

“What’s On Your Christ-Wish List?”

November 23, 2014

Colossians 1:11-14, 15-20; Luke 1:68-29

Today is the last Saturday/Sunday of the season of Pentecost- when we celebrate Christ the King. Here are some of the Christological affirmations of Paul in his letter to the Colossians:

- × Christ is the image of the invisible God
- × He is the firstborn of all creation.
- × In him-- all things hold together.
- × He is the head of the body, the church.
- × In him-- all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.
- × Through him-- God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself.
- × He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

With our first century sisters and brothers, we say Alleluia and Amen!

Today as we ponder the centrality of Jesus Christ to our faith, what is it that we would hope to receive from him- as we live the life of Christian disciples? This is what we’ll explore today.

A friend said- “Brace yourself lads, Christmas is coming!” This is the weekend before Black Friday, and our newspapers, mailboxes and inboxes- will be crammed with ads luring us toward the hottest sales, coolest gadgets and toys of the year.

Now, don’t worry, I’m not going to bash the idea of Christmas giving, for I truly believe- this season reveals our truer generous selves. That being said, I do want to encourage us to be aware- that during the next few days, the pre-Christmas advertising will be over the top. Retailers desperately want to define our holiday desires for us.

Families are especially targeted. Heaven help us if our children or grandchildren live incomplete lives- without this year’s, must-have Christmas toys. Let’s see if you can help me remember some of the biggest hits of the past.

Barbie, Mr. Potato Head, Tinker Toys and Lincoln Logs are deep in the archives of history. (How many of you loved those toys as kids?) The hot toys of the ‘60s- were Spirograph, G.I. Joe, Lite-Brite and Hot Wheels race cars. In the ‘70s- LEGOS and Star Wars figures left all other toys in the dust, while Barbie continued to dominate the little-girl market.

Video games appeared in 1977, as the Atari 2600 left kids- and parents- fixated on Breakout and Pitfall. The '80s- brought us the Rubik's Cube, Cabbage Patch Kids, Transformers and Pound Puppies. The '90's- offered Game Boys, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Pokémon and Beanie Babies. But Tickle-Me-Elmo dominated the decade.

In the new millennium, the Wii, Xbox, and PlayStation video-game systems took over the Christmas market. But aluminum scooters, Dora the Explorer, Harry Potter and Elmo-doing-Anything-Depending-on-the-Year, made non-digital splashes.

It seems as though every year, a parent brawl at Toys "R" Us makes headlines. Any of you remember the reports of parents trampling each other, or offering \$1,000 bribes, to get a Cabbage Patch Kid? The Tickle-Me-Elmo rage created mob scenes reminiscent of depression-era bank runs.

Do you think maybe, we've gotten a little- out of control? Or still yet, can you begin to imagine a world- where parents showed equal passion to secure emotional well-being and spiritual development for their kids?... I can dream can't I?

Since Christmas is still a month out- you still have plenty time to develop your Christmas-wish list. So today- let's see if we can develop what my colleague in Homiletics Magazine called- our Christ-wish list. What gifts might we hope to receive from Christ this season- gifts that will enliven our lives as Christian Disciples? Paul offers three in his letter to the Colossians.

In verse 11 he writes: "May you be made strong, with all the strength that comes from his glorious power." As we live out our lives, God offers his power to make us strong. Paul experienced God as the One who made him strong in his weak places.

You and I are probably aware of our weak places. The Good News today- is that God wants to help us when anxiety, depression, stress, doubt, frustration, cynicism and bitterness- war against who God created us to be. We need God's strength to make us strong, we cannot, nor need not, do it alone.

Also in verse 11 Paul writes: "May you be prepared to endure everything with patience"- patient endurance. Control freaks will recoil at this idea, but the reality is- we have no idea what's coming next in life. No matter how hard we try, we cannot prevent illness in the life of a loved one, being laid off from work, getting sideswiped and injured in a car accident, being betrayed by a trusted friend... So much of life is beyond our control.

We never plan for these times- so we're rarely prepared for them. The only thing we can bring to the table at that point- is the character we've developed beforehand. That's why Paul prays that we have patient endurance, a virtue that can weather the unexpected.

Lastly-Paul writes in verse 12: "Joyfully giving thanks to the Father- who has enabled us to share in the inheritance of the saints of light." Paul knew that when we face difficulties in life, and we all will, we would need to maintain a healthy joyful gratitude toward God- remembering past blessings- and staying open to what the future will bring.

Before we move into Advent next week- and the pace accelerates even more- let's join Paul in praying for these THREE qualities- inner strength, patient endurance, and joyfully grateful hearts. Which of these three do you need most?

What's on your Christ-Wish List?

I will end with a story.

This December, I vow to make Christmas a calm and peaceful experience. I will have to cut back on nonessential obligations, extensive card writing, endless baking, decorating, and even overspending. I do not want to find myself exhausted, unable to appreciate the precious family moments, and of course, the true meaning of Christmas.

My son, Nicholas, is in kindergarten this year. It is an exciting season for a six year old. For weeks, he has been memorizing songs for his school's "Winter Program." I didn't have the heart to tell him I'd be working the night of his show. Unwilling to miss his shining moment, I spoke with his teacher. She assured me there'd be a dress rehearsal the morning of the presentation. All parents unable to attend that evening were welcome to come then. Fortunately, Nicholas seemed happy with the compromise. So, the morning of the dress rehearsal, I arrived 10 minutes early, found a spot on the cafeteria floor and sat down. Around the room, I saw several other parents quietly scampering to their seats. As I waited, the students were led into the room. Each class,

accompanied by their teacher, sat cross-legged on the floor. Then, each group, one by one, rose to perform their song.

Because the public school system had long stopped referring to the holiday as "Christmas" I didn't expect anything other than fun songs of reindeer, Santa Claus, snowflakes and good cheer. So, when my son's class rose to sing,

"Christmas Love", I was slightly taken back by its bold title.

Nicholas was aglow, as were all of his classmates, all adorned in fuzzy mittens, red sweaters, and bright snowcaps upon their heads. Those in the front row, center stage, held up large letters, one by one, to spell out the title of the song. As the class would sing "C is for Christmas", a child would hold up the letter C. Then, "H is for Happy", and on and on, until each child holding up his portion had presented the complete message,

"Christmas Love".

The performance was going smoothly, until suddenly, we noticed her, a small quiet girl in the front row holding the letter "M" upside down, totally unaware her letter "M" appeared as a "W". The audience of 1st through 6th graders snickered at this little one's mistake. But she had no idea they were laughing at her, so she stood tall, proudly holding her "W". Although many teachers tried to shush the children, the laughter continued until the last letter was raised, and we all saw it together. A hush came over the audience and eyes began to widen.

In that instant, we understood the reason we were there, why we celebrated the holiday in the first place, why even in the chaos there was a purpose for our festivities. For when the last letter was held high, the message read loud and clear:

"CHRIST WAS LOVE".

What's on your Christ-Wish List? Amen.