Series: The Gifts of Christmas

Message: “The Gift of Reconciliation”

Text: 1 John 4:7-12

Date: December 14, 2014

Location: Christ Community EFC

I got this new app on my phone the other day, and according to it there are only 10 days, 11 hours and 45 minutes till Christmas!

Like many of you, I’m stating to wonder what I’m getting for Christmas.

As we head into Christmas, we are looking at “The Gifts of Christmas”.

These are gifts you won’t find under the tree but in the heart of all who truly know the real Gift of Christmas, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We started by looking at the gift of expectancy. The promise that if we seek Jesus we will find Him and the reminder that He is returning.

Last week we look at the gift of grace. We have received grace, what we do not deserve from our Heavenly Father, His Son Jesus Christ and forgiveness of our sins.

And now, in that grace we are to extend that same grace to others.

Grace leads us to the next gift of Christmas, the gift of reconciliation.

**Let’s watch this week’s video.**

I know what you’re thinking. Well, maybe I don’t but I know what I was thinking after I saw that video.

Here’s a guy who is on the down side of middle age, he knows he has made some mistakes in the past and he just wants to make things right with his kids.

He’s done everything he can think of so this time...this season...he goes…himself.

As he goes, he gives himself....a new beginning.

In 1885 Christina Rosetti wrote the hymn Love Came Down at Christmas.

“Love Came Down At Christmas”

“Love came to us. God is love. Love is God. Love came to us at Christmas.”

In the video we have a father taking the initiative to love like God as he tries to make things right with his family.

Things happen in life, and in families that can be very difficult.

Words get said. Emotions get strained. Feelings get hurt. Expectations do not get met. Sometimes there is just sin that needs to be dealt with.

Blame gets assigned, leaving behind painful wounds that never properly heal. It happens. Life happens.

If we are not careful relationships in our family, and in our church family, that were meant to be beautiful, can be bruised.

And that can lead to a brokenness that creates a chasm that can seem difficult, if not impossible, to bridge back to health and wholeness.

But God gives us the gift of love.

One of the beautiful parts of Christmas is that God began building a relational bridge back to our world.

The relationship that God the Father longed to have with the world He created and His people was in bad shape and in need of rescue.

Instead of waiting on us to change, God took the initiative to love and make things right with the world, with his family.

The only reason we can come into the presence and be in relationship with God and celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas is because the Heavenly Father gave such a gift out of a heart filled with love.

The apostle John writes these words about this incredible gift of love in 1 John 4:19. “**We love because he loved us first**.”

**If you would, please turn in your Bible to 1 John, 1 John chapter 4, but I want to back up a bit and pick up at verse 7.**

Thirty-five years ago, reading these verse during a small home Bible study, I came to saving faith in Jesus Christ as I understood that God is the one who took the initiative.

God came to me, He come to you. He doesn’t hesitate, harbor bad feelings, or let pride get in His way!

He doesn’t want to get even or lash out to make us hurt.

God knew that if things were going to be made right with him, he had to make the first move. He had to give the first gift.

He had to be the one to make things right.

And so he did; God the Father made the first move to rescue our broken relationship with him and bridge the chasm for a new and fresh start.

It was all based around love and relationship!

In 1 John 4 we see this theme of “love” wrapping the gift of God who sent his Son.

We see “love” being the central theme of all relationships mentioned in this passage which shines bright like the star that shone over the manger in Bethlehem.

Look at these words from John through the fresh lens of the Father’s love.

1 John 4:7-12 “**Beloved,** [Dear friends] **let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.**

**8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.**

**9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.**

**10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation** [atoning sacrifice, the satisfactory pay, the sacrifice that we satisfy God’s wrath and judgment] **for our sins.**

**11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us**.

A perfected and true love is a love that is in right relationship with others; especially in a right relationship with our family.

It is the love God gives us.

And because God makes himself known as our Heavenly Father, that perfected love certainly means we find ourselves in a growing and right relationship with him, our Father in Heaven.

He loved us completely and gave the gift of his Son that would make a way for us to make our relationships new and true.

What was it the father in the video said? “I’m all about new beginnings.”

Honestly, we fight day in and day out so that we never have to change. I even struggle with the change of the angle of the TV when Dana put up Christmas decorations and had to move the TV a couple inches.

We want to keep things the way they are...the way they have always been.

God says, “After this (the gift of Jesus)...nothing can be the same.”

Do you remember the story of the Prodigal Son?

We tell this story at Vacation Bible School or maybe during Sunday school, but seldom see it as a Christmas story.

Jesus said in Luke 15:11-12, “…**There was a man who had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them**.”

The next scenes find this son taking the extravagant gifts of inheritance from his overly generous father off on a spending spree in a foreign land.

Eventually, the son’s recklessness gave way to destitution and deep hunger as he slopped hogs in the most degrading job a Jewish man could have.

While longing to eat the slop in the hog trough because of his own hunger pains, he comes to his senses and remembers his father’s home.

SING: “I’ll be home for Christmas...”

The son could be home for Christmas if only in his dreams.

He could humble himself and take the initiative to move back to a place he knew to have provision from the hand of his father even if the relationship would never be quite the same.

After all the son did and said...asking for the money ahead of time would have been like saying to your father, “You’re dead to me.”

At the time this story was first heard that was a horrendous, scandalous thing. Yet, the father runs to his son.

Almost like he’s been waiting for him. The father meets him in the middle. The father welcomes him with open arms.

The end result is that a father did what was necessary to repair a relationship that was broken. He ran to his son—before his son could get to him.

Actually, Jesus says the relationship embodied in his son was dead and then brought back to life.

Thus, a celebration ensued.

This father in the video leaves his home and goes out to meet his family.

The father in the parable initiated the healing of a fractured relationship with love—he acted on his love.

The father in the video did the same thing.

We do not always know how such initiations of love and hope will turn out. However, we also will never know until you try and take the first step.

This Christmas could be about your relationships that have lingering, wounds being healed and made whole.

It may not all happen at once. But what if a step was taken that led to a second and then a third?

Perhaps all God desires to happen this Christmas is for you to take the initiative in your family and make the first move offering the gift of love.

That might just lead to a receiving of love coupled with a fresh start in your relationship.

Nothing is beyond repair. No relationship is beyond trying to fix with Christ’s help.

Not even our relationship with God.

The father in the video says, “I love you no matter what.”

Paul writes this about God’s love in Romans 8:31-39:

“**What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?**

**32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?**

**33 Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.**

**34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.**

**35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?**

**36 As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”**

**37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.**

**38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord**.

God in heaven sees that the space between us has become too great. So God comes to us. God comes to meet us.

Wherever we are, whoever we are. Whatever the past, whatever the present. No matter how broken or separated we might feel from God and others.

Remember, God came to us. Love comes down at Christmas so that we can truly love others like God loves us.

Don’t hesitate this Christmas to take the first step (again) to heal relationships knowing the power of the Holy Spirit is with you!