

God's Love Goes Up

Scripture: Acts 1: 1-14
Date: May 17, 2020

THE GIFT LOST

I love my mother but there were many quirks about her. She was always forgetting where she put gifts and cards. Often many weeks or months later those items would emerge in some hall closet. However, on the day we might get – as a result - an empty box – with an IOU. You'd get the gift – at some point in time but right now it's a missing mystery !!

We are still riding the tsunami of Covid 19 with an increasing amount of theories or guesses of how it started. There remains an uncertainty of how it is going to end and the mystery of its full impact on our health, finances, vocations or vacations weights upon us. While there is news of 'relaunching' there is still many questions of what that looks like, of when that will be and of how it will take place.

THE GIFT SOUGHT

CULTURE

In our Covid 19 world many students are learning online from home and it has yielded truths of what we already knew – that parents / people know very little and technology knows a lot! Many – adults and children alike – defer to their smart devices to discover information. OK Google or Siri or Microsoft Cortana are now our go tos - no more searching encyclopedias or asking your parents.

VISION 2020

Maranatha YYC has been focussing this year of 2020 on a type of vision quest. A quest of questions seeking answers – or more questions

Who is God?

Who are we to God?

What is our response to all this?

DISCIPLES JOURNEY

The disciples in our text also were asking loads of questions. They had been with Jesus for three years and there were miracles and healings, there were parables and teachings, there was power and possibility and there was hope and faith leading to expectations and exaltations.

Then Jesus died and all seemed lost. The disciples were alone and afraid, frustrated and confused huddled in a locked room.

Finally Jesus rose from the dead mysterious and majestic, sacred and scary. He addressed the sadness of the disciples on their way home to Emmaus, He addressed the doubts of Thomas, He addressed the failures of Peter and He addressed the worries of the women.

The time with Him over the 40 days since the resurrection He had met with them and taught them speaking of a gift – the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It seems like an empty box and they are filled with questions of what this gift truly is.

What was next?

How was it going to happen?

And as He's about to leave them – again – and they pepper Him with more questions looking for what they think the gift is – or should be

THE GIFT SOUGHT

WHAT THE GIFT WAS

The disciples had heard Jesus teach on matters of life and faith before His crucifixion. Jesus continually spoke – in parables – of the kingdom of God, the Kingdom of heaven. Their Jewish ears and minds understood kingdom as authoritative showing a dominion that rules – in righteousness - over all aspects of life.

The Kingdom of God - the realm and the rule of God – was in all aspects of their lives. It included the spiritual code, the moral code and the ethical code. It encompassed the political realm, the economic realm and the social realm.

WHEN THE GIFT WILL COME

The disciples – long used to waiting for redemption from oversight of other nations become were confused about the timing. They had – wrongfully assumed – that Jesus would bring about the kingdom following the triumphant entrance to Jerusalem BEFORE His death. Now they were days and weeks after the crucifixion and all bets were off. Who knows what is expected?

Jesus – as He did before His death / resurrection – spoke of the kingdom of the world now – and the one yet to come. The kingdom of the world here and also yet to come. The physical kingdom, the mental kingdom, the social kingdom and the spiritual kingdom. A kingdom that spoke of being baptized - as John had done but a kingdom that spoke of the power of the Holy Spirit.

Was Jesus now starting the Kingdom?

Was Jesus completing the Kingdom? A kingdom that began at the Lord's supper with a new covenant. One that was empowered by His sacrificial death on the cross - for the sins of the world and one that cumulated by His resurrection from the grave.

Empowering the followers to live life to the full and to live out the Kingdom here and now.

But Jesus does not answer them this question. Rather He speaks of the timing of God being more than human understanding. Jesus answers the disciples' question with a response - to wait for the proper time and to wait for the proper power.

WHERE WILL THE GIFT BE FOUND

The disciples are now curious as to where this gift will be discovered. Jesus declares that the kingdom will not just be for Judea or just be for Samaria but rather the kingdom will be for all - to the very ends of the earth. The promises to Abraham - that he would be a light to the nations - will be fulfilled through the disciples and their disciples and theirs

WHO WILL BRING THE GIFT

For Jesus as ascending – the disciples are left behind. No longer is He physically with them to teach and to heal. The love of God which came to earth as a baby - now leaves earth as a man to take His rightful place in the throne room of heaven.

