

**You Want THIS Gift!!!!  
Don Lincoln  
John 1: 10-13**

We all know, when it comes to gifts, it's the thought that counts, RIGHT??? Problem is we're just not always sure what they're thinking! I mean, have you ever heard (or said) something like this when opening presents?

1. Hey, now THERE'S a gift.....or,
2. This is perfect for wearing in the basement.....or,
3. And to think I vowed to give half my gifts to charity this year.

Let's face it. There are gifts, and then there are gifts.

I wonder if that doesn't also apply to the real Christmas gift. THE Gift. For despite the fact that Christmas pretty much takes over our culture for the month of December, you get the sense not everyone is interested in THE gift. A recent Pew Survey reveals that while 90% of Americans plan to celebrate Christmas, only about 50% plan to do so for religious reasons.

I wonder if that's because they're not sure they want THE gift.

Clearly that was the case when John was writing his Gospel. "Jesus, the Word, came into the world. The world was made through Him. He came to what was His own, and His own people did not accept Him." Some people saw Him, heard Him, maybe met Him, but He was not the gift for which they were looking.

That is still the case today. Some don't seem to want what He offers. And that's their choice.

But I am afraid some don't want this gift, this Jesus, because they've heard incorrect representations of the Gift and His meaning. They've read about, or heard about, or experienced first-hand what Bad Christianity looks like. They've experienced a distortion of Jesus' message – a message that is judgmental, unloving, unforgiving; all about the rules; closed-minded; homophobic; misogynistic; sometimes racist; seeming to be thrilled at the idea of someone burning in hell, or all about money.

And if that's what this gift is about, it is, I would agree with them. Who wants THAT gift???

It reminds me of what I heard last week on the radio. Listen and watch the text:

### COW STORY SLIDES AND AUDIO



*.....escaped from a live nativity scene in Old City – not once but twice early this morning giving police quite an interesting morning. KYW News Dan Wayne has more. PA State police said they were called around 2:30 a.m. for reports on a cow running the southbound lanes of I-95 as you heard right here on KYW traffic. “It’s 2:42 in the morning and we’ve got a cow running around on I-95S at the Vine. Stormy the Cow was corralled and brought back to that nativity scene but*

*clearly unhappy with her 15 minutes of fame she decided to ‘milk’ it a bit more and made a second escape around 6:30 a.m. according to Rev. Michael Kane who didn’t have much success getting her back. ‘I wasn’t trained in some areas for lassoing cows.’ Stormy was eventually got at a parking garage at 4<sup>th</sup> and Arch and returned to her temporary home.” Dan Wayne, KYW News Radio.*



It appears that for Stormy, life in the manger ain't all it's cracked up to be. The reality is you and I know there are others who have left the manger too – because they received a lousy substitute for, instead of the real gift – the love, the welcome, the grace that God intended in the gift called Jesus.

“BUT,” John says, “...to those who DO receive Him – who receive His true word, His true light, His true love – to them He gives power to be children of God.” Let me tell you what THAT looks like.

Remember the tragic fire at Barclay last month? I learned that many years ago, when the proposal was made to build that complex in that neighborhood, there was strong opposition among some neighbors to it being built. And yet – who were the first out there on that cold, fiery night – wheeling people; covering them in blankets, and holding those frail bodies in the chill? The neighbors.

And that made the news, and warmed our hearts. The outpouring of neighbors that night and in the days following – the stacks of walkers, blankets, canes, supplies touched us – brought tears to our eyes and a lump in our throats. Just like when we see other such things in the midst of tragedy – like those who pull shooting victims into their cars in Las Vegas, or who rescue neighbors and pets in hurricanes and floods.

But the children of God don't have to have a catastrophe to see human need to which to respond. This Jesus helps you and me recognize need everywhere, every day. This Jesus helps you and me realize that living for ourselves alone won't come close to bringing the joy we experience when making a difference for someone in need.

This Jesus makes that kind of difference in your life, and the life of others through you. That's why this congregation will spend \$250,000 in mission this year, making sure people have food in West Chester, or a place to sleep in southern Chester County, or medicine in the hills of Honduras or a warm bunk in an orphanage in Mexico. Because the children of God in this place see need and respond to need every day.

This gift of Jesus extends hospitality and welcome, not judgement or a slammed door. If you are, or you know a teenager wrestling with alcohol, or drugs, or cutting, or bullying, or gender issues, or orientation issues, or parent issues – there's a group that meets here every Thursday called The Landing – where ANY teen is welcome – just as they are. No judgement. Just welcome.

Because that's what Jesus did. Welcomed the lost, the outcast, the pushed aside, the struggling. Because, you and I know, every one of us has been lost, outcast, pushed aside or struggling at some point in our life.

Maybe you're like Stormy – wandering on the highways of this world – and you can't find way your back to the manger...

This Jesus offers welcome, not rejection. Forgiveness, not condemnation. Grace, not judgment. Hospitality, not hostility. Generosity, not greed. And hope, in the face of despair. This gift, this Jesus, says even death doesn't get the last word in your life. Don't believe anyone who tells you differently. THIS is the gift you want – this Jesus. He lived for you. He died for you. He loves you. That's what this Jesus offers.

John says to all who receive Him – that means any and every one – who receives this gift – even you, tonight – God can transform theirs into a life not of judgmentalism, or rules, or hypocrisy, or mean-spirited-ness – but into a life like His – a life filled with love, filled with hope, with forgiveness, with self-emptying joy – joy that comes in bringing light into darkness, hope where there is none. So I invite you again this Christmas, take this gift home. This Jesus. Take His love home. It will make all the difference to you and even more to the world to which He sends you.

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, AMEN.