



*A Transactional Life*

*Luke 3:7-18*

*(Third in the Advent sermon series)*

*Third Sunday of Advent ~ Sunday, December 16th, 2018*

*The First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois*

*The Rev. Dr. Forrest Krummel, Jr.*

Text: *Whoever had two coats must share with anyone who has none...* (v. 11)

Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* was a transactional figure. A "transactional" way of life is like Pop Tarts for the soul--nothing more than cardboard with a bit of icing and jam. It is spiritually malnourishing.

When Scrooge gave, he gave grudgingly, and he only gave when he was assured of a greater return on his so called "investment". He saw others not as "people" but as "pawns" to be used for one's own purposes. The thought of anyone being a "child of God" was completely foreign to him. He indulged his selfishness and didn't give it a second thought. When asked for a charitable gift for the less fortunate he replied, "Are there no prisons?"

"Plenty of prisons," he was told.

"And the Union workhouses; are they still in operation?"

"They are."

"The Treadmill and Poor Law are in full vigor, then?"

"Both very busy, sir."

"Oh I was afraid from what you said that something had stopped them from their useful course. ... I wish to give nothing." I wish to be left alone. I pay my taxes. That is enough. If some would rather die, then they should do so and "decrease the surplus population."

Jesus calls us to something more. He invites us to live bigger lives. He encourages us to live lives fit for a King, the King of Kings and Lord of lords, in the words of Handel's Messiah.

What does this something more look like? It's quite simple; Love. Jesus said that the world will know his disciples not by their style of worship or songs, prayer or liturgy, vestments or clothing, but by their love. Their love for each other and for the world.

In the letter to the Philippians the writer defined this Kingdom love in these words:

If then, in our common life in Christ there is anything that stirs the heart, any loving consolation, any sharing of the Spirit, any warmth of affection, or compassion, fill up my cup of happiness of thinking and feeling alike, with the same love for one another, the same turn of mind, and a common care for unity. There must be no room for rivalry and personal vanity among you, but you must humbly reckon others better than yourselves. Look to each other's interests not merely to your own.

(Philippians 2:1-4, New English Bible)

At its deepest and most profound level, love is looking out for the other person, even at your own expense.

When the Ghost of Christmas Present came to Scrooge at the stroke of one, Scrooge was confused. How could the Ghost of Christmas Past and Christmas Present both arrive at the stroke of one? He did not understand that he was having a mystical experience. He was experiencing a moment when the Eternal and Temporal were tangent, when they touched for just the moment. The Ghost of Christmas Past showed him scenes of his brokenness. The Ghost of Christmas Present showed him both the poverty of his heart and the treasures of real love. It was when he visited the home of his clerk, Bob Cratchit, that his “Bah humbug, let them die and decrease the surplus population took on body and voice. It was the child named Tiny Tim that melted the coldness of his icy heart.

When Bob Cratchit came home from worship that Christmas night, he took his wife aside and spoke quietly to her. “Somehow he gets thoughtful sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made the lame beggars walk, and the blind men see.” And a child shall lead them, the old Prophet said. Tiny Tim may have been crippled in body but Scrooge was crippled in heart. And the question that is begged is, “How is our heart?”

As Scrooge was whisked away from the Cratchit’s very humble home the Ghost of Christmas Present reminded him of his own calloused words. “If (Tiny Tim) die, he’d better do it, and decrease the surplus population.”

Scrooge hung his head in shame, penitence and grief as he heard his own words quoted back to him.

The Ghost of Christmas Present continued;

“Man,” almost as it the mere mention of Scrooge’s name was too disgusting to cross his lips, “if man you be in heart ...Will you decide (who) shall live, and who shall die? It may be, that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man’s child. Oh God! to hear the Insect on the leaf pronouncing on the too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust.”

Advent is about preparing for the coming of Christ in whatever form this “Second Coming” may take. And as we prepare for his coming, we also prepare for the celebration of Christmas. Christmas is not about trees and lights and wreaths and presents and parties but people. True riches are not found in the accumulation of worldly stock portfolios, goods and wealth but in the extravagant prodigal Love.

As the Ghost of Christmas Present prepared to take his leave Scrooge noticed something that he had never noticed before. There appeared to be a foot or, maybe it was a claw, protruding from the bottom of his robe. He asked about the protrusion. The Ghost pulled the robe back to reveal two small children; “wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable” is how Dickens described them. They sat huddled at his feet. One was a boy, the other a girl. “Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish.”

Scrooge, startled at what he saw looked away. “Spirit, are they yours,” he asked.

“No, the Spirit replied, “they are yours. They are humanity’s. The boy is Ignorance. The girl is Want. ‘Beware of them both...but most of all of the boy (Ignorance), for on his brow is written ‘Doom’.”

And through the ages the words of the prophet known as the Baptist reverberates as clearly as the day they were first said; “Whoever has two coats much share with anyone who has none; and whoever has foot must do likewise.”

To God be the glory. Amen.