

Making It Last

Luke 3:1-20

The excitement is mounting on this the third Sunday in Advent. That long awaited day will soon be here. Jesus will soon be reborn into our lives. We have looked forward to Christmas Day for two weeks. Children count down the days, waiting as patiently as they can for Christmas Day. But what do we do the day after Christmas? Are there ways to make Christmas last longer than one day?

Once there was a little girl who loved Christmas so much that she wanted it to be Christmas every day of the year. This little girl began writing to the Christmas fairy hoping that her wish would be granted. Wouldn't it be great to celebrate Christmas every day of the year?

Christmas Day arrived and the children opened their gifts. The little girl discovered candied cherries in her stocking. She ate so much candy that she didn't want any breakfast. The entire day was filled with opening presents, and as more family arrived presents were given.

For Christmas dinner they ate turkey and cranberry with plum pudding and nuts and raisins and oranges and more candy. Little wonder the girl went to bed with a stomachache. It was a grand day for the entire family.

The day after Christmas the girl woke up to the sounds of her sister and brothers dancing around her bed with their stockings full of presents. "What is it?" said the girl as she rubbed her eyes. "Christmas! Christmas! Christmas!" they all shouted and waved their stockings. "Nonsense! It was Christmas yesterday" she answered. Then all of a sudden the little girl remembered she wished Christmas Day to be everyday. The Christmas fairy granted her wish. The next day and the next day it was Christmas again and again. It was Christmas everyday. After about three or four months of having Christmas every day, people were getting tired of celebrating instead of being happy they were cross. Many people lost their tempers. Turkeys became so scarce that they cost one thousand dollars each. There were no more Christmas trees to be chopped down. The forest looked like a stubble field. People became poor because they were always buying presents.

After six months of having Christmas every day the little girl was sorry she had ever wished Christmas every day. Instead of being happy to receive so many presents all she would do is sit and cry in her bedroom. Nearly everyone had to build barns to hold all their presents, but soon the barns were overflowing with gifts. People became so sick and tired of having Christmas every day that soon they didn't care anymore. They left their presents on the sidewalks out in the rain. Police officers had to issue warnings to keep the sidewalks clear of presents.

After having Christmas every day for a year the people rejoiced that Christmas was finally over. Bonfires could be seen as people burned their excess presents. The little girl thought and thought about Christmas. At first she thought Christmas should come once every thousand years. Then she thought maybe once every century. Then once every ten years and finally she thought it was all right to leave Christmas one day a year. *

We wait patiently for Christmas Day. We wait to receive God's precious gift into our lives anew this year. We wait knowing that Christmas Day will soon be here. Are there ways we can keep the Christmas spirit throughout the year without celebrating Christmas every day? Are we going to be any different on December 26 as a result of our Advent preparation?

The answers to these questions can be found with the man crying in the wilderness—

John the Baptist

- One crying in the wilderness—people traveled out into the desert to hear him
- John was NOT a guest-friendly pastor
 - Not friendly
 - Not welcoming
 - Not warm
 - Called them a brood of vipers!
- His message was “Repent!”—Completely change the way you live your life!
 - Change will be noticed by others
 - Everything will be done for the love of God and love of others
 - Some were offended—“We are sons of Abraham.”—You can’t be talking about us!
- What shall we do? Bear fruits worthy of repentance.
 - Give out of your excess and abundance.
 - Conduct your business in a way that glorifies God and reflects the image of Christ.
 - Use your position to bless and help others, not to intimidate or to serve your own interests!

New Life

- Inward change shows itself in acts of love, kindness and generosity.
- As the late Albert Outler once said, "The world hears the Gospel when it sees it."

Todd and Lisa wanted to do something different one Christmas. Each year they always bought each other expensive gifts. They reached a point in their lives when they really didn't need or want any more gifts. They did not exchange gifts that Christmas. At first they were perplexed and uncertain what to do. Lisa had an idea she shared with her husband. "Instead of spending a lot of money buying each other gifts, why not help people who really need help? After all isn't that the true meaning of Christmas?" Todd agreed. They went to the outlets to buy clothing for homeless people. They bought coats, ski pants, thermal socks and boots. When they finished shopping they bought over one hundred items costing them one thousand dollars. Lisa described her feelings. She said, "I can't begin to describe the joy it gave us. Shopping had never been so much fun. Instead of worrying about sizes and colors, we simply bought warm, sturdy clothes." Lisa and Todd experienced a joy they had never felt before. "Next year," Lisa said, "my husband and I will celebrate Christmas twice. The first time will be in July!" A neighbor asked Todd why they had spent their Christmas money buying gifts for other people. Todd answered, saying the "joy of giving is rewarding beyond belief, and the need is always there." "The world hears the gospel when it sees it." That was what John the Baptist meant when he said, "Do those things that will show that you have turned from your sins."

Could it be that joy and repentance are two sides of the same coin? Could it be that to truly rediscover the joy of Christmas we have to take John the Baptist's advise and change the way that we live?