnation.

But, God sent his Spirit through the water and the Word, through the Sacraments, through the Lord's Supper; he has come to us and he has created faith in us and strengthened this faith in us. This is the peace of God that rules in our heart; the knowledge that we stand forgiven. Now he tells us that this peace brings about a change in us. It does something.

I'm assuming that most of you here today wrapped gifts this last week, right? After you unwrapped them, did you save the wrapping paper? If you did save the wrapping paper, do you have it sitting out so you can look at it and say, "Boy isn't that neat? That was really pretty. That's the best wrapping paper I ever had." I'm guessing not. If you saved it, you probably ironed it and put it away for next year or something like that, right?

But look at what God tells us to do. He tells us to wrap ourselves with Jesus' Christmas gifts. Because this peace rules in your heart, "clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." Clothe yourselves with bearing with each other and forgiving each other as the Lord forgave you. The wrapping paper that goes on the Christmas gifts that God has brought to us in Christ is how we live with each other every day of our lives. How we are gentle, as Christ himself was gentle. How we have compassion as our heart goes out to others; not just goes out to them, but it leads our mouths and our hands and our feet to go out to them also. It leads us to act on that feeling of sorrow for what we see someone else go through.

Kindness, that's not something we really exalt in our society today, is it? We kind of exalt type-A driven people and if they're driven, they step on people along the way. And if that's how it has to be, so be it. "That's just the way I am, you have to deal with it." God says to clothe yourself with kindness. Be the kind of person that conducts himself in such a way with love and caring for others that it attracts people to you; not keeps them out of your way.

As Christians, the goal is not to keep people out of our way. That might be your goal in the business world, but in your life in Christ, your goal is to attract people so you can share with them the message that Jesus loved them and died for them to take away their sins as well. And gentleness rather than "my way or the highway" is what God has prescribed for you.

Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Don't carry grudges. This is the wrapping paper that God wants us not to rip off and discard but to wear every day of our lives. Every day of our lives, the Christ-child is to have this affect on us. He has taken away our sins and now it moves us to do what by nature we don't want to do. Honestly, do you want to forgive as you have been forgiven, by nature? No. By nature, you and I want to give better than we got, right? That's how we are by nature.

But the love that God has shown for us in Christ that came in this Christ-child through his life and his death and his resurrection leads us to grow beyond what we are by nature and to become "little Christs" and to forgive others as we have been forgiven and not to carry grudges with each other against our fellow believers or even against unbelievers, but to forgive the grievances we have against each other. That is a high calling that God has called us to.

All these things are not things that are natural for us. All these things are things that come about only because God has worked in us to change us. And all these things require a strength that goes beyond us. That's why our God says to us, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly."

Have you ever stopped and thought about that phrase? "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." If you look around at the society we live in, dwelling on something richly is not something we are really good at anymore, is it? We're beyond a microwave society. We are a vowel-less society now, aren't we? We're in such a hurry as we text our friends that we've dropped all vowels. Or, we've shortened everything to the first letter of each word. We write "lol" and "idk" and all this other stuff because we just don't have the time to spell out seven more letters.

Now God comes to us, this society that's always in such a hurry to communicate and in such a hurry to hear back and in such a hurry to do all this and says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you." Think on it, meditate on it; probably already some of you shorten the "Word of God" to "wog," right? It's just the way we are.

Now God wants us to meditate on it. Think about how we're not really that good at it. Of all the things that we do in worship, one of the things that really enables us to meditate and focus on the Word of God, I would guess, is one of the things you probably enjoy the least – as you sing. Maybe I'm wrong. But when you think about it, when we sing Psalms, we sing them with a chant line, right? We sing a number of words on a single note. You don't do this anywhere else in the world, do you? Anywhere else in your life, do you do this? Do you turn on the radio to your favorite "chant" station? I don't think so. We want a melody that's catchy in our head and we focus on the melody and we don't think about the words all that much.

But think about when we sing the Psalm. The Psalms are the Word of God. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs;" this is what God wanted communicated to us at this place and at this time. And as we sing

the Psalm in a tone, you have more time to think about that Word and let it dwell in you richly. But we're too busy at times thinking of something else, I don't know.

The Word of God is other worldly and maybe chanting is other worldly, but think about how it enables us to do exactly what God is saying better than anything else as you and I proclaim the Word of God together in a way that can be heard. Singing it in a chant line, we can proclaim it better together so that it can be heard better even than if we read it together. And it enables us to better meditate on that Word of God. But we aren't all that good at it.

But I think one of the truths is that God enables us to do what he wants us to do better and better and better. If I want the Word of God to dwell in me richly, if I want to take God at his word here and say, "This is what is going to enable me to be thankful and gentle and compassionate and forgiving. If this is what is going to wrap me up in this Christmas gift wrap that God wants me to live in every day of my life, then I'm going to find a way to let the Word dwell in me richly." And God will open our eyes and our hearts and our minds to find joy in contemplating the simple truths of God.

Maybe we start by just reading a little bit and meditating on it all through the day thinking about it, contemplating, chewing on it, looking at it from every side. I know we're not that good at it anymore. We can't read books. We can't even read magazines. We want everything in a summary on an internet news site instead of reading anything anymore. But with God's help, we can get better at it. With God's help we can grow in this and then the Word does live in us and dwell in us. I think this is true.

It could go back to the Psalms. "To you, O Lord, I lift my soul; in you I trust, my God" (*Psalms 25*). When you hear those words, does the refrain that we sing them to immediately come to your mind? If we sing that in church in the morning, does that help keep that in your head all through the day? And as it keeps repeating itself in your head, think about what its saying. Think about who God is and who you are. Think about what God is saying about himself and what he is saying about you. Think about what God is telling you to do. Think about what God is telling you to confess. Think about all these incredible things that show us that God loves us in spite of who we are. As you dig more and more into the Word, you'll see just how much God really, truly hates sin. Then you really understand and can plum the depths of the meaning of the word "grace" or "undeserved love."

God loves you in spite of your sin. God sent Christ to take away your sin in spite of who you are; not because you've done anything for him. The more and the more that you can see that and focus on that, the more it will touch your heart and you will cherish these gifts that God has given you. It will have a purpose in your daily life, not just a once-a-year thing. They'll touch you and change you like nothing else on the face of this earth because that's what the good news about Jesus' salvation does.