

## FINDING THE RIGHT GIFT

Preached by Douglas Norris at First United Methodist Church, Palo Alto, California  
December 24, 1984, 10:45 p.m.

Did you find the right gift? I'm never sure. I wander through the stores, gasp at the prices, look at this, look at that, and finally decide, but not sure that it's the right gift. How about you? Are your gifts under the tree? Opened already, or do you open tomorrow? If you are not sure you gave the right gift, there is another gift you can give--a gift that is always appropriate, always appreciated, one that we usually take for granted.

God gave us an example of the right gift. God, too, must have struggled with the appropriate gift for humankind. God wanted to show this world how to live with each other, how to get along, how to relate with God, how to take care of the planet. God first sent a nation, called the nation Israel, to express his will. When they floundered, God sent prophets, teachers to point the way. Finally, the right gift presented itself, the gift to which all the previous gifts were pointing.

God gave himself. Our lessons this evening on the wonder of Christmas culminated in the reading from the Gospel of John, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." The word of God, the son of God, God in the flesh, God gave himself, the right gift.

Edith Lovejoy Pierce wrote in the poem, Lend-Lease:

God did not send technical assistance  
To our backward world:  
Gabriel and a company of experts  
With their know-how.  
God did not negotiate  
For the export of surplus grace  
On a long-term loan.  
Instead, God came himself.  
He hungered in the wilderness,  
He was stripped naked on the cross.  
But, hungering with us  
He became our bread,  
And suffering for us  
He became our joy.

So, too, the best gift you can give is yourself; the right gift, always appropriate and appreciated, is you. Margery Tallcott wrote in the Guideposts Christmas Treasury of a remembered Christmas. When her son, Pete, was six, it was a depression year, and the bare essentials were all the family could afford. When Christmas was a week off, they told Pete there could not be any store-bought presents this year. "But I'll tell you what we can do," said his father with an inspiration born of heartbreak. "We can make pictures of the presents we'd like to give each other." The parents had a marvelous time preparing for that Christmas--cutting out pictures, drawing, painting. Such a Christmas they had, luxurious gifts: pictures of a red motorboat, camping tents, diamond bracelet, fur coat, dream house. They didn't expect Pete to give any gift, but he, too, had been working. But six-year-old Pete didn't cut extravagant gifts out of magazines. He drew a picture of three people laughing--a man, woman and a boy.

They had their arms around one another. Under the picture, he had printed one word: "US." Little Pete knew that the right gift, always appropriate, always appreciated, is yourself, "us."

Mothers and fathers: of course, you gave lots of things this Christmas to your children, but the right gift, the best gift, is you. Things can never take the place of your time, your attention. Play with the kids, take them to dinner, share your life, talk, listen.

Grandparents: of course, you gave things this Christmas--or perhaps a generous check--but, remember, the best gift is you. I can't remember a thing my grandparents gave me. I know they gave me gifts every birthday and Christmas, but I cannot recall one item. But, I remember vividly their love for me. I remember their pride in me. I remember how, in their eyes, I could do no wrong. I remember the card games they played with me. I remember my Grandpa taking me fishing. I remember how they would read stories to me and tell me the old stories of our family--what it was like when they were children, how my parents misbehaved when they were young, what it was like when I was born. They gave me my roots. They shared their lives. That was the right gift.

Share yourself this Christmas with those around you. The world is filled with people who need you; who need not just what you can do for them, but you. This church is filled with people who need you. Your neighborhood is filled with people who need you--perhaps your smile, your joy, your caring and concern, asking "How is it going?" and then listening to the answer. There are many out there who would consider it a real gift to find someone who would listen to them.

God gave the best Christmas gift of all--himself. Receive him, open your heart to Christ, let God love you. Give the right gift this Christmas: give yourself. It will be appropriate. It will be appreciated.

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