

UNWRAPPING (AND USING!) THE GIFT

Ephesians 2:1-10

Intro

Our opening passage is crazy important because of what it consolidates into a nice portable place. It reminds us that there is a difference between being alive and really living and that really living is not something that we can earn, let alone acquire: it is a gift from God.

Now there is also another truth that is spoken in between the lines of these verses and it is this: putting this gift of grace through faith into action, that is a lifelong journey that is never perfect or complete until we are able to be in the closer presence of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And it still something that is able to grow as we lean into God in ever greater ways through the real living that he has blessed us with.

I get that it may sound like an enigma wrapped in a riddle.

We have been given a gift. We need to unwrap it, take it out of the box, use it, and as we do, we will continually find new ways that this gift is able to bless us. The scripture reads this way.

Ephesians 2:1-10

²You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— ⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Proverbs 3:1-8

Intro

Our second passage takes the 'open the gift and use it' mentality and shows us just how all-encompassing these steps of truly living are: carry it with you everywhere you go and allow it to become such an integral part of who you are becoming, that it is like the beating of your heart. The scripture reads this way.

Proverbs 3:1-8

³My child, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; ² for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare they will give you. ³ Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them round your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and of people. ⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not

rely on your own insight. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. ⁸ It will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body.

'Unwrapping (and Using!) the Gift'

So this has been a busy week for the church.

In addition to the regular activities, we also hosted the nursery's school's closing program (the kids did an awesome job with all their songs!), the funerals for Audrey Morrison and Russell Funk (both felt absolutely appropriate for who they were), as well as responding to several folks who were admitted to the hospital.

In a few ways it was tiring. To say that it wasn't, yeah, that wouldn't be truthful.

In the same breath, though, it was reassuring and even energizing to see, hear, and feel the multitude of diverse and powerful ways that God is at work...and yes, I absolutely mean that in regard to the funeral services as well.

That's an amazing and wonderful thing that is so true about this gift of faith: when you lean into it and put it use, you are able to be blessed in ways that you really never expected.

We hear about that in regard to mission trips, in how people come back energized because of the ways that God was able to work through them, and how they saw God working around them.

Yes, there may be tiredness, but it is buoyed by an energy that can never be fully articulated, and yet is absolutely known to be there. It's a God thing!

Well, it isn't just on mission trips: it's in the midst of 'everyday' life too, when we not only acknowledge this gift of faith, but unwrap it and put it to use.

And that is something that can be done regardless of how old you may be, the sorts of skills and interests you may have, or how long you have been able to say, 'I believe.'

For example, last weekend we were cleaning out the barn and we decided that we no longer needed to hang on to a patio table that has been stored there. So we did what all good Three Bridger's do: we put it out at the curb...to see if anyone would like it for free!

Well, someone did...and it turned out to be one of our neighbors up on High Street who was picking it up for her grandson. As we chatted with her, she ended up talking about someone whom both of us knew: Tillie Hotchkin. Specifically, how she had been so affected by how Tillie would send out notes and cards for all different sorts of celebrations and points of recognition.

The reason I bring this up, is because I remember sitting with Tillie in her home and she would, on occasion, lament how she was just not strong enough to do all the things that she wanted to do, or that she felt like she should do. She never said it explicitly, but she felt like she was letting people, that she was letting God, down. She knew about the notes and cards...but it didn't feel like it was enough.

I didn't agree with her then (and yes, I did tell her so), and low 5 ½ years after her death and Tillie's impact, and I believe she would agree with me saying, God's impact through her, is still being felt. Tillie put her faith into action in the ways that she could and the world is still being blessed by God through those actions because someone else was impacted and picked up that mantle.

I don't know how deep you feel your belief in God is.

Here's what I do know, that if you unpack the gift of faith that you have received and being to use it, God will be able to impact you and those around you. Yes, you've got to carry your faith with you everywhere you go and you've got to put it into action.

How I do that will be different than how you do it which will be different than how the person sitting next to you will do it. Praise be to God for His diversity of blessings!

And again, that can be done regardless of your age or how long you feel you have believed.

God has blessed you with the gift of faith: let's put it into action!

So let's talk about that...and we'll make everyone just a little uncomfortable. What gifts have you been blessed with...and how can you put them into action? The community of faith is where we need to talk about this sort of stuff so that when we head out into the world (that I have been told might not believe in God as strongly as we do inside these walls...yup, I've heard the rumor too!), then we are that much closer to trusting that not only can God work through us and our faith...but that He will.

So, what are your gifts? How can you put those gifts of faith into action?

After Sermon Prayer

Holy God, You have blessed us with the gift of faith. But it is when we unpack this gift and put it into action that Your blessings are able to flow in even greater ways. Lord, help us to carry this gift of faith everywhere we go, and use it in all of the ways that unique to each and every one of us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.