

Sermon Draft

Text: Colossians 3:12–17

Sermon: “The Gift of Love”

The promise has been fulfilled a little over two thousand years ago, but we still prepare to celebrate again the Christ Child’s birth. We rejoice in the good news that what has been promised from of old has now been brought to reality for those who believe. The birth of Jesus is a sign and a reflection of the heart of the Father in heaven toward his people. The love he shows his people comes in the form of his only Son. The embodiment of our forgiveness and mercy comes in the form of the baby in Bethlehem.

Even though we are still preparing to celebrate the greatest gift the world has even received we focus on the impact that his birth has on the world and the implication that it has on the faithful people of God as witnesses to this great event in the history of mankind. As the children of God, we are shown mercy and love. This love is what we share with the world, as lights in a dark, forsaken place of selfishness and hatred.

The gifting day is soon upon us and one point is clear: gift-giving can be very stressful for many people. One of the reasons for this stress at the holiday season is the fear of what to get someone as a gift. It's often been said that men are harder to buy gifts for than women. I know Cindy has said that I'm hard to buy for over the years but I think she is harder to buy for. The idea of giving someone the perfect gift can be overwhelming to the giver. Trying to give a gift that's memorable and lasting truly gets harder and harder as the years roll on.

Paul tells us in Colossians that we should put on compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, and we should forgive one another. But above all put on love, which binds everything together. So, Paul is telling us to give the gift of love. That sounds like the perfect gift, a gift we can all use some more of.

Receiving gifts, on the other hand is easy or it should be. Simply to receive the love, care, mercy, and compassion of people in the form of a gift is often less stressful and more enjoyable than giving or at least it should be. The stress is gone, and the joy of receiving is paramount.

Surprisingly though the ease of receiving tends to be the opposite of what we hear during the holiday season. We've all heard, "It's better to give than to receive." I'm not sure that statement is totally accurate when we look at it from a theological perspective.

One reason people may believe that giving is better than receiving stems from the focus area of the statement. When saying that giving is better than receiving, a person is more focused on looking at himself or herself as the centerpiece rather than on the one who is to receive. The world would encourage this behavior and deny the importance of what receiving is all about.

The gift of forgiveness and salvation is a free gift, one that comes with no strings attached. This gift is one we receive from Jesus without any merit or worthiness in us. The love of the Savior is an unmatched and tremendous blessing. Therefore, the idea that receiving is far more important than giving comes to us directly in the form of the Son of God, on the cross the sin-bearer of the world. Remember the baby born in Bethlehem is the greatest gift the world has ever received.

Put in proper context, our receiving of this gift is a continuation of the promises of the Old Testament, where the Lord declares that he will send us a Savior, his Son.

Paul says. We are God's people, and he has extended his hand to us and marked us, we are beloved and holy people of God: ***“as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved.”*** This is no small declaration for the faithful children of Christ. As his chosen and set-apart ones, we are not alone and living for ourselves. We are his, chosen and called to share his love and compassion. ***“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience”*** (Colossians 3:12).

Scripture reminds us that we should forgive one another in Christian love: Oftentimes, we are not willing to forgive those who've hurt us because it seems to empower us as we withhold forgiveness. Scripture encourages us to see and know that our ability to forgive comes from the reality that we are first forgiven by Christ in our own lives; thus we are able to forgive others.

This is a beautiful reality in which we live as children of the heavenly Father.

And love is what binds all things together in the life of the Christian. One of my catechumens once asked me, “How do we put on love?” This question is, for the Christian, a beautiful picture of God’s love and mercy. God the Father has showered us with his love. His love comes to us in the form of his Son, who lived and died and now lives again. We know this reality through the Word of God as it reminds us in many places and in many ways of the love in our lives, which is Christ.

For all Christians, the love of Christ is poured out in Holy Baptism, where we are robed in love. Therefore, putting on love is a reality of our relationship to Christ as his chosen people. Like many aspects of our relationship to Christ, we must not reject the ability we have to love.

The Word of God dwells in us. *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him”* (Colossians 3:16–17).

We remain hopeful and joyful at this reality. It is through that very Word that we are encouraged and strengthened to be able to meet the tasks before us with confidence and joy. As we have been given the gift of love we share forgiveness and mercy which we have also been given. We provide the gift of forgiveness to those who’ve hurt us and trespassed against us, we take encouragement and nourishment from the Word of God as it reminds us and empowers us in our lives in Christ. We give freely the gift of forgiveness as it has been freely given to us by Christ our Lord and risen, living Savior.

So, with joy, receive what is yours as a gift. Receive it with joy and thankfulness knowing that you are forgiven freely, without price and without worthiness on your part. All wrapped in the gift of love.

Amen