

## “Yours for the Asking”

**Date:** December 24, 2017 **Place:** Lakewood UMC **Occasion:** Christmas Eve **Text:** Luke 2:1-20 **Theme:** God’s extravagance

I would like to ask you to do the most difficult thing that can be asked of our culture, and that is to do nothing. I invite you to approach this night with open hands and hearts, and do nothing. This night is not about effort, but about receiving. The gift of this night is yours for the asking, and without effort. A story:

A certain fellow was in the Atlanta airport. Since he had a lay-over he went into the restaurant where he was served something he had never seen before. He inquired, “What is this white glob here on my plate?” The waitress said, “Those are grits.”

“But I didn’t order grits,” he said, while looking at the check. She finally said, “You don’t order grits. They just come!” Here’s the tie-in to Christmas. You don’t order Bethlehem, it just comes. You don’t order grace, it just comes. You don’t order God. God comes in God’s time and in God’s way, not ours.

I was visiting a hospital some time ago, and on my way out I drove up to one of the single-board barriers that stand at the exit to a parking garage. I got close enough to see the words written on the wooden sign. It read, “Approach the gate slowly, and it will open.”

That’s good advice for Bethlehem: “Approach it slowly and God will open to you all that you need. Three things are asked of us, and they all require very little effort.

First, look up. Once, there was a boy who had watched his father put up a lighted sign on top of their house for years. When he became ten years of age, his father told *him* to put the sign up for Christmas.

The boy was proud to do it in record time and plugged it in. He went in the house bursting with pride. But the neighbors were rolling with laughter. He had spelled “Noel” backwards. In flashing lights it read, “Leon” on top of his house.

But maybe he was on to something. We may not know anyone named Noel, but that boy had a friend named Leon. Leon knew that Christmas was special? Why?- because his friend Joey had put his name on the roof. And that’s a reminder to each of us that God comes to us through the power of the personal.

On this night, God comes to us in the form of a holy child, by the power of the personal. God comes with your names on the lips of the holy one of Bethlehem. God comes not reprimand but to remind you of the love with which God holds you forever.

My friends, look up! Because God knows your name, and He comes by the power of the personal.

The second thing we are invited to do is enjoy the chaos. Yes, you heard me correctly. Let’s embrace and enjoy the chaos of this season. Earlier this week I had to drive to Upper Peach Street from downtown Erie. And I found out you don’t get there quickly the week before Christmas.

The road was crowded and hectic and busy and chaotic. Did anyone else have that experience? Well, we could complain about it, or, we could celebrate it. It’s a good sign of a busy economy. It depends on how you look at it.

I was talking to a colleague of mine early in Advent who said, “It’s terribly hectic and crazy. And I love every minute of it.” Interesting point of view, don’t you think? We do tend to go to a lot of trouble in this season. It is full of chaos. We could complain, or we could enjoy it. I vote, lets enjoy.

You see, this chaos seems to have a purpose to it. This chaos even has a note of triumph about it. Another story: There was a Catholic nun who was getting ready to leave a community in Africa where she had served for 10 years as a missionary.

As she was preparing to leave, a young man came up to her and said, "I have a gift for you." He gave her a seashell. She adored it and thanked him for it. "Where did you get it?" she asked.

He told her he had gone to the ocean to get it. "But that is over 100 miles away. How did you get there?" He said, "I walked." "Why did you go to all of the trouble," asked the nun. He said, "The long walk is part of the gift." She was humbled by his answer.

We go to a lot of trouble this time of year, don't we? But let's not look at the trouble as a bad thing. The trouble is a part of the gift. Our willingness to go through all the bother and the chaos is to tell others that we care. The bother and the chaos is part of showing our love.

Jesus was born in the chaos of Bethlehem, at a time when there were so many visitors to the village there was no room in the inn. God has constantly created good out of chaos. We pray that God will do the same with the both the healthy, and unhealthy chaos we bring to this season.

The third thing we're invited to do, without much effort, is ask for more. Yes, you heard me correctly, ask for more. When you go to God, don't be afraid to ask for more.

There was a famous golfer from our country who went to Saudi Arabia to teach the king how to play golf. The king was very rich and had over 30 golf courses. But no one, including the king, played very well. So, for a large sum of money, one of our famous golfers gave him golf lessons.

Weeks went by, and it was finally time for the golfer to leave. An emissary for the king came to the golfer and said, “The king would like to know what gift you would like upon your leaving?” The golfer said he had been paid well and didn’t need anything.

The emissary insisted and told the golfer he would offend the king by not naming a gift. Finally, the golfer said, “Just tell him to give me a golf club. That’ll be fine.”

The next day the emissary came and announced the king was delighted with the request. Then the golfer was presented with his golf club. He was handed the deed to an 18-hole golf course. And the moral of the story is this – when you’re in the presence of a king, ask for no small gift.

In the presence of the King of kings this night, remember to look up. God knows your name and keeps repeating it with love. Enjoy the chaos, for God creates best in chaos. And ask for more. Because God wants you to have more than what you ask – God wants you to have what you need.

Then, with open hands, simply receive the gift of Christmas. You will find that “all your hopes and all your fears of all your years” will be met in this child tonight. Amen? Amen. Let us pray:

O holy God, we are as confounded as Mary and Joseph, as busy as the innkeepers, as lonely as the shepherds, as frightened as Herod, as wayfaring as the Magi. Turn us again to the place where, with quietness, You wrap up your truth and promise, your love and salvation, in the Child born in a primitive barn.

We ponder these things as the noise and the clamor of the world is quiet for a time. And there is a peace that settles deep within us. Bring us to Bethlehem, we pray, to the place where Jesus was homeless, but where we are truly at home. Amen.