

**KEEPING AND RE-GIFTING** (5<sup>TH</sup> January 2020, Lindfield)

**JOHN 1:1-18**

Christmas has come and gone for another year. The decorations have been put away, the leftovers have all been eaten and we settle back to watch the cricket and tennis – that is if we're not fighting or escaping bushfires. One question crops up every year that to some is always embarrassing. What do you do with the gifts that you won't use, don't really like or are just not appropriate for you? Is it OK to ask to exchange them or do you just put it in a drawer and forget about it or do you re-gift it to someone who might appreciate it? To put it away seems to me to be a waste. It's not as though you don't appreciate the thought but is it better that someone else may appreciate it even more? I once bought my mother a dress for Christmas. I thought it was beautiful but she didn't like it much so I said we would exchange it. Luckily for me the New Year sales were on and we were able to get 2 dresses for the cost of the one we were exchanging!

What do we do with the gift God has given us? Some don't seem to care very much for it. Some ignore it or just forget about it. The strange thing about this gift is that if you love it and appreciate it you will also try and give it away! If we gladly accept this gift we will want others to have it as well.

The prologue to John's Gospel, unlike the others, gives us an eternal look at Jesus as the gift of God. It is couched somewhat like Genesis Ch. 1, talking about creation and that Jesus of Nazareth is also the Christ, the second person of the Trinity. Such lofty and beautiful language but such deep and abiding messages. There are probably 10 sermons in these 18 verses but I want to briefly mention 2 verses that we don't think about as often as some others.

In verse 5 John states, *the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it*. If you ever been in a pitch black room where you can't see your hand in front of your face, it is enveloping and frightening. It only takes a tiny light to break up that darkness and cause you to see, to find your bearings, to not feel so scared. How can even a tiny light do that? The dark cannot overcome the light. The dark will always give in to the light. In fact darkness, as an entity does not exist. You cannot create darkness. Darkness is simply the absence of light. To achieve darkness you just remove the light. To destroy darkness you just re-introduce the light.

That is why in John's Gospel light is a common metaphor for Jesus. When we are in those dark moments – and maybe even feel as though God has abandoned us – remember that God's gift is still there for you to appropriate. Jesus said, *I am the light of the world*. That also means He is the light of our world as well. The darkness, whatever it may be for you, cannot overcome the light that is at the heart of God's gift to you.

The second verse I want to draw your attention to is theologically the most significant of all and is how we understand Christmas. At the end of his prologue John reminds us, *No-one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known*. This, on the one hand is stating the glaringly obvious. God's presence has been seen in a bush, as a dove but not face to face as it were.

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About 50 years ago, my sister was a Sunday School teacher and she asked her class to draw a picture of God. Some drew Jesus. A couple drew the sun. One child drew a cloud with 2 eyes. When asked why she drew God like that she said that she had been in a plane and when she looked up at the sky there were no clouds but up in the plane there were clouds. She concluded that God was like that – even if we couldn't see him he was still there. A very theologically astute 7 year old.

Many times in my own Quiet Times I have tried to imagine what God might be like but I can't do it. Every time I come up with a picture of Jesus. According to John, I have been entirely accurate. Because He (Jesus) has made Him (God) known. This is the answer the atheist cannot accept. They say there is no God but if they accept Jesus as a man, they are also accepting God.

The great French Theologian of the Reformation, John Calvin, called it "God's condescension". The eternal, unapproachable God becoming finite and vulnerable in order to become truly available to us. And because we have seen God in Jesus, we are emboldened to live with hope as well as share with others the hope that is within us.

There is so much more to this yet in the scheme of the Christian liturgical year Christmas only gets 2 weeks, then we move to Epiphany – Jesus' earthly ministry, then the 5 weeks of Lent leading to Easter and on it goes. Yet each month when we celebrate Holy Communion we are taken back, not only to the Easter events but to Christmas as well. The elements of bread and wine remind us of Jesus' body and blood. That's what Jesus came to be – God in flesh and blood.

So perhaps the opportunity before us on this last Sunday of Christmas and the first Sunday of a New Year is to emulate and actualize God's activity to come among us in grace, mercy and love. To both keep the gift given and to constantly re-gift it to others. If so, then Howard Thurman's wonderful poem, *The Work of Christmas* might be a fit accompaniment to John's Prologue:

*When the song of the angel is stilled,  
when the star in the sky is gone,  
when the kings and princes are home,  
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,  
the work of Christmas begins:  
to find the lost,  
to heal the broken,  
to feed the hungry,  
to release the prisoner,  
to rebuild the nations,  
to bring peace among the people,  
to make music in the heart.*

AMEN

