

Sunday, August 24, 2014  
Accepting the Gift  
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As I thought about the act of accepting a gift, I couldn't help but touch on the meaning of giving. I thought about the gifts themselves.

And I wondered, thinking back to the Christmas story as told in the Bible... I wondered if the three wise men were re-gifting in a way, when that brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh...to offer the Baby Jesus. I wondered what their expectations were. How did they think the parents would respond?

Could these gifts be some things they found around the house that really never got used much. And by the way, "What is myrrh, anyway?"

Well, in fact, it's a sap that is said to have many medicinal uses and could prove very useful for a poor family with a new born child.

Is it important to know what a gift is? Or more important to just accept it in the spirit in which it was given?

So, again, we know little about how the baby's parents accepted the gifts or what they might have said.

If Joseph and Mary were not sure what to think, how might they have received those gifts?

"Oh, you shouldn't have..."

There are at times, those awkward moments when it comes to giving and receiving gifts. It seems to me it should be the easiest thing in the world. Giving. Receiving. It a part of the natural flow of humankind.

This all brings us to the quandary I have. Is it easy to accept gifts? If not, why not?

"It is Better to Receive, than to give."

That's just wrong...

Unless you are the recipient from an organ donor. Many of us have pledged to be organ donors and have no idea who our organs might benefit.

But, we do it because we want to help someone else. To make their life better. That may be the ultimate gift to give.

I am sure many of us have been a part of some Secret Pal exercise in our lives, maybe at work, or in school. We all draw names from a jar and then give thought to a nice gift we can secretly give to the chosen one;

maybe once a week, or at random times until the game is ended.

How do we feel when we participate? Better as the Secret Pal; giving the gift? Or Better as the one who gets this surprise gift?

In fact, **is** it easier to accept that gift from some unknown benefactor until we all take off our masks, so to speak, at the end?

Maybe it's even easier to give that gift if the person doesn't know it came from us. And I know we all try to figure out who gave it to us, with CSI-like detective work to uncover style, expense, and choice of gift.

But, let's think about receiving the gift. Accepting the gift...

What thoughts do we have when we are given a gift?

Not a gift we expected or maybe felt we deserved.

But, a gift out of the clear blue sky. A gift such as this morning, this day, these friends, and this park.

We might feel vulnerable, or off guard, or indebted. We might feel, "Oh Great, now what do I need to give them."

Or we might realize that something I did, a choice I made, or a word I spoke, might have put me here at the receiving end of this gift-giving event.

I think that could be a dilemma for some of us.

We don't always remember what we might have done to deserve this. Or we might not want our act acknowledged.

Altruism usually doesn't have an agenda. Sometimes we do good because we are good. And nothing more needs to be said.

At other times we may suspect the gift is a prepayment on deeds to be done. Quid pro Quo.

But, truthfully, I think most gifts are deserved and while the Baby Jesus may not have performed as anticipated on day one, he eventually is said to have done countless acts of kindness, compassion, and bravery.

Sometimes there is a such a need for kindness that we are willing to give gifts to those we believe are capable of such acts even before they themselves know this or perform such acts.

In teaching, and likely other fields, this is called the "Anticipatory Set."

Acts of kindness prompt us to respond the same way.

So, when we accept that gift it is both a reward for who we are and what we've done, and a token of appreciation for what we may do.

And I have no doubt, the gift moves us to act in a giving way.  
The Gift that Keeps on Giving.

I think the act of accepting a gift can be an act of compassion, grace, and love.

When a child hands us a frozen glob of clay with patches of color painted on, and says, “Here, I made this for you” we accept it with a smile. We know it came out of love.  
And we embrace it as an expression of a very special bond between us.

I think the act of giving can be a way to heal. To love. To express feelings. And to connect.  
And to receive and accept the gift is the same.  
Accepting the gift completes the mutual act of recognition and respect, and shows a willingness to be in touch with another human’s heart.  
Having a gift to give with no one to accept it, is no more fulfilling than having a ticket to fly and nowhere to land.

My cousin’s former wife wrote that she’d just been delivered a gift from someone unknown. She was delighted with the tea cup and saucer and wondered who sent it. It made her feel special and curious.

So I told her she was a perfect recipient and that she had already fulfilled the wishes of the giver by gratefully accepting this special gift with joy.

Others told her ways to find out who sent it.

Is the gift better accepted as we focus more on how it made us feel than on how to respond to the giver?

We are taught to say “Thank you” and “please”, of course, but maybe we should be taught that sometimes life is about accepting the gift, and maybe being the next one to give.

The Gift that Keeps on Giving.

Look around us today at the world created for us. We are not expected to thank the creator. But, we might still.

We are not expected to seek out the one who brought this feeling of joy to us, but we might still search for them.

We are not expected to create such a world, such a place, such a feeling, for someone else, but we might find ourselves wanting to share this with others.

Accepting the gift is what makes the exchange so meaningful. While comedians might show how clever they are hugging themselves, it really means so much more when our arms and heart are wrapped around someone else.

We get back the love when we give it.

Open your heart to accept the gifts that life can offer. And then, Please, pass it on.....