



Show Me Your Ways Through Giving (Matthew 2:1-12)

We have all experienced the joy and often surprise of receiving gifts. Coming down the stairs on Christmas morning to a living room transformed into a toyland are some of the most magical memories of my childhood. But as I grew older, I gradually became aware of a much deeper joy, the joy of giving. The act of sharing a part of myself with someone else, whether through giving a gift that had been carefully selected for them, or simply through the giving of my time and talents to fulfill a need, brought a deeper sense of joy and satisfaction to my soul. I quickly came to realize that the act of giving was indeed a gift in and of itself.

In our Scripture text today we read the familiar story of the Magi coming to visit the baby Jesus. They traversed thousands of miles to see this baby, born king of the Jews. When they finally found him, their response was one of joy, worshipping, and gift giving. In that moment, the actions of the Magi symbolize for us that all of life and all that we are, comes from God, who gives life. In John we read that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not die but have eternal life (John 3:16). The act of giving is a reflection of who God is. God is the Giver and because God gives, we live.

When the spirit of our giving is rooted in God's love, we are sharing with others the gift of life. We are reaching beyond the confinements of our society that often urges us to get all that we can possibly get, and we are opening the doors to eternal life, the gift that transcends time, as we know it. When we give of ourselves, God is able to show us, and the receiver of our gift, who He is and what He can do, and, most importantly, how very much is His love for us.

Each day we are presented with so many opportunities to give, to show others the love that Christ has for us all. All too often, we are too distracted and busy to notice those opportunities, or we see them and think we are not qualified to fulfill what that opportunity is presenting to us. We are often far too quick to place limitations upon ourselves and deny the gifts of giving that God is placing in front of us. We feel we don't have much to give and therefore are of no great importance to anyone, even to God. Why should we even try? God calls us to be no less than our best. God created us in His own image. God gives abundantly. We cannot hide behind the walls we surround ourselves with, walls of self-doubt and questioning whether or not we are qualified for the task at hand. The issue is not how much we have (or how gifted we are), but what we do with what we do have. Our presents from God can become to others the presence of God.

Discussion Questions and Reflection Activities

Read Acts 20:22-38. Pay attention to verse 35. Discuss the following questions:

1. Share a time when you found it more blessed to give than to receive.
2. Do you see yourself, your women's group, your church, your community more as a giver or receiver? Why?
3. Discuss the following statement: "Those who know the joy of receiving tend to lose the joy of giving." Do you think this holds truth? Now alter the statement just a bit, "Those who know the joy of receiving tend to gain the joy of giving." How does Christ's call in our lives fit in the altered statement?
4. When the Magi encountered the Christ Child, they responded with joy and worship and gift giving. How are we moved to respond when we encounter Christ in our lives?

Activity

1. Have a small paper sack or gift bag for each member of the group with their name on it. Have enough note cards or slips of paper on hand so that each person has one for every other member of the group. Have each person complete the following sentence about the other people present in your group, putting one on each card:

A present you give me from your presence is your...(warmth, care, friendliness, etc.)

Once the cards have been completed, place them in each person's bag. These may be taken home and serve as our reminders how we can give presents from our presence.

2. Using the word GIVING, write an acrostic poem that helps define the word in the context of our lesson for today.

Prayer:

Close with a prayer thanking God for the gifts we have been given. Ask God for help in being a giver so that we may share His love and life with those around us. Close with singing the hymn, "They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love."