

TWO GIFTS
John 16:16-33

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What is the greatest gift ever? Let me throw out a few possibilities that might win the award.

How about the Statue of Liberty, a gift from France to the United States. The statue was built overseas and shipped to the United States in pieces. If you're going to give anyone a gift like that, you might make sure they clear out some yard space before the boats arrive.

We've all heard of the "white elephant gift." No, I mean a real, live, white elephant. King Manuel of Portugal gave a white elephant to Pope Leo X in 1514. The Pope was so enamored with the pachyderm named Hanno that he commissioned Raphael to paint a pachyderm portrait. No elephant had been seen in Italy for centuries, and the crowds stampeded to get a glimpse of this almost mythological beast. He was the Pope's favorite pet.

Or, in 1947, President Truman received a two-lane bowling alley, installed at the White House, as a birthday gift. Never mind that Truman hadn't bowled since he was 19 years of age. Truman, I read, enjoyed poker more than bowling. The staff, however, seemed to enjoy the bowling alley. By the way, he knocked down seven pins on the first roll down the alley.

Or how about Liz Taylor. She received a 69.42 carat pear-shaped diamond from Richard Burton in 1969. It was the first diamond ever publicly sold for seven figures, but it did prove to be a good investment. The giant stone was auctioned off in 1978 for \$5 million, and the proceeds were used to build a hospital in Botswana. Liz said, "They needed a hospital badly and I certainly don't need another ring."

And then there are duplicitous gifts, like the one given in 1945 by the Young Pioneer organization of the Soviet Union to U.S. Ambassador Averell Harriman. These Russians gave a hand-carved version of the Great Seal of the United States. It was a ruse, however. In 1952 – and not until 1952 – it was discovered that the Russians had included a bug in the gift. Russian inventor, Leon Theremin, had designed a bug that required no power supply and gave off no signal – amazing technology in 1945 – so the Russians could listen in on American affairs. Beware of your enemies who bear gifts.

What is the best gift you've ever received – a gift that, literally, changed your life? Bet it wasn't a sweater or another bottle of Old Spice. Socks and underwear dare not claim the place of your greatest gift ever.

Was it a diamond engagement ring? Or was it the time that your daughter-in-law wrapped up a birthday box? When opened, a tiny card declared, "Happy Birthday, Grandma! Twins are on the

way.” Maybe someone in your family was sacrificial enough to give you a kidney for a transplant – giving, literally, the gift of life at the risk of her own.

I don’t know about the greatest gift you ever received, but I do know that in our passage today Jesus gives His disciples two great gifts. We have two sections in John 16:16-33 – nine verses each. In the first section, verses 16-24, He gives them joy in depression. And the second gift, in verses 25-33, He gives them peace in the face of defeat.

I. Jesus’ gift of joy in depression (vs. 16-24).

Did you see the story this week about the rubber duck that mysteriously appeared in a Maine harbor with the word “joy” written across its chest? The appearance of the rubber duck – no, not a tiny rubber duck, but a 25-foot tall rubber duck that suddenly drifted into a Maine harbor – has become a whimsical who-done-it that has defied all the sleuths so far. No one knows who owns the duck – the duck of joy.

This giant, yellow waterfowl emblazoned with the word “joy” appeared in Belfast Harbor over the weekend. The harbormaster, Katherine Given, told the Bangor Daily News that the 25-foot tall duck didn’t pose any navigational hazards and they are not anxious to shoo it away. The duck that brings joy to the residents around the harbor. “Everybody loves it,” said the harbormaster. “A lot of people want to keep it here.” The duck has become a social media star.

People in Jesus’ day, and people now, want the sudden appearance of joy. But joy has never made a more powerful appearance than it does in the gospel.

Look at verse 16

A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.

Now this quizzical comment about not seeing Jesus and then seeing Jesus again is almost awkward, as it is repeated three different times in a total of four verses.

Again in verse 17: “A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.”

And then in verse 19: “A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me.”

Clearly a reference to Jesus’ death, during which time they do not see Him, and then His resurrection, when they see Him again “in a little while” – three days to be exact.

Finally, He speaks of the wonderful gift of joy (verses 20-23). One translator put it this way, “Truly, truly, I want to tell you something very important. You will be sobbing and crying, but the world will be rejoicing. You will be depressed, but your depression will be turned into joy. For example, when a woman is in labor, she is in pain, she’s depressed, because her hour of delivery has come. But when she gives birth to a child, she no longer remembers her anguish because of the thrill of having brought a human being into the world. So you’re depressed now,

too, but I will see you again, and your hearts will be thrilled with joy, and no one will ever be able to take your joy from you. Indeed, on that day, you will ask Me no more questions.”

Any time in John’s gospel – and only in John’s gospel – when we have the “truly, truly” or the “verily, verily” or the “amen, amen,” this double formula is used when something really important is about to be said by Jesus. “Listen up, truly, truly I say to you, the hostile world which hates Jesus will rejoice when Jesus is crucified. But when the disciples see their Lord, their Savior, their Rabbi hanging on the tree, they will be plunged into depression and into despair. Their whole world will be turned upside down. There will be no purpose for living. The disciples will be aimless. They will be without cause. They will be without their Christ.”

Now He explains: “In a little while, you’ll see Me again. Your depression will be like that of a woman who goes into labor. She is in such anguish. She dreads the moment of delivery. But at the end of the delivery there is joy.

I have been in several rooms while women were in the throes of birth pangs – either during the birth of my own children or as a chaplain in the hospital. Without getting too personal, let me just say I have come to the conclusion that women are probably not putting their best face forward in the middle of a contraction. They can be angry at their husband. They can be angry at their best friend. They can be angry at the doctor, and the nurse can get nothing right. Let me give you a few examples of what women have confessed happening in the delivery room.

One lady confesses that the worst thing she said was to her husband. It was their first child (which always seems to be the worst because you’re not sure what to expect), and she had had bad back labor. He was rubbing her back and started complaining about his hand hurting. The wife snapped at him, saying that her entire body hurt and if he didn’t want to help, he could just get out.

Another soon-to-be-mother told her husband, “Get out of my face, you’re using my oxygen!” She said it’s still a running joke in their household, but, luckily, he’s a forgiving type of guy.

Or what about the lady who punched the nurse in the face! Not long after that, the doctor came in and tied her to the bed and put a gas mask over her face. She woke up hours later – everyone was gone and she didn’t realize she’d had the baby.

Or the mother who stood up on the bed and said, “I’m going home and not doing this anymore! I changed my mind!” In her mind, she believed she could do that. She remembers her mother saying very gently, “It’s too late for that now.”

And then there is the lady with an epidural drip that a nurse was trying to change because it was running out. She asked her friend for a knife because the nurse was making her so angry!

But in the end, the cry of the baby – with the sounds of joy – all sorrow fades and the joy takes center stage.

After Jesus is crucified, His disciples were in utter despair. Their Lord had been so wonderful, and yet a total disappointment in the end. Given the cross, the defeat of their rabbi, could there

have been a more ecstatic reunion in all of human history than the reunion between the disciples and their Lord – their death-defeating Lord? When the tomb is empty, when He walks into the room, and says, “Behold, my scars....”

“Your hearts,” He says, “will be thrilled with joy and no one can ever take your joy from you. On that day, you won’t even have any more questions.”

When you see that death itself cannot defeat your Lord, you really understand the power of God, the meaning of life, and the perplexing puzzle of human existence is answered. All the suffering, all the death, all the hardship, all the loss, all the grief turns to grace. Jesus’ life, His death, and then His resurrection. My Lord, what a morning Easter must have been. Your sorrow is turned to joy.

When God gives you the gift of joy, you will have no more questions.

What’s the question that believers most often ask their God? The question, “Why? Why?”

“Why, God, this loss?”

“Why, God, this tragedy?”

“Why, God, this chronic illness?”

“Why, God, this surgery?”

“Why, God, this death?”

“Why, God, this divorce?”

“Why, God, this injustice?”

“Why, God? Why?”

When God gives the gift of joy, a joy that no one can take away, the whys fade for all eternity. When you see God, you won’t even ask your questions. The glory of the kingdom of God and the reunion with the ones you love and the union with your Lord will be answer enough.

And no one can take your joy away from you (v. 22).

I’ve been guilty. I’ve let people steal my joy. I’ve let their words rob me of my joy. At some point, when you really experience the joy that comes from having eternal salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus, when you understand the power of the gift, then you have a joy of which no one can rob you.

