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December 15, 2019

Don't Forget the Giver!
Matthew 11:2-6, Isaiah 35:1-10

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples³ to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"⁴ Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy^[b] are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶ Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

Are you the ONE? Or should we expect another?
Report what you hear and see, said Jesus:
The blind see, the lame walk, the sick are healed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the good news is proclaimed!

Wow!
THAT'S who we are waiting for at Christmas!
What if we realized that?
What if we were ***amazed by that*** this Christmas?

We are ***NOT JUST celebrating gifts, or family, or friends***, right?
We are NOT JUST celebrating food, lights, or gatherings!

We are celebrating a ***SAVIOR***, the One who ***heals and restores!***
We are celebrating a ***Messiah***—
the one who ***redeems*** all of ***us***, and all of ***creation!***

Isaiah chapter 35 reminds us
that God is in this thing called life, for the ***long-haul.***

Jesus WILL bring redemption, healing, restoration and wholeness,
Not only to all humanity, but to all creation.
That time is coming.

We live in *the “already/not yet” time*.
 Jesus *has been born* into this world,
 he lived, died, and was raised for us.
 And he brought with him the promises of the prophets like Isaiah,
 He brought with him new and eternal life.
 And we find that new life as his disciples!
 But the ***WHOLE new and eternal life is not yet fully realized.***

This is why *Isaiah is the prophet of hope*.
 He spoke to people long before the birth of Jesus,
 telling them God’s promises of a Savior.
 And, he speaks to us still *today*,
 because we are still waiting for that Savior to return to earth,
 and make all things right.

This is what *Advent is all about---*
waiting to welcome the Christ child,
 and waiting for his ***return!***

In the meantime, our lives, and our world,
 are ***under construction.***
 In the Movie, *The Grand Hotel*,
 this beautiful hotel is hyped up as a glorious destination.
 But when the guests arrive,
 they discover that the hotel is actually ***still under construction!***
 The proprietor of the hotel assures them that everything will be ok.

That’s kind of like ***our lives, and our world.***
 We are under construction, right?

We are under construction,
 and ***awaiting a day when all things will be ok.***
 And as the famous saying goes:
Everything will be okay in the end. If it's not okay, it's not the end.

Everything will be ok in the end.
 And the great news is:
 we don't have to worry about that end—
 because our ***God is already there!***

Meanwhile, we wait.

And as my colleague Pastor Sandy Bach says,
Advent is about ***'waiting well'***.

James 5:7-8 talks about this:

*Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming.
See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop,
patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.*

⁸ *You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.*

That's us--we are waiting for Jesus,
with patience, and with hope.

And there is ***another secret to "waiting well"***.

It's what I talked about with the kids today---waiting with ***gratitude***.

I was reading in a Devotional called *Our Daily Bread*, on December 8th,
and John Blasé told a story about a mother
whose ***children were struggling with gratitude*** before Christmas.
And she wanted something better for their hearts at Christmas.

So, she went through her whole house,
and placed bright red bows on light switches, the refrigerator,
the pantry, the washing machine and dryer, the water faucets.
And with each bow, there was this handwritten note:
***"Some of the gifts God gives us are easy to overlook,
so I've put a bow on them. He is so good to our family.
Let's not forget where the gifts come from"***

I wonder, what if instead of just focusing on our tree, and gifts,
And the lights in our homes...

What if we did put bows on everything?

What if we realized that ***ALL that we have is a GIFT?***

What if we understood that ***ALL that we ARE is a GIFT?***

We all need that attitude of gratitude,
especially at Christmas, don't we?

Think about how that can become our focus this year!

Gratitude is actually what helps us do
 what the ***Advent Conspiracy*** movement promotes---
spending less,
 while ***worshipping*** more,
 and ***giving*** more of time, and talent,
 and ***loving*** more, of everyone, especially the least of these.
Because gratitude brings that true joy, and hope.

It's so easy to be consumed with ***stress and sorrow*** at Christmas.
 Because none of our families are Norman Rockwell Christmas cards,
 And none of our lives are free from pain and suffering.
 We all needed healing and wholeness, don't we?
 I know I do.
 Because we are all broken.
 We are all struggling, in some way or another.

And yet, we are ***surrounded by a culture telling us to celebrate***—
 celebrate the lights, the gifts, the food, the gatherings.
Be happy, it's all good! It's Christmas!

But we find joy in ***celebrating something deeper.***
 We don't just celebrate lights and gifts,
We celebrate a person---a Savior—
 the one who brings ***hope and healing,***
 to our broken lives and a broken world.

No sugar-coating here.
 Jesus knows our ***lives*** are not perfect,
 Jesus knows our ***world*** is a mess.
 And He comes to ***bring hope in the midst*** of all of it!

He comes to remind us that one day---it will all be made right.
 And in the meantime,
He is Emmanuel, God with us.
 Helping us get through each day and night.

So let us ***not forget the Giver,***
As we gather around the gifts.

Let us ***not forget the Savior,***
As we gather around our tables.

And let us ***not forget the Hope of the Future,***
As we wait for a day when love, joy, and peace
REPLACE all pain and sorrow.

That is our ***Good News of the Gospel.***
And for the greatest Giver,
all God's people say, Amen.