Oswald Chambers in his devotional Utmost for His Highest – on today May 17 - reminds us that Jesus is fulfilling His glorified presence. The image revealed to the disciples at the transfiguration is now completed with the ascension. The role of Jesus in the crucifixion and the resurrection were for us – that we would be reconciled. The role of Jesus in the transfiguration and the ascension - were for Him – that He would be recognized

The disciples were then instructed that they would be the witness of Christ. They who had been called by Jesus from different vocations into disciples, they who had followed Jesus for three years – heard His teachings and seen His power would be the first to speak of Jesus to others. They who had seen Jesus before and after the resurrection would be the search engines for people inquiring about Jesus

HOW

At this stage the disciples have no more questions to ask of Jesus - He's left. But as they are staring and marvelling as the scene of Jesus' ascension two angels – men dressed in white – suddenly appear before them. They ask why they are looking up - Jesus has gone and until he returns – you need to stop looking up and start looking around – start living out the kingdom gift.

THE GIFT PROMISED

SOURCE - GOD

If Google is the prime search engine – or Wikipedia etc. then what do you do if neither has an answer to your question. To understand and accept a gift's intention of coming one needs to trust the source. James 1: 17 describes God as a giver of good gifts – good and perfect gifts.

James 1: 17 also describes the surety of God's gift giving as the God who does not shift like changing shadows. We want our gift to be a guarantee and not a gamble.

John 16: 7 has Jesus telling the disciples that the Holy Spirit is coming and won't come until he leaves (ascends). Philippians 1: 6 describes the certainty of the God who began a good work in you as being one who will complete it.

SUBJECT - US

The gift is for us but if we perceive the gift as I O U – as in I Owe yoU - then the focus is on us. There was a debt and it was ours – we owed God. On Good Friday we put those debts on the cross trusting in Jesus’ sacrifice to pay our debt.

Perhaps the letters IOU might best be read - I Offer You. Jesus’s offer of life, love, forgiveness, and freedom is the gift of the kingdom that comes from God – not because we’ve earned it or are owed it but because of God’s grace.

One Christmas in my 20’s I didn’t have much money - so I gave out IOU’s. I offered to wash my father’s car, I offered to make my mother dinner – and clean up !! They didn’t owe me anything - in fact I owed them my love and now my faithfulness

STAY - HOW

The disciples were told to go to Jerusalem and wait. The apostle Luke is the biblical writer of Acts and the gospel that bears his name. Luke 24: 49 has Jesus telling the disciples to - stay in the city until you have been clothed / received power. In Luke 24: 54 the disciples worshipped Jesus as they returned to Jerusalem with great joy and then they stayed at the temple praising God. Today’s text of Acts 1: 14 adds another dimension where the group were in prayer.

They were told that the gift of the power of the Holy Spirit will come. God’s love coming down will describe the coming of the Holy Spirit in power. But the focus is the waiting as the timing, the expectations, the understandings are not ours – they are God’s.

The disciples were told to wait – to stay – in Jerusalem. When we think of staying, we think of remain at something – but with an endurance. The disciples were called to stay – to wait with patience and endurance for the gift. They praised God and prayed to / for God as they waited for the next and as they wondered about the next.

APPLICATION / CONCLUSION

We are all on a journey filled with many questions. But we’ve also been privileged to already received many answers. Answers that have given hope, answers that have given purpose and answers that that have given power.

God’s kingdom gift to us has come through His reign and His rule because of Jesus Christ. God’s kingdom gift will be restored – through us. Not just to Israel - but to all who believe

God’s love goes up in the prayers of God’s people - empowered because God’s love went up in the person of Jesus. God’s love brings this kingdom about through His Holy Spirit coming down on us in a timing – in a manner – befitting God’s perfect pleasing Will and glory

Next week - the gift that is promised – is produced with power !!!

AMEN