

Year C Advent 3
December 13, 2009
Resurrection

A SHORT POEM

**I was shocked, confused, bewildered
As I entered Heaven's door,
Not by the beauty of it all,
Nor the lights or its décor.**

**But it was the folks in Heaven
Who made me sputter and gasp—
The thieves, the liars, the sinners
The alcoholics and the trash.**

**There stood the kid from seventh grade
Who swiped my lunch money twice,
Next to him was my old neighbor
Who never said anything nice.**

**Herb, who I always thought
Was rotting away in hell,
Was sitting pretty on cloud nine,
Looking incredibly well.**

**I nudged Jesus, "What's the deal?
I would love to hear Your take.
How'd all these sinners get up here?
God must've made a mistake."**

**"Hush child," He said, "they're all in shock
No one thought they'd be seeing you"**

JUDGE NOT!

**Remember...Just going to church doesn't make you a Christian
Anymore than standing in your garage makes you a car.**

**Every saint has a PAST...
Every sinner has a FUTURE.**

If John the Baptist were alive today, I think he would revel in sharing this poem with the crowds that had come to witness his proclamations. For you see, John the Baptist upset the traditions—he upset the religious powers that were in control—he told of one who was coming after him,

- **“..One who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”**

John extolled his listeners to

- **Share their coats with those who have none**
- **To do likewise with their food.**
- **He told the tax collectors (the most hated members of their society) to collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.**
- **He told the soldiers to not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation and be satisfied with your wages.**
- **And with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.**

John was calling the community that had come out to hear him preach, that this was the way to prepare for the one who was coming—the One who was to usher in God’s Kingdom here on earth. The way for preparation was by sharing what they had with those who didn’t have.

By giving away, the community was ushering in God’s Kingdom. This is the season of giving away, isn’t it? Christmas is just around the corner. We are making lists of who we want to buy presents for and what we are going to buy them. What fun--maybe they would like this or maybe that or perhaps something really outlandish!

In just 12 days, we will be gathering around the Christmas tree and opening our presents. Even as an adult, I love doing this. I hope I never grow up!

What are you giving God this year for Christmas? “What am I giving to God?” What a strange question. Let me see--I will be giving God what I always do—

- **Going to church**
- **Trying to live a moral and upright life—cheating no one and not telling any lies.**
- **Loving my family as much as I can.**
- **Be thoughtful of my neighbors.**
- **What else can I give?**

I would like for you to consider this. This is the season of giving. We give things—we give tangible things—like clothes, jewelry, toys—things we can touch and see. In contrast, we usually give God intangible things—love, patience, kindness, humility, etc.

This Christmas season; why don’t we consider our financial pledge to the church as our gift to God? The annual church pledge campaign is always right before Christmas anyway so why can’t we put these two very important times of the year together? It makes sense to me!

Remember our poem--Just as all those sinners in heaven were shocked to see you in heaven—so God might be shocked to learn that your financial commitment to his church is your special Christmas gift to him. Perhaps a better way to say it is that God would be PLEASED to hear that your commitment for the coming year was given in the spirit of Christmas—giving a gift to someone we dearly love.

Many of you here this morning may have already come to that place in your life concerning your financial commitment to the church—that your giving is a gift to God. But I dare say there more who give grudgingly and just give the leftovers.

- **They may have had a bad experience with their giving because their money was misused or that there were too many secrets with where their money went. (PS—I wouldn’t give to a church who would do that either!)**

- **Others may have the attitude that their money is all theirs—I earned and therefore I am going to keep all of it I can. (PS—I used to be the same way—especially when times were tough).**

But you know what; I have come to believe that everything that I have, everything that means anything at all to me, is but a gift from a most gracious God.

- **My life is a gift from God**
- **My family is a gift from God**
- **My church is a gift from God**
- **My livelihood is a gift from God**
- **My health is a gift from God**
- **There is giftedness all around me!**

And all God asks of me is to be generous to him in return and to be generous to those around me. That’s it. It isn’t rocket science. It isn’t Wall Street financial knowhow. It is just being generous and thankful in return.

And the most beautiful thing about being generous is that we receive it back many times over. When I give away my hard earned dollars and see what wonderful things it has done, I am satisfied beyond description. It is the most wonderful thing in the world!

This Christmas, I want to challenge you to give God a Christmas present—a financial commitment to His Church—The Episcopal Church of the Resurrection. I want you to join with me in making this Church bloom and blossom as never before in its history. We have so much to be thankful for this Christmas. Just look around you—and you will see God’s people. This is God’s community. We have been given the responsibility to make God present and to bring about God’s Kingdom in our little corner of the world. It is a huge responsibility!

Also I want you to consider your gift this year to be a percentage of your income—your cash income. The biblical standard for this is the tithe—10% of your income to be returned to God by giving it away. Giving it away with no strings attached.

I am a confirmed tither. I believe in it and I practice it. My tithe this year will be split—80% of it (\$8,000) will be given to Resurrection and 20% (\$2,000) will be given to other charitable organizations that spread the Love of God.

Please consider percentage giving this coming year. You may have to start with 3% of your income. You may be at 5% now. But make it a percentage. And then, with God's blessing and help, you will be able to increase the percentage each subsequent year until you reach 10%. I guarantee you that you will be blessed beyond measure.

I also want to challenge those who have never made a yearly commitment to consider doing so this year. In order for your vestry to be good and Godly stewards of the monies of this church, they must have an accurate prediction for the year. Your financial commitment will do that. But it must be written down and turned in. It is not an IOU or anything of the like. You are just telling God and the vestry this is what you think that you can give this coming year. It is just your Christmas gift to God.

God has big plans for the Resurrection family this year. I invite you to give God a great Christmas gift this year. Join with me as we together proclaim God's present and love in this community!

AMEN