

Chapel Talk
Penny Bartsch
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What is a Gift from the Heart?

Everyone bear with me tonight, I've never stood up in front of so many people before, let alone been expected to TALK! Because Christmas is on everyone's mind I decided to speak about gifts, a subject near and dear to all of us. We all like receiving gifts but the real joy comes from giving a gift. And the most meaningful gift is a gift from the heart. But what is a gift from the heart?

You can get a good idea from one of my favorite stories "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry. Born William Sydney Porter in 1862 he had a varied and exciting life, taking the name O. Henry in 1901 and becoming one of our greatest short story writers, a master of surprise endings. The gift of the Magi was written in 1906. It's the story of Della and James Young a young married couple that has fallen on slim times.

The story opens with Della nervously pacing their small apartment, trying to think of something she could afford to give her beloved husband for Christmas, which happens to be tomorrow. Afford! "That's the hard part of giving a gift" she thinks as she holds the measly one dollar and eighty seven cents she had managed to save. And hard saving it was! A penny here and a penny there for months! And this was all she had! And James would just love to have the wonderful watch fob! (For those of you who are too young to know what a watch fob is, it's a chain, usually made out of a precious metal. The rest of us old fogies know what it is). She had seen it in the store last month: platinum and deceptively simple, it was the perfect match for his watch, but it cost \$21.00! Clearly, the only thing to do was sit down and have a good howling cry! After several minutes of self indulgence, Della finally sat up, running her hands through her waist length (actually, it fell almost to her knees) brown hair - brown hair that was full of light and was her most prized possession. Suddenly an idea struck her! A wonderful, horrible idea! Grabbing her coat she ran out the door.

At the same time Della was trying to solve her Christmas gift problem, James was trying to solve his. He loved Della so much, she did so much for him! He wanted to give her the world wrapped in shiny foil! But here he was without a penny to his name and Christmas was tomorrow! He knew Della wanted a beautiful pair of tortoise shell combs that would look fabulous in her wonderful hair but had no way of getting them! He shoved his hands in his pockets and felt the smooth shape of his grandfather's watch - his grandfather's watch, handed down to him from his father, and he had planned on handing it to his son some day. An idea! A heart breaking idea, but Della was worth it! He started to run down the street.

It was late! Jim was never late! Della paced about the small apartment, stopping to stare at her new reflection in the hallway mirror. Her flowing brown locks were gone, replaced with short curls framing her face. Would he still love her? she wondered. Suddenly she heard the door open, James was home! She turned as he came into the room, her face tight with fear. James took one look at her and stopped, his jaw dropping open!

"I love you" she said, holding out a small package. "Merry Christmas!" He took the package, not saying a word. Holding up the platinum fob he almost broke down in tears. Della ran to him, "You needed it to show off your wonderful watch" she told him. "I sold my watch to buy you these," he said as he held out a hastily wrapped package. She opened it, shrieking with delight as she saw the combs, then bursting into tears as she remembered her hair was gone. "My hair will grow back" she said. "I'll buy another watch some day" James told her. They fell into each others arms, knowing that they had given up their most prized possessions for each other, they had given a "Gift from the heart".

You all know of the Three Kings who brought expensive gifts to the Christ Child, but I always liked the story of the little drummer boy. He didn't have an expensive gift to bring; in fact, he had no gift at all. He wanted very badly to give a gift to the Christ Child, so he decided to give the only thing he had - his ability to play the drum. So he went to the manger and played the best he could, and the Christ Child smiled at him! He gave a "Gift from the Heart".

In Luke: 21 1-4 Jesus talks of gifts to the temple. The rich gave lavishly and a poor widow put in only 2 copper coins. Jesus said "This poor widow has put in more than all the others."

I look at it that Jesus wasn't saying that you couldn't give an expensive gift or that you had to give a small one. He was saying that you should give with love, a gift from the heart.

The parents here know what I'm talking about. Somewhere you probably still have a bright colored, hand-painted card or an ornament painstakingly created by small hands. A delicate trinket made with much love, proudly given because they did it themselves. Another example of a "Gift from the Heart".

When I was young my mother told me to give something that I loved or something that I would love to have. I've tried to do that over the years. Just recently my sister reached her 60th birthday. She loves decoys and last year at the faculty and staff art show Bill Lewis, one of the security guards, brought in some of his hand-made duck decoys. One little hen caught my eye. She was beautiful, carved with great detail and just seemed to talk to me. I loved her right away and knew that my sister would too. I bought her, brought her home and she fit right in with all my other toys (I have lots of different kinds of animals scattered around my house, mostly in baskets hiding in corners. My husband is thrilled!). It took everything I had to part with her, but when I saw that my sister loved her as much as I did (I knew she would!), it made me happier than keeping the duck ever would have.

A "Gift from the Heart" doesn't have to wait for Christmas or birthdays or special occasions, it can be given any time of year. Helping someone when they need you (even when you're very busy!), calling someone you care about just to say hello, giving a smile (even when you don't feel like smiling) will give your own heart a lift.

It comes down to this: you alone have to decide what a "Gift from the Heart" really is and when to give it.