

## The Heart He Offers"- John 3:16

Unless you have been living under a rock for the past many months you know that the summer Olympics will be starting in about 3 weeks. This time they are being held as you know in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. You also know that some athletes are not going to participate because of the Zika mosquito disease. Whenever we think of Rio and see pictures of Rio, we think of the song by Frank Sinatra, "The Girl from Ipanema", one of the beautiful beaches in Rio. We also see the Christ the Redeemer statue. This statue was built over a 9 year period from 1922-1931. Some say it was built as a protest and a reminder of the "godless materialism" society of the 1920s. The figure of Christ stands guard over the city, one hundred and twenty feet tall with an arm span of nearly one hundred feet. It has more than a thousand tons of reinforced steel holding it up. The head alone measures ten feet from chin to scalp. Perched a half of mile above sea level on Corcovado Mountain, the elevated Jesus is always visible. Many people especially those new to Rio use the statue as a beacon, a bearings marker. The statue is seen as one flies into Rio's airport nearby. Look at the statue carefully Jesus arms are outstretched ready to embrace and ready to give over and over again. Jesus, like his statute is looking over and watching 24/7 in our lives. The statue looks like Christ is ready to receive but to also give.

We are in the midst of a series of sermons based on the very familiar John 3:16. In this verse we are looking at four things: Last week we looked at God loves. God loves us with the agape kind of love. No strings attached. You can't lose it. The act of love is not an afterthought or a last-minute emergency plan. Love is central to the very nature of God, reaching out to all who are unlovely and sick. We discovered that the love is not selective or discriminating. God comes to the whole world in love. This morning we look at the second thing and that is God gives. The next two weeks we look at: We believe. We live. Last week we looked at "For God so loved the world" This week we look at "...that he gave his one and one and only Son..."

When parents begat or conceive a child, they transfer their DNA to the newborn. Jesus shares God's DNA. If you want to know what God is like look at

the life and teachings of Jesus? They share the same DNA. Jesus claimed that if you have seen me you have seen the father. Because of the nature of God's love we learned about last week, because Jesus and the father are one Jesus' love is the same kind of love as God's: not passive but active. When we love someone we love with an active kind of love. It is a love that is not just spoken but is also acted out. When our love is active we give gifts to those we love.

All of us like to give and receive gifts. Many of us are more comfortable in giving gifts than we are in receiving them. Sometimes we receive gifts that are mere tokens. For example we might give or receive a hostess gift. This is a token of thanks for someone's hospitality. We may receive a gift from someone because they have received a gift from us. We feel the strong need to reciprocate. So we give them a small token of thanks for their generosity. Sometimes, however, we give or receive a gift that has been well thought through. It is a thoughtful gift that might be expensive. Someone has wanted a nice watch or some electronic device such as a tablet or a computer that costs a lot of money. It may be a thoughtful gift that is home-made that took many days to make such as a quilt, or a painting, or needle point. Or we might receive a thoughtful gift such as baby sitting someone's children so they can go out to dinner or coming and cleaning someone's home as a surprise. Many of the best gifts given are not the ones you buy in a store. Many of the best gifts are the ones that are a surprise. So there are many levels and types of gifts.

Because God's/Jesus love is active and not passive he gives good gifts to show this active kind of love. The Bible mentions the gifts of God to his people over 100 times in the Bible. God's gift is like no other gift we can receive. God's gift first of all is unique. God gives us the gift of all of who he is the person of Jesus Christ. God's gift is costly. The greater the object of love, the more costly the gift. God gave his one and only son. That's costly. God's gift has no string attached to it. We don't have to be good to receive his gift because we already have it. God's gift is everlasting. Many of the gifts we have received and will receive will end up in the land-fill. They are temporary. They don't last. We can't take most if not all of our gifts with us when we die. They are precious for a moment or for a season but they will wear out and break, or be forgotten. How many of us even

remember what we got for Christmas last year? But God's gift is different. God's gift is everlasting. It is a gift that is limitless; it is quality, not quantity. It is a gift that we need to respond to.

So how does God want us to respond to this gift of Jesus in our lives? God wants us to live life with gratitude. In July 1939, Lou Gehrig the first baseman for the New York Yankees was honored at his last baseball game. He had had a marvelous career but now he had to stop because he was dying of a debilitating disease that would take his life in two years. He took the time to thank the vendors and the ticket takers and workers who never got applauded or thanked, but made his job easier. And then he said the words that echo still, "Today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth."

What makes this statement profound is that Gehrig spoke of gratitude in the heart we think should have every right to be bitter, because in our day we find more athletes who express more entitlement than gratitude. The great secret to the joy of life is the ecstasy of gratitude. Gratitude are those rich toward God-rich in being, not just having. Gratitude is the ability to experience all of life as a gift. It opens us up to wonder, delight, and humility. It makes our hearts generous. It liberates us from the prison of self-preoccupation. Gratitude is not something we give to God because he wants to make sure we are appreciative of all he has done for us. Gratitude is instilled in us by God so that our lives don't degenerate into envy, dissatisfaction, and complaints, taking what we have for granted and always wanting more. Like then story of the man in Luke's gospel.

Gratitude is always an act of humility. There is a tribe in west Africa named the Masai tribe who when they express thanks, they put their foreheads on the ground and say, "My head is in the dirt." Another tribe expresses gratitude by sitting for a long time in front of the person to whom they are indebted, and say, "I sit on the ground before you."

Gratitude can be learned. I had a friend early in my ministry who every night before he went to bed wrote down and reflected on five events during the day that prompted gratitude. It was as simple as waking up in the morning, seeing the face of someone he loved, eating a great taco, having a great exercise

program, to completing a challenging task at the church. I invite us to do the same thing. We can then remember that each of the things we write down came from the hand of God. As we reflect we discover how good God must be to give such gifts. Keeping track builds gratitude.

“For God so loved the world he gave his one and only son...” God loved and then he gave.