

*Quite a Gift*  
*John 6: 22-40*

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What do you give the God who has everything? Of course I'm being a bit silly here, but come down this road a few steps. What kind of present could the eternal Son of God pick out for Father's Day? Hmm, Andromeda Galaxy? No, he's got that. A song of praise from a Seraphim? No, they're always so dramatic, casting down their crowns and all. A digital recording of the sound of an electron in the hydrogen atom? No, I did that last year. What *do* you give the God who has everything?

We saw as we studied John 5 that Jesus claimed oneness with his Father in heaven. We discovered that from eternity the Father and the Son have been in a relationship of love. Their love issued forth in creation. When the Son entered the world as the man Jesus, that relationship of oneness with his Father continued. Only now it was done from within our skin and bone. The everlasting love of the Father and the Son got earthed. It was worked out from the ground of our daily life. So Jesus could show us exactly what his Father is like. He spoke the words and did the work his Father had for him. This great mystery is at the heart of what makes Christianity unique. The one God has his very life, his very being, in relationship. He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is how we know that God is love. This is why no other religion came up with the phrase "God *is* love." Because love requires relationship. Relating in love is the very essence of our God: the Father and Son have loved each other always. This is the fundamental reality. The flowering of this truth in the minds and hearts of people is what created art, music, science, theology, and literature un-paralleled in history.

Perhaps you know Gary Chapman's zillion-seller book *The Five Love Languages*. Chapman originally wrote it for married couples. He identified five main ways we give and receive love: words of affirmation, touch, time spent, acts of service, and gifts. Each of us can give and receive love through all five of these languages. But most of us have a preference. For some, telling me you love me may be fine but if you did the dishes once in a while, I'd be more likely to believe you. Another may not care if you miss her birthday while another values the perfectly chosen gift as a true expression of love.

Jesus showed his Father love through time spent in his night long session of prayer. We overhear his words of affirmation through the praise he gave to his Father. We see his acts of service done through deeds of love to us, for the glory of his Father. But what could the Father and the Son *give* to each other as a gift?

At the heart of our passage today, we hear Jesus say, “I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.” Jesus came here on a mission of love, offering the doing of his Father’s will as a sign of his love. But then he goes on to say, “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.” That I should lose nothing of all that he has given me. The Father has given something to his Son on earth. The Son’s gift to the Father is to tend and care for the gift so that he can give it back to his Father. He will raise up that gift as an offering of love on the last day, that is, at the end of time.

What is the gift so lovingly given and so precious tended so that it can be returned? The next words tell us, “For this is the will of my Father that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” The gift is us! The gift is those who look to the Son and believe in him. The Father gave to the Son people who would be joined to him by the Spirit through faith. Scripture describes the gift in various ways: people who would be branches from his vine (Jn. 15), sheep of his flock (Jn. 10) followers of his way (Jn. 14), brothers of his flesh and blood (Heb. 2), and children of his Father (Jn. 1).

We are the love gift of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father! We are the gift that goes on giving into eternity. Living, breathing people who love the Father and the Son. How do you like the idea of being a gift? We can look at it in a negative way. As if I am just a commodity. A pawn being passed around among the high and mighty. But it doesn’t feel like that, does it? We are the gift without compare. The jewel. The highest treasure. The thing that takes the most intensive work to secure. But we’re not actually things. We’re people. And the Father and the Son are not passing us around like a fruitcake. The Father and the Son are taking us up into their eternal relationship of love. The Son became what we are so that we could be joined to him and thus join him in eternity in the glorious dance of love that is the Triune God.

Have you thought of yourself that way recently? I am the gift of highest value, offered by the Father to the Son for him to teach, guard, tend, redeem, clean up, make holy, and ultimately glorify so splendidly that I will out shine the stars

when I am presented back to the Father. I am the recipient of the affection of the Father for his Son and the Son for his Father now turned outward toward us. I am being polished to adorn the Father's crown. I am being shaped to participate in the holy love of the Triune God.

The purpose of my life is not me, myself and I. My purpose is to be the gift and participate more and more in this great love story. So I live to praise God, to bless him for his mighty deeds toward me. I live to reflect his love toward others. For participating in the love of Father and Son means loving one another. It means giving my life to others in such a way that they can see and so believe the love that is at the heart of the universe. The purpose of my life is to be the gift and to add to the gift. To rejoice in being a gift and to adorn the gift as I live within the love that flows between Father and Son in the radiance of the Holy Spirit.

That is not the way we usually think of ourselves. I want to suggest, though, that training our minds to this truth is the way to joy. It is the way to grow and deepen in loving others. Far better than any guilty list of the ten do's and don'ts, realizing my identity as a love gift releases love, joy, and peace through my life.

Let's keep thinking about this. Jesus' teaching in John 6 does not read so much in a straight line as it reads like dropping a stone in the center of a pond. From that center, ripples move out in every direction. The center of his teaching is the truth that we are the gift between the Father and the Son. What ripples before and after that statement is another wonderful open secret. It is the interplay between God's work in us and our response to him. The Father must draw us if we are to come to him. We come to him through belief that involves the active giving of our whole lives freely to him. God works and we work. One does not cancel the other.

In vs. 37, Jesus holds these two together as he says in one sentence,  
All that the Father gives me will come to me, and  
Whoever comes to me I will never cast out (5: 37).  
Who comes to Jesus? We come to Jesus. Who are we? The one whom the Father gives to the Son. In vs. 44 and 47, he says,  
"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him....  
Truly, truly I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life."  
Who may come to Jesus? Only those the Father draws. Yet who has eternal life?  
Anyone who believes. Those actively choosing Jesus.

There is a mysterious interplay of love going on here. We dare not collapse the tension by a neat theological solution. Rather we can see what this paradox between God's choice and our choice shows us about the nature of love.

Do you ever feel drawn to Jesus? That's the Father's gift. That's the Father sending you the Spirit to create that pull inside your heart. That's the Father gifting you to the Son. Have you ever cried out to God for forgiveness? Have you ever poured out your heart to Jesus to help you, even to save you? That's the Spirit the Father has given you crying out through your Spirit. That's God turning you from a fool who thinks he can solve life on his own into a wise, humbled child who knows he needs a savior. This is a total gift.

But look closely. Do you feel that such prayers have been coerced or were they truly coming from the depths of you? You know that you truly prayed them with all your heart. Do you feel love towards Jesus when you contemplate his cross? Do you want to do his will when you know what he has done for you? That's a gift of God to feel that way. But it is nonetheless totally authentic. It comes from the very heart of you and is freely given. Have you ever noticed that you feel most truly yourself after worship? God does not take away our wills: he restores them. The Father does not eliminate choice from us in choosing us, he establishes our free choice to love.

The stubborn side of me rebels against this. I don't want to be someone else's gift. I don't want to have to be drawn, I want to come on my own. It feels like I will be diminished if I don't retain all control and choice. But Christian experience tells us precisely the opposite is true. God makes us more ourselves when we trust him. We become more glorious when we are taken up into the love of the Father and the Son than when we are chasing false gods and trinkets on our own. Love creates personhood. God makes us more real, more us with more choice when we accept that we have been created to be a gift of love from Father to Son and Son to Father. For what the Son does with us as a gift is to make us healed, forgiven, whole and glorious. Jude tells us Christ will present faultless before the Father with great joy (Jude 24). Because we have been given to the Son by the Father and the Son, accepting the gift, has undertaken to present us splendidly restored to his Father.

Let's let the stone ripple out from the center in one more ring. Wrapped before and after the verses we have been considering are Jesus' teachings about being the Bread of heaven which gives life to the world. In vs. 33 he said, "For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

Then in vs. 51, we hear Jesus say, “And the bread I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” Wrapped around the teaching about how individuals come to Jesus is the wider intent of Christ’s mission to the world. The Father sent his Son to offer life to a dead world. He came to renew all things. He came to set things right. He came to give his life for the sake of the life of the whole world.

Jesus is the Bread of Life. He is that which nourishes us from the heart of reality. He is what has been missing in the center of our lives. He is the key to truly enjoying the life we have been given. He is the key to having peace, and even joy in the midst of suffering. He is the source of purpose, energy, and direction in life. He is what matters. He is the one who fills us from the inside out. He cleanses our guilt. He takes out of ourselves and into his life. We get relocated into him.

Of course, eating the Bread of Life is supremely shown forth in Holy Communion. John’s Gospel does not actually have the account of Jesus breaking the bread and sharing the cup at the Last Supper. Instead we have John 6 which gives us the inner meaning of communion. It is not the actual bread of the Eucharist which nourishes us. There is not magic where an ordinary substance becomes the worker of a miracle. Communion is not drinking a love potion or even drinking from the fountain of youth. It’s about relationship. We feed on the flesh of Jesus when we come to him in believing relationship. We ask him to feed us with his life. We ask him to save us. We ask him to make us more and more a beautiful gift of love from the Son to the Father. The Eucharist is a wonderful way Jesus gives us himself. But it’s not magic. It’s relationship. We feed on him in our hearts by faith. We draw on him by actively loving him and trusting him. We ask the Holy Spirit to join us more and more to Jesus. We pray. We listen. We believe. We trust. We take and eat. It is through the bread and the wine shared that the Spirit joins us to Jesus and to one another.

What happens at the Lord’s Table gathers up what happens every moment that we live in and through Jesus in our daily lives. We continuously feed on the Bread of Life whenever we are coming to Jesus to be the source of our life. We draw on him as we pray when we go forth to do our work, to love our colleagues and our neighbors and the people of our city. \

We eat Jesus as the Bread of Life when we freely participate in being the love gift that passes between the Father and the Son. We pray, “Shine me up, Jesus, so that I will be splendid when you offer me to the Father. Thank you for calling me to yourself. Now please make me more like you so that I may adorn the love you have with your Father. I’m thrilled and amazed that you call me a gift.

When I look at myself, I feel more like a big white elephant gift. But I will trust your valuation of me. I will trust that the Father drew me to you, and that you have conferred your worth upon me. I will, as you help me, join you in preparing gifts of joy for your Father. So give me the Bread of Life more and more that I may be grown into you. For you are the life of the world, you are my life and my hope.”