

Pastor Geoffrey R. Boyle  
Christmas Day  
25 December 2011  
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita  
John 1:1-18

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*

If the gift you give is rejected,  
does it make the gift a bad gift?

This is the sort of fear we live in this time of year—  
it's also the sort of fear that the commercials on tv try to frighten us with:  
“Unless you shop *here*, your gift will be no good, rejected.”

We worry, “Did I pick the right sweater?”  
“Will the jacket fit?”  
“Will she like that style of necklace?”  
“Will this toy end up in the trash?”

The other side of all this is:  
“What gift will knock his socks off?”  
“What gift will really impress her?”  
“What gift will be the best?”

We have this same sort of conversation with God as well—  
“Am I doing enough?”  
“Am I seeking God rightly?”  
“Do I know what I need to know, and have I made the right decisions with my life?”  
“Am I giving Him all I have and can?”

We want to please God.  
We want to give Him our biggest and best,  
feel most spiritual,  
and understand most clearly what He wants for us—  
we want to make Him happy.

We worry that we haven't done enough, well enough, or fully enough.  
And the truth is:  
we haven't.  
We won't.  
We can't.

The gifts we give to God will not get us anywhere with Him.  
He won't love us more or better,  
He won't be happier with us depending on how we do or what we say.

It's not that He rejects our gifts;  
it's that what we give and say and do for Him aren't what make us His children—  
it's His gift to us that takes care of that!

But for some reason, that's not good enough for us.  
 We want to give and then earn His favor.  
 But no gift we give will do the trick.

The reason why our gifts are always so unsatisfactory, so *not enough*,  
 is because we give in terms of greatness, and prestige, and honor—  
 we want to give the *best* so that we *get* the best;  
 with us it's always about being fair and equal.  
 But today's Gospel turns all our thoughts about giving on their heads.

John presents for us a God who gives unfairly, unequally.  
 He gives what we can't repay,  
 and He doesn't expect us to.

What's more, His giving is always downward, weak, common, and unspectacular in the way it  
 looks and feels.  
 The way He gives gifts, you'd never know it was Him just by looking at it!

We really spice it up with all the ceremony and pomp we celebrate with Christmas.  
 We dim the lights, we chant, we hold candles, we cultivate a night that resembles the  
 holy, the spectacular,  
 we try to recreate what that *Holy Night* must have been like—  
 at least, the way we'd imagine it to be.

We imagine it all to have been spectacular and otherworldly, even ideal—  
 but in reality, if it's at all like the way our God works,  
 it was utterly *unspectacular*.

I'm sure the weather was uncomfortably cold.  
 I'm sure the shepherds were dirty and disheveled,  
 and the oxen didn't clean up after themselves!

I'm fairly sure Mary didn't have any make-up to dress herself with after giving birth—  
 the whole episode was probably much more grotesque and painful than we'd like to think.

It wasn't the outward experience that was spectacular;  
 it wasn't the emotions or the sign of halo's—  
 but in fact it was the reality hidden behind an all too common event,  
 that causes us to remember Christmas.

What the eyes saw was a crying, filthy baby,  
 a pained and tired mother,  
 and a husband who probably saw more than he would've liked.

*And yet there was joy.*

Joy not from the looks or the feelings or the glitz or the glamour—  
 but a joy at what really just happened.  
*for the Word became flesh and dwelt among us* (Jn 1:14).

If we want to learn how to give gifts,  
 we must remember that the greatest gift of all time was wrapped in common, every day  
 swaddling cloths.

John's Gospel speaks of this birth in the most amazing of terms:  
 He was the *Word* from the beginning.  
 He was the *Life* and the *Light of men*.  
 He was the one through whom the world was created.  
 And at His birth, *we beheld His glory*.

But even still, the greatest gift of all was rejected.  
*He came to His own, but His own didn't receive Him.*

Why not?

If the birth of this Jesus means that light and life and God Himself are now in the world *for us*—  
 then why is He rejected?

It's because it was so *unspectacular*.  
 It's because this child was so ordinary, so every-day, so one-of-us.

With God as giver, we expect more—  
 fancier, richer, higher.

He wasn't a king as we expect Kings to be.  
 And what sort of savior wears diapers and nurses from His mother?

*The Word became flesh...*  
 and it wasn't a big deal at all!

When God gives gifts, He does it in a most *unspectacular* sort of way.

But that doesn't diminish the gift at all.  
 And it doesn't lessen the gift when it's rejected.

The gift is still the same:  
 it's still the salvation of our souls,  
 the redemption of our bodies,  
 the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting!

The greatest gift of all was rejected and is still rejected today.  
 Because our Lord demands that it always be gift.

He refuses coercion,  
 He will not force us to believe or receive Him with honor and adoration.  
 For God as giver, the gift must be free—  
 unearned, unmerited, undeserved.

And there's a reason why God dresses down His gifts.  
 There's a reason why the Word becoming flesh is ignored by so many.  
 There's a reason why the almighty and everlasting God comes in weakness.

He comes to us in weakness because we are weak.  
 He shares our weakness,  
 He shares our suffering,  
 He shares our every-day, ordinary lives.

He comes not to control us, but to love us.  
 He comes not to punish and destroy, but to heal and redeem and to save us!

And this gift of Christmas,  
 the gift of the Word of God becoming *Flesh*,  
 comes to us again today.

Again, not so spectacular in how it looks or feels, and you don't need a PhD to figure it out—  
 God comes to us with His flesh and blood in the bread and the wine.

And while it looks so ordinary, so weak, so unsubstantial—so did the manger.  
 That's why we kneel;  
 that's why we adore the bread and wine put into our mouths,  
 because just as shepherds adored God made flesh on Christmas morning,  
 so we adore God in the flesh today!

Sure, we're probably filthier with our sin than they,  
 but we recognize in this Jesus a gift far more important than anything we think, do, or say.

Here, on this altar,  
 like the manger of old,  
 God Himself, the Word, the Life, the Light,  
 comes to us and dwells among us.

He gives His true body and blood *for us*—  
 and *from His fullness, we all receive grace upon grace.*

Gathered around this Jesus, the Word made flesh, the Holy Communion,  
 adore the miracle of miracles, the most spectacular and glorious gift of all,  
 not because we see or feel or know enough—  
 but because He gives Himself to us.

With our God, it's all free;  
it's all for us;  
it's all gift!

And while it doesn't look like much,  
while *you* might not look like much,  
He gives Himself to you and for you,  
and then through you to others.

***We have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth...  
and from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace (Jn 1:14).***

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit*