

“God is Jealous”

Date: December 13, 2015

Place: Lakewood UMC

Occasion: Advent 3, Under Wraps series

Texts: Deuteronomy 6:13-15; Luke 10:25-28

Themes: Jealousy, God, priorities, Advent

The video makes you think, doesn't it? It did for me; I'm a lot like the Dad in that clip – eagerly looking through catalogs to find the gifts I would like to receive at Christmas-time. I guess I can be a lot like the little boy going through the old Sears catalog, remember those? Looking for gift ideas and dog-eared the pages.

Let's face it – in our society, Christmas has largely become all about the gifts. No longer do we wait for Black Friday to start those Christmas sales, we want people in the stores on Thanksgiving Day. Christmas, somehow, reveals the selfishness of the human heart.

It's not that we're more selfish or greedy this time of the year, it's just that Christmas time seems to heighten those impulses. We give a lot of time and energy to the effort. Lists are made and money is spent. We start wishing and hoping and dreaming of the things we want. We dream about how excited the kids will be when we give them that new gadget they've been begging for all year.

Andy Nixon, who wrote the third chapter of our study book, *Under Wraps*, writes: “The whole gift-giving process can be so consuming, our greed so over-powering, our minds in such overdrive that we end up simply giving lip service to the thing we're really supposed to be celebrating – the birth of our Savior, Jesus. And I have to wonder, ‘*Does that make God jealous?*’”

Jealousy is not an attribute we usually associate with God. Jealousy is not an attractive quality in a relationship. We don't like to

think of ourselves as being jealous people. We tend to use the word *jealous* to communicate our pettiness or envy.

We are jealous of a colleague for receiving a promotion; we are envious of our neighbor's new car in the driveway. We might be jealous of someone's looks or how much money they make. We might be jealous of someone else's happiness. Jealousy does not sound like our holy God.

And yet there are several places in the scriptures that describe God this way: "Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." (Exodus 34:14) Our first lesson today says:

"Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of peoples around you; for the Lord your God is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you, and he will destroy you from the face of the land."(Ex. 6:13-15)

Wow! That's pretty intense. So what is the Old Testament trying to tell us by using the word *jealous* to describe God? Well, the Hebrew word for jealousy is *qin'ah*, which means "warmth" or "heat," and it is used to describe intense emotion and passion.

When the Bible uses this word for God, it is describing how God is intensely passionate about his people. You might say that God is "on fire" for us. God's love for us causes him to be jealous of anything that stands between us and Him – namely our idols.

Our Creator God is so passionately in love with us that He is eager for us to live in His fullness. And the only way that will happen is if we put God and our relationship with Him first in our hearts. Our idolatry also has a way of distracting us from God's plans and pulling

us off course. God wants what is best for our lives. Putting God first enables us to live the abundant life God intends for us.

God makes no apologies about wanting to have first place in our lives, and his jealousy for our hearts is revealed in his sending Jesus to us. Through Jesus, we see how jealous God is for a relationship with us, and how committed he was to getting it.

God didn't send just another prophet, not another Moses or another Amos or Isaiah or Jeremiah – to show his love for us. Instead he sent his one and only Son to come and live among us so that we could intimately know his heart, and live in communion with Him.

The season of Advent serves as a great reminder of how much God loves us and how he moved Heaven and Earth on that first Christmas Day in order to be in relationship with us.

As we prepare to celebrate Jesus' coming to earth, it is important for us to examine our hearts. Advent can serve as a reminder that God is moving in our hearts and lives, and He is jealous for first place in our hearts.

Jesus taught us that making God our first and only love would be essential to following Him. When asked what the most important commandment was, Jesus answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Luke 10:27)

This year, during the Advent season, I have been deeply touched by the generosity and the caring of our congregation. One family I know has told me they have everything they need, and instead of buying presents for themselves this year, they're donating what they would have spent to help another family.

One young man I know approached me and said he wanted to give away the savings from his part time job. He's a college student, who, with his girlfriend, is giving gifts to a family here in Lakewood that will really benefit from their generous hearts.

Another family approached me and asked if I knew anyone in Lakewood who could use a helping hand. They are buying Christmas gifts for a single parent and two children. That family will be blessed this year.

When we put Jesus first, our selfishness begins to fade. When we allow God to be the priority in our lives, we open ourselves up to the possibility that God can use us to do good in the world. When God sits on the throne of our hearts, He can change the world.

The season of Advent is all about preparation – not preparing our trees or the things that go under them; but preparing our hearts for God to do a great work. It is a time to look into our hearts and ask, “What is number one in my heart?”

God is jealous for that spot. He loves us so much that he wants us to experience the power of his love to change our hearts and the lives of those around us. He wants us to do amazing things.

But more than that, He wants us to know Him intimately and to be able to let go of our plans and freely experience the glorious gift he has given us through Jesus Christ. God wants you to experience the fullness of his love, and then put that love into action.

This Christmas, will you put him first? Will you open your heart and your life to his leading? I pray that you will. May it be so. Amen.

This sermon borrows heavily from the book *Under Wraps: The Gift We Never Expected*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014, pp. 49-58, “God Is Jealous,” by Andy Nixon.

