

12-10-78

Two verses of the lesson read this morning, I would like to note again from TEV. They are Romans 15:5 and 13 "May God, the source of patience and encouragement, enable you to have the same point of view among yourselves by following the example of Christ Jesus...May God, the source of hope, fill you with all joy and peace by means of your faith in him".

Perhap<sup>s</sup> your attention has already focused on the large Christmas package we have before us. And you may be wondering what is in the box. Would it be something we could use? I imagine that all of you have been wondering about the present.

We are going to open the present, but before we do you'll agree that this is the time for thinking about gifts and Christmas, this being the second Sunday in Advent. We are all looking forward to getting gifts for Christmas. Today I want to give you some hints and ideas about gifts to give this Christmas. Our text and our big box are going to help us.

~~Open~~ <sup>Box</sup> there are no toys or candy in here. This rather is an Advent cube and it reminds us of all sorts of personal gifts I can give people this Christmas.

We'll think a lot about gifts from now until Christmas and we'll put up bright lights. Some will bake cookies,

go to parties. God's people will do more than those things. This ought to be a joyful time for us, but it needs to be a serious time too when we think about how we should act toward one another. (2)

Well, our cube - based on the text - suggests six personal gifts we can give to other people...not only at Christmas but thru out the year. Let's look at them.

1. First, let us practice giving joy to other people. Sometimes we can do this by actually giving a visible gift. How joyful it might make a person to have a gift from you, apart from a special occasion...a gift for no special reason.

But we can bring joy to other people when we share something more worthwhile than anything they can hold in their hands. You know, today someone is waiting to hear your voice, to feel the touch of your hand, to know that you care. Sometimes only you can make someone else feel joy. Of course the basic joy is Christmas joy "Joy to the world, the Lord is come". God's people have joy because they have Christ and they know that thru him they hear God's voice, they feel the touch of his hand, they know that he cares. And many people, outside the community of God's people, will not know those things, lest we bring the joy to them.

2. Now then, we turn our cube to the gift of hope.

We live in a whirl of change today. Often we see it

going in directions which ~~a~~<sup>are</sup> wrong. Some sense the endless-  
ness of human conflicts, the continuing strife among the <sup>(3)</sup>  
races, the seemingly deteriorating moral and ethical cli-  
mate, the burgeoning spiral of inflation, the darkness of  
~~thwarted~~ personal aspirations. Many have lost hope because of some  
particular situation or happening in their lives.

And it could be that the most needed spiritual quality  
needed today is hope. Oh, there seems to be an adequate  
supply of head-in-the-cloud psuedo-religious optimism.  
Rare tho is the hope which Christ gives.

The people of God can give hope to others, and in doing  
so generate hope for themselves. We can do so by emphasising  
the Lordship of Christ, knowing that he is in control  
even tho there is much around us which seems to deny his  
power and presence. We can call attention to the goal  
which he has for every life . . . it's re-creation into the  
image of God himself. We can know that God is working out  
his will, even though the mysterious ways often distress us  
and even cause us to doubt. How will the people of this  
planet, indeed of this community, have hope lest we who share  
the hope of Christ share it with them?

3. Now we turn our cube to another gift suggestion, the  
gift of peace.

See how peace is needed today....especially with the  
anxious, and the "forn within" - - the ones bothered



by many things, the ones experiencing various kinds of un-  
rest, the inhabitants of ravaged countries, the ones who do  
now know <sup>where</sup> their next meal is coming from, all searchers  
and drifters. How many of our lives are like a troubled  
sea where we are buffeted about by the winds of change and  
uncertainty . . . so much so that we seek to cover our need  
for peace by busyness, by drink, by lots of things which  
we think will solve our problems, but which only really  
cover them, and usually not too successfully.

Well, we people of God, can give the gift of peace by  
living at peace with one another, and by pointing out that  
all peace begins with the peace of Christ. After all, his  
very birth was accompanied by the promise of peace to those  
who please him. Peace comes thru the knowledge of the love  
of God which does not hold our sins against us, and which  
we can announce ~~that~~ to those who believe their sin is for-  
given. We can give peace to others by leading them to a  
crude cross on which the prince of peace hangs, strangely,  
but glorious, giving his peace to us. Who shall give the  
world the "peace which passes all understanding" if it is  
not the people of God who themselves have experienced his  
peace?

4. Now the cube turns to a precious gift, tho perhaps  
an unusual one....patience. Here is a needed grace . .  
to be long-suffering and understanding. How we need some-

one to be patient with us...how we need to be patient....  
whether we are young or whether we are old. 5

Well, we can give this gift to others by living out a more relaxed life style, by stopping our frantic efforts to make things happen, usually we succeed in making ourselves miserable and unhappy. That isn't to say that we give up the urgency of living fruitfully, but we can cease being fretful, jammed, and trying to accomplish too <sup>much</sup> ~~much~~ too fast.

Again who will give the gift of patience to others lest it be the people of God who have received the understanding and love of God?

5. Another side of our cube suggests still another gift for us to give . . . Courage.

Perhaps courage is underrated. Here is something which is needed by all at times, and by many much of the time. Who of us have not had to make difficult decisions, take some hard action when the heart was faint. How many times have we seen an obvious need, perhaps to speak out, but were afraid to , afraid of being branded foolish, or of losing friends. How many times have we been afraid to witness to Jesus Christ. And how often we have been afraid to extend ourselves to others, perhaps to our own son or daughter to reestablish communication.

This gift of courage, which God has given us if we will

receive it, comes largely thru a certainty of God's constant presence in our lives. And we give it to others by reminding them of his presence in their lives. That is what Christmas is all about . . . God is here. You do what you have to and know that even in failure God stands with you. The Advent message is Immanuel, God with us. So take heart and share the gift of courage, God's presence with others this Christmas. (6)

6. Then our cube has still another side to it. It is the real gift of Christmas - Jesus. This is God's greatest gift to us . . . and the gift which we must share with others

Who of us questions the world's need for Christ. If you do question that, you have no business sitting here with the people God. Oh, how the body of Christ is weakened by those who do not believe yet put on the show of believing.

Here is a joyous responsibility which we have at all times, but one we especially need to think about at Christmas - to give Jesus Christ. Give Jesus Christ - not just the baby Jesus of the crib, but the Christ of the cross as well

Really there are no exceptions, every one needs Christ. Of course, there are those who deny their need....but there are no exceptions. If you do not have Christ in your life, this is a good time to receive the gift of Christ for yourself. He is the perfect personal gift, both to



receive and to give.

7

The people of his community, the Church, give by telling of him. They take the other five gifts and make them a part of their lives, thus making them believable to others and in the process making Jesus believable to them too.

Let this advent cube tell you what<sup>^</sup> to look for, what to shop for, what to give this Christmas and thru the year.