

Dave Johnson

Sermon: “A ‘Do Over’ in Life” (John 1:4)

December 27, 2009

I hope you had a wonderful Christmas ☺.

My all time favorite movie is *It's a Wonderful Life*, the classic 1946 film starring Jimmy Stewart as George Bailey. I watch it every year at Christmas time, and every year it makes me tear up in multiple places. One of the most powerful scenes is toward the end of the movie when George Bailey is praying on a bridge. You may remember that George was the head of a small building and loan company and that one of the employees had misplaced a large sum of money. George found himself in a desperate situation with the threat of losing his business, his reputation, his family, as well as the threat of going to prison. He wished he had never been born, and then got a glimpse of what the world would look like if indeed he had never been born. At that point he returned to the bridge where he had earlier thought of killing himself, but this time he prays a simple, powerful prayer: “I want to live again. I want to live again. Please God, let me live again.”

That prayer connects with all of us, the desire to live again, the desire to have a second chance at life.

When I was a kid I was part of a group of guys in our neighborhood that played outside together all the time—football, basketball, baseball, kickball—hours and hours all year long. Often in a game we would argue about a certain play— whether someone had counted to five Mississippi correctly before rushing the quarterback, whether someone had been fouled when going for a lay-up, whether someone had beaten the throw to first base. Often we would reach an impasse in these arguments, and then someone would say the magic words: “Do Over.” When someone said, “Do Over,” we would simply do the play again—repeat the down, take the basketball back to the top of the key, or return to home plate—and do the play over. When we reached an impasse in our arguing, the “Do Over” made everything alright again, and the game could continue. A “Do Over” meant everyone got a second chance to make a play.

People often need a “Do Over” in some area in their life—a “Do Over” in their choice of career, a “Do Over” in their marriage, a “Do Over” in their relationship with their parents or their children, a “Do Over” with certain financial decisions, a “Do Over” regarding an addiction. Some people need a “Do Over” for their whole life. Like George Bailey, their prayer is: “I want to live again. I want to live again. Please God, let me live again.”

The good news is that God meets us in that place, that God give us a “Do Over” in life through his Son, Jesus Christ. In this morning’s gospel passage from John 1 we see that God became

incarnate in Jesus Christ to give us life, as John writes: “What has come into being in him (Jesus Christ) was life.”

In fact, the main theme throughout John’s account of the gospel is that God gives us life in Jesus Christ. On a rooftop at night Jesus told a Pharisee named Nicodemus that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal *life*” (3:16).

At a well in Samaria Jesus told a woman whose personal life was in shambles that “The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal *life*” (4:14).

After healing a man on the Sabbath he told those present, “Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal *life*” (5:24).

After the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand Jesus said, “I am the bread of *life*... I am the *living* bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will *live* forever” (6:48, 51).

In John 10 Jesus reassures his disciples, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have *life*, and have it abundantly” (10:10).

Just prior to raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus consoled Martha, “I am the resurrection and the *life*. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will *live*” (11:25).

At the Last Supper Jesus reassured his disciples, “I am the way, the truth, and the *life*” (14:6).

On the night before his death on the cross he prayed in his high priestly prayer, “This is eternal *life*, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (17:3).

Toward the end of his account of the gospel John reveals why he wrote it in the first place, “these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have *life* in his name” (20:31).

God gives us life in Jesus Christ. That is the main point of John’s account of the gospel. Indeed it is the main point of all scripture, as Jesus rebuked the Pharisees: “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have *life*” (John 5:39-40).

Life in Jesus Christ is the ultimate Christmas present. Think for a moment about the worst Christmas presents you have ever received. When I was six years old I was actually given an Old Spice soap on a rope—no kidding. Can you imagine that? Who would give a six-year old an Old Spice soap on a rope? What six year old boys are concerned about their hygiene? What six year old boys want to smell like Old Spice? Ten years later I received an even better

Christmas present—a lint brush shaped like a car. What a great gift—after all, if there’s one thing sixteen year old guys are concerned about, it’s the lint on their clothes.

Now think for a moment about the best Christmas presents you have ever received. When I was five I received a Big Wheel and rode around the neighborhood for hours and hours. This year I received several CD’s and several iTunes cards—very, very cool, because I love music.

Chances are the ones who give you the best presents are the ones who know you the best and love you the most.

God knows you the best and loves you the most, so it makes sense that the greatest Christmas present ever would be from God. God doesn’t give us soap on a rope or lint brushes. God doesn’t give us a Big Wheel or iTunes cards. At Christmas God gives us Himself, God gives us life, a “Do Over” in life through Jesus Christ.

And this “Do Over” in life is not a one-and-done gift from God, but an ongoing gift that will never end. Another word for it is grace.

In today’s passage from John 1 we read, “From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (1:16-17).

The reality is we all need a “Do Over” many times in our lives. We need God’s grace not just sometimes, but all the time.

Each year during the Christmas Eve services here at Christ Church we darken the sanctuary and sing *Silent Night* while everyone holds a candle—a very powerful part of the service. In the final verse of *Silent Night* we sing:

Silent night, holy night
Son of God, love’s pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace

The grace God gives us in Jesus Christ at Christmas is just the beginning; it is “the *dawn* of redeeming grace,” the *dawn* of an age of grace in Jesus Christ that never ever ends. It means God gives us “grace upon grace” now and forever.

In his book, *Souvenirs of Solitude*, Brennan Manning describes how the grace God gives us in Jesus Christ at Christmas gives us comfort and hope especially in the midst of the challenges in our lives:

Christmas is the promise that the God who came in history and comes daily in mystery will one day come again in glory. God is saying in Jesus that in the end everything will

be all right. Nothing can harm you permanently, no suffering is irrevocable, no loss is lasting, no defeat is more than transitory, no disappointment is conclusive. Jesus did not deny the reality of suffering, discouragement, disappointment, frustration and death; He simply stated that the kingdom of God would conquer all of these horrors, that the Father's love is so prodigal that no evil could possibly resist it (p. 46).

In other words, God's grace in Jesus Christ will ultimately triumph in our life, no matter what.

Tom Petty, one of my favorite rock and roll artists, wrote a song called *Square One* that is on the soundtrack for the 2005 film, *Elizabethtown*, as well as his 2006 album, *Highway Companion*. The chorus of *Square One* goes like this:

Square one, my slate is clear.
Rest your head on me my dear.
It took a world of trouble, took a world of tears
It took a long time to get back here

Some people endure a lot of suffering and hardship in their lives—physical, emotional, financial, relational suffering and hardship. As Petty puts it, some people go through a “world of trouble” and a “world of tears.” Perhaps this includes you. Perhaps you need your slate to be made clear. Perhaps you need a “Do Over” in some area of your life, or maybe your entire life. Perhaps, like George Bailey, your prayer is “I want to live again. I want to live again. Please God, let me live again.”

The good news is that God answers that prayer in Jesus Christ.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross to atone for the sins of the world, including yours and mine, he opened the door for all of us to live again. The main point in the gospel according to John and indeed of all scripture is that God gives us life in Jesus Christ.

God knows us the best and loves us the most, and He gives us the best Christmas present ever in giving us Himself in Jesus Christ, whose birth marked “the dawn of redeeming grace,” the beginning of the never-ending age of God's grace.

In Jesus Christ God gives us “grace upon grace.”

In Jesus Christ God brings us back to square one, where our “slate is clear.”

In Jesus Christ God makes it possible for all of us to have a “Do Over” in life.

Let us pray...