

**The Joy of 'Right Giving'**  
Sermon on Isaiah 61:1-4,8-11  
Sunday December 11, 2005  
Trinity United, Ottawa  
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***"Jehovah, Alleluia, the Lord will provide.  
Jehovah, Alleluia, the Lord will provide".***

***"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me...  
the Lord has anointed me to bring good news... to provide for those who mourn -  
to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit..."***

This prophet Isaiah, a spiritual leader who pushed and pulled his exiled people toward their God, turns today from his warnings of judgement - to relaying heavenly messages of hope. He envisions an exchange of the symbols of human brokenness and grief, for the garments of healing and celebration. By Jehovah's grace, each shall receive what they need and all shall exult in joyful praise!

In this Advent of the Christ coming, are we not all enjoined in Isaiah's prophetic calling, to bring about God's good news? Maybe we too are anointed to be God's messengers - of hope and help and healing - to those who mourn deep losses, those who are imprisoned by pain, oppressed by prejudice, broken-hearted by loneliness or poverty or exile to this chilly country? Maybe we, like the prophets of old, will be surprised to find that we are the unlikely ones who are called to speak and somehow equipped by the Spirit to be agents of this promise: that the Lord will provide. I think so. Through us and with us, the Lord does provide.

Today is our Festival of Sharing. It is a Festival because our giving to others' needs feels so good we can't help but celebrate. Sharing our relative surfeit of consumer bounty with less fortunate neighbours at Christmastime is ingrained in our

Christian consciousness. This week Trinity packages up and provides Christmas goods for fifty-some families, most of whom live just over the hill and beyond the woods in Carlington. They need *some* of what we have *lots* of. And in our Christian understanding, we don't own these goods that they need, we are just borrowing them. The goods of all Creation are God's, gifted to us to share. And so, we do.

We, who are graced to be the givers of what is needed and the bearers of God's promise to provide, experience real joy in sharing, when we give with humble awareness. Awareness of what it feels like to be a recipient of charity or assistance. Awareness of the unequal and uncomfortable power relationship that having more and less wealth can create. Awareness of the gifts of different cultures and religions that colour God's world. Awareness that because we are all deeply connected and our souls ache when others suffer, **our own deep spiritual need to give may be even greater than their need to receive!**

In this season of gift giving, consciousness of our selves and our needs as givers, as well as the needs of the one to be gifted, will enhance our joy. Gift-giving is a concrete expression of our feelings - a symbolic act of love and caring. So taking time to contemplate some questions may save us a lot of time in the Mall and a lot of discomfort by the Christmas tree: Why do we want to give a gift to this person? What need of ours does it express? What need of theirs will it recognize?

Think about what you know of this person. If they are at a place in life where we really need a winter coat or one new toy, the useful item itself meets a need and that generates joy. But once someone can pretty much afford to buy whatever they need and pretty much anything they want, gifts can fulfill other purposes. They become more symbolic and self giving. They can even be sacramental.

The gifts that bring the well-to-do joy are often small things that indicate we are truly known and uniquely appreciated as a person, by this person. They are symbols that speak like a prophet to our deep human need to be recognized and respected and enjoyed.

I am always delighted remembering the year that my teenage son made his way to the Toronto Women's Bookstore to find a Christmas gift for me. When he scouted out my old haunt for a feminist novel that I'd really want to read, I felt like he had discovered his mom as a person, with a personality. That present marked a new stage in our relationship. So as well as pleased - I was proud!

Good gift-giving is a spiritual strength. It makes us agents of the prophet, making real the Christ message that God will provide...materially and spiritually...all that we really need. Amidst the shopping frenzy of this season, stop and recall, that herein lies the joyful news in Christmas presents:

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