

God is Jealous©
Under Wraps – the Gift We Never Expected©
December 14, 2014

Deuteronomy 6:10-15a; Luke 10:25-28

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Are you ready for Christmas? Is your shopping done, your list all crossed off? The wrapping finished? Gifts under the tree?

Have you been naughty or nice?

These last couple of weeks, I've been asking for suggestions from my sons and daughter, trying to figure out what to get them, and our grandchildren, for Christmas.

When I was growing up we would take turns looking at the Sears catalog and would circle things we were hoping for, putting our name beside the item. Trying to help Santa know what we wanted for Christmas.

Kind of like this family ... **Show the video**

Did you notice who had the biggest wish list? Whose list took up the most room? It really wasn't the kids, was it? Their lists were fairly small compared to their parents list. I guess it's true, the older we get, the bigger the toys.

I really love giving presents to people. I sometimes wish I had more money because it would be so much fun to be able to really surprise people – family and friends – with gifts they never expected.

And I would love to wrap them all up in a beautiful, attractive wrapping paper with great big bows – like these presents we have here as our décor, wrapped by a professional.

And really, who doesn't enjoy *receiving* gifts? I admit, I always end up regretting it when Fred and I say we aren't going to get each other a gift.

Somewhere along the line, before Christmas comes, we change our minds. ... Well, maybe it's more like I change my mind. I love to get presents from my husband, even if it is a little thing.

It's all very exciting – all the decorations, the Christmas movies, all the shopping, all the wrapping, the baking, the waiting.

But then, there is the *other* side of this season. It seems like December is a time when there is sorrow and depression and funerals. Week before last, I did the funeral for

Rachel's mother. And bless their hearts, they've had 2 more deaths in their family since that time.

And this past week, I did the funeral service for one of our members – Ethel Wiethoff. Ethel was 99 years old and ready to go, but still, it's never easy to let go of a loved one, especially a mother or father, a child or a sibling.

There isn't anyone here, I think, who doesn't have something in your lives that you are worrying about or grieving over. I think of Jaymi and Sara and Nick, Kati and Pat who are celebrating Christmas early today ... just in case they don't make it to Christmas Day.

It kind of puts it all into perspective, doesn't it? As we grow older and experience life and death and sorrow, it draws us close to one another in a different way. And for me ... and I think for you too ... it makes this place and these people so very important.

It makes being here a high priority because it is here that we are reminded of the real reason for Christmas. And we are reminded again of what Advent means.

Advent is about waiting, of course. And it's about hoping for something new and better and life-giving. It's about finding peace even when we are suffering, and peace even when we see the news about a world full of war and discrimination and hatred and oppression and violence.

And today, we hear that Advent is about love. Yes, it's about loving one another and showing that love in giving ways.

But really, Advent is about hearing again of the love God has shown to us. Giving us God's self as a tiny baby. A Son that would teach us how God loves us. A Son that go to his death on a cross in order to bring us to a new relationship with God. This is about a Son who would not stay dead, but would be raised from the dead by the mighty power of the only true God, giving us hope of that same resurrection when our time comes. What a gift that is!

But Advent is also about being reminded that our first priority really is about loving God. I mean, think about it ... Whose birthday is it, anyway? With all the gift giving, are we thinking about the gift we want to give the Christ child? Are we focused on giving our very best gift to Him – the gift of ourselves, our hearts, our wills?

Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God with everything we are – our hearts, our souls, our strength and our minds. And then to love others as we love ourselves. Those others are often people we easily forget about it.

And our Old Testament reading tells us: "the Lord your God, who is present with you, is a jealous God."

And God said, in Exodus 20: “You shall not make for yourself an idol, ... You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God.”

God wants to be number one with us. We certainly have been number one with God. Loving God is the best gift we can give.

When we’re making our lists and checking them twice, are we putting at the top of the list, the gift we are giving to the One who gave us the best gift ever? The one who is jealous of any of the other things we might consider a priority?

Our precious children have made a gift for us ... a movie to tell us all about that very special gift – the gift of love. Let’s watch it now.

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