Are you a sinner? He is a Savior.

Are you lost? He will find you.

Are you broken? He will make you whole.

Are you hurt? He’s a balm in Gilead.

Is death creeping at your door? He's the resurrection and the life.

No one can ever rob God's children of their joy. And this morning, if you are letting someone rob you of your joy, then you either don't understand who God is or you don't understand what He has done for you.

To make joy full and complete, pray and petition for the kingdom. "In my name" equals "in my mission."

II. Jesus' gift of peace in the face of defeat (vs. 25-33).

In verses 25-33, we learn about the second great gift – the gift of God's peace.

There is an interesting introduction to this gift of peace. Maybe you've never noticed it before. Jesus says that when the disciples pray in His name – now, up until this point, the disciples have prayed to God, but not really in the name of Jesus – "You will pray in My name, or you will ask in My name, and I will not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf..." (v. 25-26).

Jesus is saying that He's not going to go to the Father on behalf of His disciples? Why?

Verse 27

...for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father.

And then He says, "I'm going back to the Father."

One translator put it this way: "On that day, you will ask for something in prayer in My name, and I cannot honestly say that I will ask the Father for you. For the Father Himself loves you because you have come to love Me and have come to believe that I came from God."

Sometimes through the categories of classic theology, we have made the mistake of depicting God as being cool and aloof and only connected to His people by a more caring Christ. Nothing could be further from the truth. "The Father loves you because you have loved Me and because you have believed that I have come from Him." In fact, God loves those who accept, love, and trust His Son – the Father is so deeply pleased when we believe that the Son has come from Him.

The reality is God loves you more than God loves God's self, because He gave up His life, in the form of Jesus, for yours.

Jesus begins to talk about the V form of theology. "I have come from the Father" ↓(verse 27) and have come into the world." ↓ And (verse 28), "I am leaving the world again ↑ and going to the Father."↑ The Christian story can be described by a letter V. "I came out from the Father, and I have come into the world. And I am leaving the world, being lifted up on the cross and then the resurrection – I am going back to the Father." Death, burial, and ascension – the career of our Lord. And all that's left is His glorious return.

But before they get to the good news, there is the bad news. I am always perplexed when someone says, "I've got good news and bad news. Which one do you want first?" I always say I want the bad news first. What do you say? I don't know what that means – that I would want to hear the sorry side first before I heard the side of glory.

"You really believe in Me?" That's what they say. "We understand now. You're speaking clearly" (verse 29). "You know all things. We know that you know all things. And we don't have any need to ask you any more questions. We believe that you came from God" (verse. 30).

"Oh, do you believe?" (verse 31). "The hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."

Jesus knows what is going to happen. Soon, they are going to the Garden, the authorities will arrest Him. And the disciples will all flee. They will deny having ever known Him. They will run for cover. They will run for their lives. They will scatter, and they will abandon their Lord. Even Peter, who said he would lay down his life for his Lord, will run for the hills and only follow at a safe distance. And when you follow at a distance, you're not following at all.

Jesus knows the limits of their faith. He knows how confused and frightened they are going to be by the cross.

Did you know the desertion by the disciples is recorded in every gospel – all four? Seems an odd thing to include. The church admits her failures, and when she does, it honors Christ.

There is only one hero in the story of the gospel, and I'm not he, you're not he, Peter's not he, John's not he. Certainly Judas isn't the hero. The one hero is Jesus. If your theology makes you the hero of the story, you've got a bad theology. You are a disciple who deserts the Lord in His hour of passion.

Then the gift of peace. "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me" – not in yourself, not in your own power – "you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world" (verse 33).

Translation: "I have conquered the world."

Don't be too upset by your fallibility, by your unbelief, by your failure and your fragile nature. It will always be Christ, the victor. Christus – victor. He has overcome the world.

So what's the greatest gift you've ever received?

A white elephant or a gargantuan diamond? A bowling alley or a bugged medallion? Probably not.

Friendship is a wonderful gift. Maybe someone has given you their friendship.

Sometimes handmade gifts are the best, because they come from the heart.

But the greatest gifts of all come from God – the giver of all good things. And the two good gifts today are joy, which no one can take away from you, and peace despite tribulation, because He has overcome the world.