

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 "God's gifts"

Scripture: Acts 2:37-41, Psalm 46

Hymns: Come, children, join to sing 377, A little child the Saviour came 516 (1-3),
 The Lord bless you 619, The church's one foundation, choruses: Jesus, all for Jesus,
 Psalm 23, Mighty to Save

September 17

Rev. Steve Filyk

Only 99 days till Christmas.

Can you believe it?

Only 99 days till Christmas.

I don't know about you,

But Christmas gets me thinking about gifts.

Gifts like a 10" heavy-duty portable table saw.

With a 25" rip capacity,

And a gravity-rise wheeled stand.

Bought on sale, of course...

I don't know about you,

But Christmas gets me thinking

About all those MATERIAL 'things' I want.

All those MATERIAL 'things' I would like to buy
 or better yet, receive as a gift.

And so I need to constantly remind myself

That life's greatest gifts aren't things that are bought.

The fancy new car quickly loses luster.

The new outfit soon starts feeling drab.

But reading a story with a child or grandchild...

Reconnecting with an old friend...

Watching the sun set with a loved one...

These gifts are enduring.

What's that word that Mastercard uses?... priceless.

Today's New Testament passage take us to the day of Pentecost.

On that day God's Spirit blew through a room

Where Jesus' disciples had been meeting.

They started praising God,

Declaring God's wonders in many different languages.

When visitors to Jerusalem heard the commotion

They were amazed and astonished.

For those visitors heard the locals speaking

In their own native tongues.

All their questioning provided a good opportunity for preaching.

So Peter stepped into the pulpit and started explaining.

He told them they were watching history happen.

That the Jesus whom they had crucified had risen

and had "received from the Father

the promised Holy Spirit

and has poured out what [they]
 now see and hear."ⁱ

We enter this Pentecost story at the end of Peter's sermon.

After listening closely to Peter's message

the people are 'cut to the heart'

and are asking 'how do we respond?'

Peter tells them to repent,

To turn their lives in God's direction,

And Peter calls them to be baptised in Jesus' name:

"Repent and be baptised, every one of you,

in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."ⁱⁱ

Peter's call, God's call, comes with promises:

Forgiveness...

The Holy Spirit.

Gifts that are offered to those who turn towards Christ.

Now forgiveness might not have been something
 That those listeners were thinking about
 When they woke up earlier that morning.

But in that sermon Peter let them know
 that Jesus' blood was on their hands,
 That they had rejected God's Messiah:
 "you with the help of wicked men,
 put him to death by nailing him to the cross."ⁱⁱⁱ

Peter wasn't speaking at the Roman garrison
 So it is obvious that he is speaking figuratively.
 His listeners may not have driven in the nails
 that pierced Christ's hands and feet,
 But they had indeed crucified Christ.

They had spent their lives ignoring God's purposes.
 And when God sent his very own Son,
 they rejected him just the same.

Two thousand years later we share that same guilt,
 Of refusing God's plans and purposes
 And rejecting God's own son.

We feign poverty when someone takes a collection
 for people who are hungry.
 We let the phone go to voicemail
 Instead of making peace with a family member.

When God whispers in our ear
 We turn on the TV instead of paying attention.

Peter's says we share responsibility for the brutal death of Jesus
 But Peter also says that God is offering amnesty for our sins.

He says that when we turn to God
 Our sins are forgiven.
 That this promise is for us and our children.
 Even those of us who live far away.

Forgiveness...
 A slate wiped clean.
 A debt that is paid.
 Freedom from the guilt of past mistakes.

What an incredible gift we are offered in Jesus!

But being released from our past is only part of the gift.
 We are also brought into right relationship with God.
 We are given the promised Holy Spirit.

Now in the past the Holy Spirit
 was the "exotic possession of a chosen few".^{iv}
 Back then people depended on others
 to teach them, guide them, even pray for them.
 Their faith was second-hand.

But Peter declares that in these last days
 God's Spirit has been poured out on all people.^v

When Jesus was exalted to the Father,
 He has sent us the Spirit to be "God with us".^{vi}

The Spirit is "another Counsellor to be with [us] forever",
 Who will renew us and helps us.^{vii}

With the Spirit, God's life becomes our life.
 And God's purposes start becoming our purposes.

And so where we once would easily overlook those appeals for aid
 God's Spirit reminds us of all our material blessings.
 Where we once would have snubbed those who crossed us,
 We show them grace.

Where we once depended solely on the faith of others,
 Or maybe only knew things ABOUT God,
 We now know God.

We experience God's active hand in our lives:
 Encouraging us, directing us, correcting us.

Peter call out: "Repent and be baptised, every one of your,
 in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.
 And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."^{viii}

Turning to Christ and being baptised offers great promise:
 Forgiveness...
 The Holy Spirit.

But it would be untrue to say that you only receive these gifts
 If you get wet.

When Peter preaches at Cornelius' home
 The Spirit falls on those present
 before he wraps up his sermon,
 let alone starts sprinkling anyone with water.^{ix}

And yet it is through baptism
 That these gifts are clearly seen,
 It is in baptism that they are best welcomed and celebrated.

That is why Peter calls the people to be baptized.
 That is why Jesus sent out his disciples to do the same.
 That is why we baptise in our church.

Think of what you saw this morning.

There was water,
 Poured out into a font.
 Splashed over Abel's head.

Water is a universal symbol of life and refreshment...
 You can go without food for thirty days
 But won't last three days without water.

The water that is splashed over Abel
 Is a sign of God's renewing Spirit
 Now poured out on all people.
 God with him. God with us.

The act of pouring water
 is also a symbol of cleansing:
 Before we eat we wash off the day's grime with water.
 We take a shower before we head out to school or work.

The water running off Abel's head
 Gives us a picture of that cleansing
 That God's offers us in Jesus.

This token external washing
 Is a sign of the internal washing,
 the God accomplishes in our hearts.

PAUSE

It is only 99 days till Christmas.
 You may find yourself thinking of gifts you want to receive
 Or gifts you would like to pick up for others.

We'll consider the gifts that God offers us TODAY in Jesus:
 Amnesty for past sins and mistakes;
 God's renewing presence not just around us,
 But inside us!

When Peter spoke about these gifts
 Three thousand came forward to receive them;
 Three thousand were baptised that day.

Is there any reason why you shouldn't also be baptised?
 The promise Peter reminds us:
 "is for you and your children
 and for all who are far off—[even those here in Kamloops]
 for all whom the Lord our God will call."^x

Thanks be to God. Amen

ⁱ Acts 2:33 NIV

ⁱⁱ Acts 2:38,39 NIV

ⁱⁱⁱ Acts 2:23 NIV

^{iv} William H. Willimon *Acts* 35

^v Acts 2:17 Peter quoting the book of Joel

^{vi} *Living Faith* 4.1

^{vii} John 14:16 and *Living Faith* 4.1

^{viii} Acts 2:38,39 NIV

^{ix} See Acts 10 & 11

^x Acts 2:39 NIV