

THE GIFTS THAT SHOULD CONTINUE TO BE GIVEN

Two days before Christmas I ventured out early to our nearby Dollar Store to get a few last-minute items. I arrived in the parking lot just before 8:00 a.m. wanting to get in and out before the store really got busy. There were six of us with the same idea. As we entered, I held open the door for the man standing behind me, and he in turn did the same for me when it came to the next door leading inside. We each thanked the other for the kind gestures and manners being shown. We wished each other a Merry Christmas and then he commented, "I have already forgotten what I came in to buy!" I shared with him how I have the tendency of always forgetting one thing on my list whenever I go into a store.

We each made our way around the store and ended up at the checkout at the same time. It was only the two of us in line when one of the store employees ran over to the cashier and said, "I have found the last roll of Scotch tape in the store." When this other man heard this he said, "I don't need it but I will buy it." At that moment I realized that Scotch tape was on my list of things to get at the store, and I had forgotten all about it. I have come to realize it never hurts to ask so picking up on his words I said to him, "If you really don't need that roll of tape, I truly do." He smiled and said, "I was just buying it as a joke. Here you have it." With that he gave me the roll of tape to buy, so I would have enough to wrap our presents with later that morning.

It was a fun and pleasant interaction I had with this man on Saturday morning. Both of us were going in for items we needed in preparation for Christmas, but I came away with three special gifts:

1. Being reciprocated with kind gestures and manners,
2. Being helped to remember something important I was forgetting,
3. Being able to experience sharing instead of selfishness.

As I spent the rest of Saturday morning wrapping gifts, I thought a lot about this interaction and the gifts we both gave to each other. What stood out to me was how the gifts I was wrapping that morning not only cost money, but they were meant only to be given on one specific day of the year. I contrasted this with the three gifts from earlier that morning and how they did not cost anything to give and should be given throughout an entire year. It was at this

moment I realized this would be an ideal message to share with others as we draw to the end of 2023.

Wouldn't it be nice if these three gifts mentioned above became common place with respect to giving in the year ahead. Let's start with the *kind gesture* of simply holding a door open for somebody. I try and do this for others when I am entering a coffee shop, a store, or any place the opportunity may present itself. I do not always receive a thank you or an acknowledgement of appreciation for doing so, but when I do it usually results in a smile not only appearing on that person's face but mine as well. Smiles are a gift we need.

The second gift had to do with helping people to remember. We are not mind readers, but if we truly take the time to show interest in other people and listen carefully to what they are saying we will come across information about certain things happening in their lives. When I do this with cashiers at the coffee shop or grocery store, I often hear about things going on in their lives. The things they may share might be as routine as heading out that weekend to do their Christmas shopping, or getting their son to a baseball game, or an upcoming medical appointment or surgery for a family member. The next time I see them I will remember to ask them about it. I can always see how appreciative these people are when they realize they are being thought of and remembered. Once again, this gift puts a smile on their face and mine as well.

Sharing is the *third gift* from that day. Sharing can be as easy as offering words of encouragement and appreciation to others. It can also be as simple as sharing a special memory from the past that we have experienced with that person that perhaps they have forgotten. Sharing can also be given through the gift of time we devote to others. I try to offer these gifts whenever the opportunities present themselves. Once again it is special to see the smiles on people's faces when I share in these ways.

Scripture is filled with and reminds us of the importance of these gifts.

- **Hebrews 13:2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.**

- **Matthew 7: 12** “Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.
- **Galatians 6:9** And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.
- **Luke 6:31** Do to others as you would have them do to you.

The season of Christmas and gift giving will have passed by the time you read this message but I hope we will all continue to give the three gifts I experienced at the Dollar Store. If we do, we will put a smile on many faces and in so doing put one on ours as well.

Have a blessed and wonderful year ahead!

Pastor Dean