

Christmas Eve: Homily

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks, John and Greg. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to have you all with us celebrating tonight.

As we think about Christmas and the gifts that we're giving and receiving tomorrow, and maybe some of you tonight, maybe some of you even earlier, you might be tempted to think that Black Friday is the greatest day where all the most gifts are bought.

Well, I'm told that you'd be wrong. In fact, tonight is when more Christmas gifts are bought than any other time. Now, I hope that's not true of anyone in this room.

I believe better things for you and of you, but we talk about gifts, right, because that's a core part of what we do at Christmas. But I want to flip the script a little bit tonight and talk not about giving gifts or about receiving gifts, but I want to talk instead about being a gift.

Now, some people think that they are God's gift to mankind, and that's certainly not a good thing, and it's not a compliment, and that's not what I mean when I talk about being a gift.

[1 : 1 0] Of course, you might say to someone, wow, you are such a gift, and that's a nice sentiment. It gets a little bit closer to what I mean. It doesn't get us quite to where we want to go, though, so I'm going to invite you to turn to page 6 of your worship guide and look for a minute with me at John chapter 17, because he shows us something here a little bit different about being a gift.

And so, yes, I mentioned earlier for our offertory that God does give us a gift. He gives us the gift of Jesus. That's what we celebrate at Christmas. In fact, John tells us that earlier in his gospel in chapter 3, verse 16, that famous verse, For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, that we have eternal life.

But that's not actually the only gift that God the Father gives, because the gospel of John here tells us that there is something that Jesus wanted to unwrap.

There's a gift that Jesus wanted and a gift that he came for, and you might ask, what was it? It might be more appropriate to ask, who was it?

Because the gospel of John here in chapter 17 tells us that it was us. God's people are the ones that Jesus unwraps as his gift.

[2 : 3 1] So it's important. It's, in fact, the greatest importance that God gives us Jesus. But it's also important that God gives Jesus us.

And so I want you to look with me for a minute here at John chapter 17, verse 2. Jesus says here that God has given him all to give eternal life.

So since you have given authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all you have given him, all the people that God has given to Jesus. Verse 6. I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world.

Verse 6 again. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. And finally, verse 7. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you.

And so the point of all of this is to say that if you are a Christian, God gave you to Jesus. If you're a Christian, John is telling us here that God gave you to Jesus.

[3 : 40] And this is not just some mere sentimental reality that I'm telling you. It's so important, in fact, that the authors of our church's Confession of Faith, who wrote it back in the 1600s, included this in chapter 8.

That it was important to remember that God gave to Jesus a people for himself. Ephesians chapter 1, verse 4, tells us that God chose these people before the beginning of the world.

And so, yes, Christmas means that God gave Jesus to us as our gift. It also means that we're Jesus' gift. If we belong to him, we're the gift that God the Father gave to him.

And Jesus came. He came to die for us. We celebrate the beginning of his life as a human on this earth at Christmas. And it reminds us of how he lived the rest of his life.

It reminds us of the fact that he came, that he died for us. He died the death that we should have died. He took the punishment that we deserved. And he lived the perfect life that we should have lived.

[4 : 43] If you have been with us in worship for a while, you've been in present when we've confessed Heidelberg Catechism question 1 together. Where we ask the question, what is your only comfort in life and in death?

By the way, spoiler, that's going to be our Confession of Faith this Sunday, day after tomorrow. I hope to see you all there. The answer to what our comfort in life and in death is, is this.

That I am not my own, but belong, body and soul, in life and death to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. You don't belong to yourself if you're a Christian.

You belong to Jesus. You belong to Jesus because God gave you as a gift. The answer finishes, it's a long one, but it finishes like this.

Because I belong to Him, Christ by His Holy Spirit assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for Him. Notice how that sentence starts.

[5 : 41] Because I belong to Him. Because Jesus came as a gift and He came to receive a gift. One man says this about that confession.

We live in a world where we expect to find comfort in possessions, pride, power, and position. But the Catechism teaches us that our only true comfort comes from the fact that we don't even belong to ourselves.

How countercultural and counterintuitive. We can endure suffering and disappointment in life and face death and the life to come without fear of judgment. Not because of what we've done or what we own or who we are.

But because of what we do not possess. Namely, our own selves. This shapes our whole existence. The first thing we need to know as a Christian is that we belong to Jesus and not ourselves.

Now this isn't just some intellectual or doctrinal proposition for us to be reminded of. But it is what we are encouraged of and what holds us up as we live our lives.

[6 : 45] It means we belong to Jesus as we face sadness and loss. We have the words of 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. That we grieve as those who don't have...

We do not grieve as those who have no hope. We can grieve knowing that we have hope. Because we belong to someone else. If we rejoice and we're filled with excitement about Christmas, we know there's even more joy to come for us in the future.

We don't have to worry about the joy being scarce. We don't have to worry about it getting less and less. We don't have to worry about joy becoming dimmer and dimmer as our bodies become weaker and weaker.

Instead, we know that we belong to God. And the greatest joy that we have is greater than what we have now. It's more than we could think or imagine. It's more permanent than any other allegiance or commitment.

