

Christmas Eve 8:00 p.m. Service

It was the last day of school before Christmas vacation began. It was raining in So Cal so my class of kindergarten students at the Lutheran school were coloring and chatting during "rainy day recess". I was eavesdropping as I prepared a few materials for the day.

One student noted that Shanene, a classmate was not present.
"Shanene's not sick. She's not here because her Grandpa died."

Another observant student added: "Her grandpa was old."
In the Christmas spirit, a third student chimed in: "You know, Santa is old."

A fourth student voiced the unthinkable: "What if Santa dies???"

The coloring and conversation ground to a halt.

Time for an intervention. Thankfully it was a Christian school, so I chimed in:
"You're right--Santa is old. But he's been around for a long, long time and I don't think he'll be dying any time soon.

Even if he did--which I don't think he will--whose birthday do we celebrate on Christmas??

"Jesus!!" came the shout from around the table.

"And who brought gifts to Jesus?"

"The wise men!"

"Right! So---***in the very unlikely event that something happens to Santa, we will still have a reason to celebrate, because of Jesus birthday!*** And we can still give gifts, right?"

"Right!" ahhhh....there was a collective sigh of relief around that table! Jesus saved Christmas!!

Thank God for Birthdays!!

Later after lunch, the Kindergarteners were settling down on cots in the nap room. Herman, one of my students had brought me a gift. Knowing I would not see him

until after the break, I found his cot and knelt beside him. "Thank you for the gift. Would you like for me to open it now?"

"Oh yes!" he said with delight.

He had obviously wrapped the box himself, the paper folded in interesting angles, with the use of LOTS of scotch tape. Herman had to help me--did I mention that he really liked scotch tape???

OH (intake of breath!) It was a box of candy--those chocolate "turtles" with nuts and caramel, covered with chocolate. One of my favorites!

I asked Herman if he would like one.

"Oh yes! They are really yummy!"

Noting there was no cellophane outer wrapping, I could easily lift the lid.

Two of the turtles were missing!!

Herman obviously had helped himself to a taste, while wrapping the gift!

These two stories are about giving and receiving gifts, and why we do so in the first place.

We give because God first gave to us.

We love because God first loved us.

It's easy for Jesus' birthday to get lost in the shuffle of wrapping paper. We exchange gifts with one another, and that's always fun.

BUT...it IS Jesus' birthday.

What gift might you or I give Jesus for his Birthday??

I imagine that like me, you try to give someone a gift that really is fitting for them...not just size-wise, but that suits their interests, and the things they enjoy doing.

What might Jesus really like to receive on his birthday??

He tells us in Matthew 25:

³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;

³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’
³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?
³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

Mt 25--3 people--not members of our church-- in 3 days last week filled our blessing box

Sunday, I spoke of the Greatest Love Story Ever Told...that we are God's beloved, and God wants us to return that love.
One could say: I've given Jesus my heart."

But discipleship means taking that love one step further...

It means living out that love in a way that reaches out to others: The hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned, the sick, those needing clothing, those who are lonely or need a sense of belonging.

The gifts we give one another, but particularly these kinds of gifts that we would give to “the least of these who are members of Jesus’ family” —these gifts are given as to Jesus—he says so himself!

What will you give Jesus this Christmas?

It is His birthday, after all.

Pray: God of Grace—than you for your lavish love sent in the person of your Son. Help us to give him room in our hearts this Christmas, and to serve him – and the least of these – everyday throughout the entire year. In Jesus’ precious name, Amen.