

November 28, 2010 – Isaiah 9:1-7 “Let the gift giving begin!”

Be ready! This Advent season you will given some gifts: love, light, joy and peace

It’s the season of giving – gifts, that is. Did you venture out on Black Friday to prepare for all of those on your list? I did, but not as early (or late) as some of you. And, it went well until I accidentally threw my list away and found myself caught up in the chaos. I think I only hit someone w/my shopping cart once – and I should’ve known better – I was on my cell phone.

It can be fun to get caught up in the spirit of giving – to be creative w/ways in which to share during the season. And yet, have you ever received a gift that you didn’t expect? Maybe from someone that you didn’t even know very well? What about the teenage boy who comes home with an expensive sweater from a girl he’s only been on a date with twice? How embarrassing for him when his parents tell him that he has to return it (W.W. example)! Well, what do we do when this happens? How do we feel? Do you feel guilty? Indebted? Suddenly think, “Oh, crap, now what am I going to get them?” Sometimes, we are just not ready for a gift to have a claim on us.

Isaiah, a prophet from the southern kingdom, brings us the promise of a gift – an announcement of a gift to come – and yet, we sit here knowing that we have already received the gift of that baby so long ago! The gift given by God is love, wrapped up in a child born to us who is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

How does it feel to receive that gift, knowing it has a much bigger claim on you than any gift you’ve ever received or will receive again? It’s not like other “favorite” gifts, things that you just have to have, and suddenly a few months (weeks, days) that “gift” sits forgotten on a shelf in the closet. This gift that Isaiah proclaims, at times seems to be tucked away somewhere out of sight b/c we might not feel that rush of adrenaline as we did on finding that “one thing” for our loved one – the last one on the shelf that we got up early to get. And those are great things to do as well because as a people, we look for tangible ways to show our love and sometimes that means giving a gift. The gift that Isaiah speaks about is so unbelievably unexpected!

You see, Isaiah the prophet had been pleading with the king, with Ahaz, to put his trust in God’s promise to Israel and not an alliance with other military powers and other gods. The Assyrians had taken the northern part of the kingdom and were now after the southern kingdom. So the prophet Isaiah tells King Ahaz that God will send a sign to him – and would you believe that sign would not be military might or a wall to stop the Assyrians or a sea that divides and comes crashing down on his enemy, but the sign would be a baby! What was God thinking! That really isn’t what he needed. . . is it?

Isn't it true, that what we think we need, maybe really isn't what we really need?

How many of us have to make a trip back the week after Black Friday because we got the wrong thing, got too much of a "good deal"? Realized that what we bought as a gift will end up being a burden?

How many of us have prayed and prayed for God to change something or do something for us and wondered why it wasn't happening – we were praying so hard – only to realize later that it was sure a good thing that God didn't give us what we thought we needed and that God was with us the whole time?

God's love comes to us as a gift we thought we didn't need in a way that we didn't expect. And sometime, sometimes, it even transforms us in ways that we aren't sure that we want! What! God, you want me to be the first to forgive? What! God, you need me to be quiet and just listen? What! God, you need me to quit judging people's needs and just help them? I'm sure it can be a pretty long list!

That gift of a baby that Isaiah was proclaiming to King Ahaz and the people actually had more power than they could imagine – it was just a different kind.

We may think that we have so much to give and yet, as Isaiah proclaims, it is not us who gives, but God. God has already given us the gift of a baby that transforms us daily into whom we really are – and here's the reality – we are empty-handed beggars who are in desperate need of the gift of love that God hands to us as the Christ child.

Remember the gift of love in the next few weeks b/c it won't be the only gift that you get from God. William Willimon writes, "It is tough to be on the receiving end of love, God's or anybody else's. It requires that we see our lives not as possessions, but as gifts."

Your life is a gift from God out of love through the Christ child and it is the only true gift that keeps on giving and whose claim on you is always good news.

Helpful Resources

- Narrative Lectionary podcast
- Sermon on Isaiah 9 by William Willimon