We're grateful for family at Christmas. And we're also reminded that God's commitment to us is even greater than that. Psalm 27 verse 10 reminds us that my father and my mother have forsaken me.

[7 : 53] The Lord will take me in. And we have our promise too from Isaiah chapter 49. God speaks of his people and says, Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.

Your walls are continually before you. God has written the names of his people on his hands. Because they belong to him.

And so my question for you tonight is this. Are you part of the gift that the father gave to the son? Are you part of the gift that the father gave to the son?

Look with me again on page 6 verse 2. To give eternal life to all whom you have given him. So there's a limited number. God has not given everyone as a gift to Jesus.

Verse 3 tells us what eternal life looks like. This is eternal life. That they know you. The only true God. And Jesus Christ whom you have sent. And so you know that you're part of the gift.

[8 : 58] That the father has given to the son. In verse 3. You know him. The only true God. And you know Jesus Christ whom God has sent. The way that we talk about knowing God in this way.

As Christians. Is we talk about the idea of faith. And we think of faith as three different things. Faith is first knowledge. It's knowing the truth of the gospel. It's knowing what the Bible teaches us.

About the fact that Jesus came. He lived the perfect life that we should have lived. He died the death that we should have died. He calls people to follow him. As his disciples. But it's not just enough to have that knowledge.

We also have to have belief. We have to know and think those things are true. But even having belief is not enough. Because the Bible tells us. Even the demons believe these things. And they shudder for them.

And so we have to have a final component. Which is trust or action. That we live as if these things are true. In our lives. And so that's how we know. If we're part of the gift. That the father has given to the son.

[9 : 54] If we have faith in Jesus Christ. That's how we know. That no matter how sad something might be. In this life. We don't grieve. As those who have no hope. And that's how we know.

How much joy we have in this life. There's even more and greater joy to come. If that's something that's still confusing for you. Or you have questions about. I invite you to turn in your worship guide.

To page 10. Page 10 gives a fuller explanation. That I won't review right now. About what it means to be part of the gift. That the father has given to the son. And I encourage you.

If you have doubts or questions. Or objections about that. To take this home with you. Take some time. To read through it. Come back. And join us on Sunday at 1030. But know that.

We want you to be part of the gift. That God the father has given to the son. We don't want you to just give gifts. Or receive gifts. We want you to be a gift.

[10 : 50] We want you to be a part. Of God's people. In the original Toy Story. Which came out all the way back. In 1995.

Feels like yesterday. For some of us. We're faced with a tension. Between Buzz Lightyear and Woody. As Woody realizes. That he might be about to be replaced. As Andy's favorite toy.

And so this conflict between them. As they're fighting with each other. Unfortunately. If you're familiar. Leads them to Sid's house. Sid being the evil next door neighbor. Who delights in torturing. And destroying toys.

Now Buzz Lightyear at this point. Has an emotional breakdown. Because Buzz comes to grips. With the reality. That he is not actually a space ranger. This is a conflict. That he and Woody have.

Throughout the beginning of the movie. Woody's trying to convince him. He can't actually fly. He doesn't actually have the ability. To kill other toys with his laser. And Buzz has been in denial about it.

[11 : 48] Until he finds out. After he gets thrown out of a window. That he's not able to actually fly. And then it's really cemented for him. Over at Sid's house. He sees a commercial. Selling action figures.

That look just like him. And so he loses all hope. In this moment. Even as Sid ties him. To a rocket. And Buzz is facing imminent death. He's completely passive.

Doesn't fight back. He doesn't try to free himself. He doesn't help Woody at all. In fact. He gives up in resignation. And he says this. I'm not a space ranger.

I'm just a toy. A stupid. Little. Insignificant toy. Woody reminds him. Whoa. Hey. Wait a minute. Being a toy. Is a lot better. Than being a space ranger.

Buzz says. Yeah. Right. And then Woody reminds him. No. It is. Look. Over in that house. Is a kid. Who thinks you are the greatest. And it's not because you are a space ranger pal.

[12 : 45] It's because you are a toy. You are his toy. Woody finishes his pep talk. Buzz has this confused and bewildered look on his face.

And finally he pulls up his right foot. So he can look at the bottom of his right shoe. And you know what's written on the bottom of his right shoe. In correct letters. The name Andy.

Because Andy puts his name on all his toys. Reminded of his true identity. Reminded of reality. Buzz finally has hope and trust again.

He smiles with his determined look on his face. And he takes the toolbox that's on top of the milk crate that is trapping Woody. He pushes it off so that they can continue to fight back against Sid and escape.

Brothers and sisters. Because Jesus came as a baby at Christmas. We have something much better and greater than a name written on our foot. We have our names engraved on God's hands.

[13 : 47] We are the gift given from the Father to the Son. Jesus came to this earth for his gift. He came for us.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that you haven't left us alone in this universe. But instead, you have chosen a people for yourself.

We thank you for calling us to you and for calling us here this evening. We ask that you would be at work by your spirit in our hearts, stirring up our love for you and our trust in you.

We ask that you would bless our celebrations tonight and tomorrow. that as we join together, we would not lose sight of you and your glory. We ask these things grateful that we don't have to earn them or deserve them.

But instead, we ask them in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.