



THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

of Naugatuck, Connecticut
The Reverend Steven Kim, Pastor

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*A community of God seeking, serving, and growing in Christ
with open hearts, open minds, and open doors.*

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The Unlikely Gift of God

Isaiah 55:1-7: 2 Corinthians 9: 15

This is the time of year when we have been concerned about choosing the right Christmas gifts to give to the special people in our lives. Gifts are like the lubricant of life which encourage us, help us to feel loved, and enhance our friendship with others. Some of them, in particular, leave indelible impression in our hearts. It doesn't have to be expensive necessarily for a gift to have a special meaning to us. Sometimes we don't grasp the true value of it right way but over time we realize how precious it is in our lives.

One of the greatest gifts I've received was from my mother back in the late 1970'. It was a black cassette player. Back then, I was studying hard in preparation for the college entrance exam. There was a demo-tape in it which contained a couple of music. I don't know how many times I had played it. The melodies of the music still ring in my heart, which is not only the beat of music but of love.

Another gift that I have cherished is this gray knitted vest I am wearing now. One of my sisters knitted this for me as a gift for my coming to the United States 20 years ago. Gray is not my favorite color for a sweater so that I have seldom put it on. In fact, I almost threw it away a few times. However, whenever I tried that I felt like my arm was held back by the unseen power so that I put it back in the closet.

Now let me ask you a question: "Have you ever received an indescribable gift?" Have you ever received a gift that was beyond description – a gift that was so good that words could not adequately describe it? This is what Apostle Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians chapter 9. At first he is writing about human gifts. The church in Corinth is taking up offerings to give to the poor Christians in Jerusalem. He commends them for their eagerness to help, and reminds them that those who sow sparingly will also reap sparingly, but that those who sow generously will reap generously.

Then he shifts his attention from human gifts to God's gift of sending Jesus Christ to the world for us. And he cannot find words to describe that. So, he simply says in 2 Corinthians 9:15, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" The gift of Jesus is beyond words. The gift of Jesus is the best gift ever! By the way, I hope you'd keep these words in your heart as you give your final thought to the 2012 pledge for our church and ministry. That will be your gift for God.

I have found such an inspirational story that helped me to figure out this gift. There was a very wealthy man who shared with his only son a passion for art collecting. Together they traveled around the world, adding only the finest art treasures to their collection. Priceless works by Picasso, Van Gogh, Monet and many others. The widowed father looked on with satisfaction as his only child became an experienced art collector. But the day came when war engulfed the nation, and the young man left to serve his country.

After only a few short weeks, his father received a telegram that his beloved son had been killed while carrying a fellow soldier to a medic.

On Christmas morning, a soldier visited him with a large package in his hand. He introduced himself to the man by saying, "I was a friend of your son. I was the one he was rescuing when he died... I have something to show you." "I'm an artist," said the soldier, "and I want to give you this." The father found a portrait of his son in the package. The following spring, the old man became ill and passed away. According to the will of the old man, all of the art works would be auctioned. Art collectors from around the world gathered to bid on some of the world's most spectacular paintings. The auction began with the painting of the man's son. The auctioneer asked for an opening bid. The room was silent. "Who will open the bidding with \$100?" he asked. "Who cares about that painting? It's just a picture of his son" someone said.

But the auctioneer replied, "No, we have to sell this one first. Now, who will take the son?" Finally, a man said, "I'll bid on it for \$100." After a long silence the auctioneer said, "Going once. Going twice. Gone." The gavel fell. Someone quickly said, "Now we can get on with it!" But the auctioneer announced the auction was over. Someone spoke up and asked, "What do you mean it's over? What about all of these paintings?" The auctioneer replied, "It's very simple. According to the will of the father, whoever takes the son... gets it all."

That is the essence of the story of Christmas: Absolutely it is more than 'Buy one, Get one free!' Whoever takes the Son gets it all. The Bible puts it like this in 1 John 5:11-12, "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

In this highly commercialized era, we are offered literally tons of items every single day, big or small, cheap or expensive. They come to us through TV channels, Internet, mailing inserts, super markets, billboards, and even the commercial calls on Sunday evening! These commercials sound so luring to us. They all promise good quality by affordable price.

Now, our Isaiah text for today calls our attention to one last commercial; 'Come, Buy, and Eat!' It sounds pretty catchy, doesn't it? And the price tag is attached, too; 'For Free.' "Come, all who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy, and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost."

Let me remind you first that the main target of this commercial were the poor in the ancient Israel. What they needed for daily survival was not gold or silver but daily food and drink. In the Youth Advent session last Friday, the students were asked to answer what are needed for their survival, daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, and for next ten years. All the items they came up with were the basic necessities such as water, food, clothing, transportation, and love, family, etc.

Now, let me wrap up this message. God urges us to pay attention to one final commercial. It is living water and living bread, which is one last item necessary for our survival not only for a week or next ten years but for eternity. Good news is that it is offered to everyone for free without cost. The item is Jesus Christ the unlikely gift of God for us. I pray that you all would pay attention to this item and make it your own.

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Sermon from The Reverend Steven Kim

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Another Christmas shopping season is coming. Let us make this item on top of our shopping list not only this Christmas season but through our entire life. Wouldn't it be a tragedy for us to miss this commercial and fail to buy the item it offers after spending all our resources which do not satisfy us in light of eternity?