

Jan 7, 2024

Let us pray.

O God of Love, O God of Truth;

Let us say strong things gently and gentle things strongly.

Let us speak the truth in love to all  
and love the truth that lives in each.

Let us hear the truth as we each need it and live that truth.

O God, we heed it through Jesus; Your Word & our Lord.

Amen.

### **The Free Gift**

*Romans 5:15-17*

*“Surely the grace of God is a free gift coming to humanity through one person - Jesus Christ - and meant for the many. And the free gift is not like the effect of (Adam’s) sin. For his sin unleashed judgment, and judgment brought condemnation. But the free gift (of God’s grace) brings justification. If because of (Adam’s) trespass Death held dominion, much more surely will those who receive the God’s bountiful free gift of grace find Life through Jesus Christ...”*

Be honest. How many of you re-gift?

So many of us do it,

that “The Twelve Days of Christmas” is comically called the one day of getting and the eleven days of re-gifting.

My aunt Jeannette was an avid re-gifter.

She even called herself “The Regifting Santa”

and she would give the history of the item

she was re-giving you.

**“This dagger belonged to your grandpa Hopkins who bought it on a trip to Egypt when he was just your age.”**

I loved her re-gifting and I loved her honesty, and I still cherish that dagger.

But many hate re-gifting

and think it socially crass and spiritually tight.

And so a list of rules has evolved to get away with it.

#1. Don't forget to remove all tags.

**(Left on tags are a sure give-away!)**

#2. Be sure to re-wrap.

#3. Be sure to remember to whom you gave the re-gift!

**(Wouldn't it be embarrassing giving something they once gave to you?)**

#4. There's a time limit.

**(Even fruitcake has an expiration date!)**

#5. Don't re-gift meaningful gifts.

**(You don't want to break someone's heart.)**

#6. Don't forget donation centers.

#8. Don't look cheap with your re-gift.

**(Just because someone IS your after-thought,  
you don't want them to KNOW they are!)**

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How one deals with gifts,

says so much about a person - and indeed -

so much about the society in which they live.

Which is why today's scripture lesson has soooo much  
to teach us - about ourselves and our spiritual values.

And why, one of the greatest roadblocks

between us and our Christian faith is about gifts.

Let me read it again:

*"Surely the grace of God is a free gift coming to humanity through one person - Jesus Christ - and meant for the many. And the free gift is not like the effect of (Adam's) sin. For his sin unleashed judgment, and judgment brought condemnation. But the free gift (of God's grace) brings justification. If because of (Adam's) trespass Death held dominion, much more surely will those who receive the God's bountiful free gift of grace find Life through Jesus Christ..."*

We tend to be suspicious of "free gifts".

What's the line?

**"If something is FREE, It's too good to be true."**

And how many of us are so steeped in a ethos of

**"You've got to earn it"**

that we judge anyone getting anything free?

I know many people who despise welfare  
mainly for this reason.

Likewise, have opposition to immigrants getting into  
America.

But on a more personal and less political level,  
how many of us give gifts with “strings attached”?  
We expect a thank-you.

We make our gift-giving more about ourselves  
than the needs of the recipient?

Take parenting for example.

How many love their children  
for the underlying purpose

of their children loving them back?

We expect to be appreciated for our gifts,  
and when we’re not - we take it personally.

(This congregation has several soulful stories  
of times it hugely helped people in dire & desperate need,  
only to have them bad-mouth us,  
turn their backs on us,  
and certainly, not show their appreciation!)

When that happens,

it’s hard to still believe in the gift we gave  
in the first place.

Then there’s the flip side of this “free” coin.

How many refuse help - even in their time of need?

How many love and hoard their material wealth,  
to strengthen their self-sufficiency  
so they don't have to ask for help from others?

Let face it dear friends,  
when it comes to gifts - giving them and getting them -  
so often there are strings attached.  
And this, by itself,  
may explain why our world - personally and politically  
soooo lacks "the grace of God".  
We have way too capitalistic a view of gifts.  
We have way too individualistic a view of gifts.  
We have such an Un-Christlike  
understanding of God.

Yes - GOD!

Jesus view of God was a departure  
from the God of ancient Israel,  
who was a "quid pro quo" God.  
"I gift you, you gift me back"  
And if you don't, you get punished.

Compare that God to the one described in Paul's letter  
to the Romans.

*"Surely the grace of God is a free gift  
coming to humanity through one person - Jesus Christ -  
and meant for the many."*

When is a gift truly A GIFT?

When it is free and clear, given for it's own sake  
in pure and unabashed grace.

Such is the love of Jesus' God.

A God who:

*"Spared not his own son,  
but gave him up for us all."*

Speaking of "no strings attached"!

I know - for us with such deep capitalistic views -  
it is hard to trust in such a gift  
but there it is, in all it's suspicious, glorious,  
unearned "freedom".

And, if we want our world to be more greatly  
filled with Grace - which we dearly need -  
we must receive it that gift,  
believe in that gift,  
and RE-GIFT it as much as possible.