

Text: Luke 23

Isn't it a wonderful thing - a moment of great expectation when someone says, "I want to give you something". Though sometimes- we would be well advised to have our defenses up a bit- not everything that is called a "gift" is free- and sometimes things are given with a definite eye to creating obligation and reciprocation. You have - we all have given something- looking for a return- it is the most human of instincts- and you have- I suspect loved someone deeply and passionately enough to give- without thinking of a return- only of joy, the brilliant flash of joy in the person's eye.

However else we think of this death- it is surely God's immense and unimaginable gift to us. The eternal Son of God takes human flesh- and is born- for us and for our salvation the creed reminds us- in the same way every human infant is- a first breath- and a first day- that is one less from the fixed total allotted to mortals. That is the way of things with us- and it became the way of things with Christ out of an immense love and longing for us- in the heart of God.

And so he had a body- a voice and a pair of hands- so he could speak and work, and feet to follow the pathways of our world. And he used them- to gather friends and to teach them - telling stories we still have not finished hearing and to rebuke self-satisfied and disdainful types. He used his hands to beckon us closer- to break the bread and to touch the leper. His feet took him up to the temple and out into the streets, his path led towards Lazarus and Martha and Mary where he knew friendship and to the streets where he faced fierce opposition. The eternal God- whose voice calls into existence even the things that are not- that voice- the hands that spun out the milky way way- those hands- except that without the limitations and the confinement of the Incarnation - hands and voice and feet would be silly anthropomorphic ideas fostered off on the realities of God- But out of love for us- he took our life into himself- and he followed our paths. He spoke with a local accent, his hands were calloused from holding certain tools, and his feet knew well those few hundred miles of road. The Eternal Word- the everlasting Son of God- was found in human form.

And he became Obedient unto death, even death on the cross- Christ would not hold himself back- not out of fear or in order to coerce. He gave himself utterly and he refused nothing, not the last drop of human suffering. The weight of our sin- and the horror of our death- it all falls on him- as if it were his- and not ours.

God longs to forgive- and honest forgiveness can only be spoken from under the weight of sin's result. It is not for me to forgive what someone did to you. Remember how he said- as you have done unto the least of these, you have done it unto me? As those hammer strokes fell on his hands- it places him not only on the cross, but in a place where he can say- "*Father forgive them*". God longs to gather us all home- and so, when there is nothing left to say, and the power of hearing is fading with each dying breath, we can hear him say with his dying

breath- *you will be with me*. Here are gifts that we can never answer or repay. This can not be a calculated gift- "were the whole realm of nature mine- that were a offering for too small"

The immense Love of the Triune God- which pours out creation- is now visible- even as the earth goes dark for these three hours. Those feet- and those hands- so beautiful and so strong to heal and to do good- are accomplishing the world's renewal- even as they are cruelly and painfully nailed into what looks like submission. Thirty-three years or so of speaking- words that delighted and perplexed, that challenged and struck awe- now that voice has only a few last breaths and just these handful of words.

Take - eat, this is my body. That is what he said- and now he pours himself out for us- so that there is no dark place into which his grace does not extend and no sorrow he cannot share. Take - eat he says- just as he had said, "follow me" - and now these words of forgiveness and welcome; he speaks to be heard- these words are a gift. There is nothing - nothing we can give in return. This gift is not intended as a bargain - we are empty handed before the cross- and we have nothing to give- not to the one who creates all and who is willing to empty himself of all. All we have is this one thing- our open heart, our humble and grateful thanks -our acceptance.

Julian of Norwich wrote these words- "A glad giver taketh but little heed to the thing that he giveth but all his desire and all his intent is to please him and solace him to whom he giveth it. And if the receiver take the gift highly and thankfully, then the courteous giver setteth at naught all his cost and his travail for joy and delight that he hath pleased and solaced him that he loveth.

Take eat- this is my body. The Son of man came to seek the lost- to give his life as a ransom for many. Father Forgive them.. today, you will be with me.

A whole life poured out- the divine life poured out- so that those words can be spoken- and heard, so that this great gift can be offered- so that you can receive it- so that the living heart of God can be seen and known- even in death. At the Cross, we are looking into the heart of pain and suffering- if we can receive something of what God is offering- if we can accept that this is for us- we are looking into a deep and eternal joy- as the eternal God gives fully and completely- setting at naught all his cost- and his travail for joy and delight that he hath pleased and solaced him that he loveth- and in every word and action of his life and on the Cross- Jesus pours out himself as gift- to please and solace those whom he loves- you, and me - and all of us and all the world.

Sermon by The Revd. David Cobb
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