



December 3, 2006

Preaching: Ronni Sue Verboom

Jeremiah 33:14-16

“The Days are Coming...”

What do you want for Christmas? That’s a popular question this time of year. I was recently asked what I wanted by a super-organized daughter, and I thought I’d better come up with something so I don’t end up with stuff I’ll never use. I haven’t made a lot of progress. So far I have listed a bath pouf, gift certificates for local restaurants, and a couple books that have been recommended to me.

How are you coming on your lists? Some years we know just what we want, other years, we’re not sure. Kids and teens find it easiest, I believe. The older we get the more we may feel we have just about everything we need or want.

Many people have a secret list they never give to anybody, because they know all the items are completely unrealistic- like a luxury car, a vacation home in the mountains, a small plane with paid flight instruction, a sailboat able to navigate the globe—you know, things like that.

If we list ALL our wishes, we will include items that can probably be put into one of two categories:

Items we will likely get (because they are in the right price range and not too difficult to find) AND

Items we don’t really have any hope of getting (because of the expense and limited availability).

What do you want for Christmas?

You know, I think there is a third category to include on our Christmas lists!

My adult children almost always join us for Thanksgiving. But one daughter and her husband have lived out of state for ten years now. They don’t generally join us at Christmas. One year when we lived in Crystal Lake, I was busy Christmas morning in

the kitchen. The front door opened and a familiar voice called out, “Hi, Mom!” I replied, “Hi! Merry Christmas!” and glanced toward the door. People were arriving in a steady stream, and the voice was familiar. I didn’t think twice even when I glanced toward the door and saw a familiar face. It took a minute for my aging brain to put it together. I finally said, “Oh my gosh, Natalie! YOU’RE here! And Erik! I can’t believe it!” And I rushed to give them hugs. It was one of the best Christmas gifts I have ever received.

One of the best, if not THE best part of Christmas is sharing time with people we love. Kids wait for Grandma and Grandpa to arrive, watching the cars pass by at the front window. Old friends come by for uninterrupted food and stories and laughter.

What do you want for Christmas? I am convinced that time with people you cherish is on that list. If you haven’t ever written down their names, maybe it would be good to do that! Then you can make sure that shared time together HAPPENS at some point in this Advent and Christmas season.

Okay, we have three categories of Christmas wishes:

- things we will probably get, because they aren’t too expensive or hard to find;
- things we won’t get because they are too expensive or hard to find;
- PEOPLE we cherish, to spend time with at Christmas

Is that all we want for Christmas?

The more I think about that question, the more I realize that there is a fourth category of Christmas wishes. Items in this category never make it onto any written list because we don’t know how we could make them happen; how they could come true.

What we REALLY want for Christmas, deep in our hearts and souls, are things that can’t be boxed or wrapped.

We want freedom from anxiety about paying the rent, the mortgage, old medical bills, college tuition, nursing care.

We want help and healing in the midst of serious illnesses, like cancer.

We want a loved one serving in Iraq or Afghanistan to come home well and whole-for good.

We want a loved one- a parent or sister or son or daughter to be happy, rather than plunged into despair or depression.

We want justice in a world where children are abused and enslaved, where families literally face starvation, where HIV and AIDS orphan children every day, where workers are exploited and mistreated, where fear of violence robs life of all joy.

We want peace, peace with justice. But gunfire is still heard in the streets, here in our land as well as afar. The sound of bombs and explosives echoes on and on.

We want loved ones who have died to be with us here. Their absence is like a jagged tear in the fabric of our lives.

The Bible speaks to these deep longings, if we will stop and listen.

The Scripture read today comes from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah lived in a time of war. About 587 B.C. the city of Jerusalem was under siege, attacked by Babylonian armies. Jeremiah had predicted misfortune to the leaders of his people. When misfortune and war did indeed arrive, he was imprisoned for treason. While he was in prison, Jeremiah had a vision of Jerusalem being restored. He saw the return of joy and health to his nation. The verses we heard today are a part of his vision.

Jeremiah saw a ruler emerging from the line of the great King David, a ruler who would bring justice and righteousness. Jeremiah was in prison, in a time of violence, death and despair. But God told him, “Hold on...., a better day is coming—a day when I will make things right. The days are coming, when justice and safety for all my people will be accomplished.” God told this to Jeremiah, and he tells us this today.

Christians have claimed these verses for centuries, as a prophecy of the coming of Jesus Christ. JESUS is that King descended from David. JESUS is the One who brings saving love and justice. That’s why we read these words today: This year, once again, WE ARE AWAITING AND EXPECTING the coming of Jesus, our King.

What do you want for Christmas? The Bible tells us the days are coming when ALL you want will be provided. Because GOD HIMSELF is coming to you IN THE FLESH in Jesus of Nazareth.

As we anticipate Christmas each year, we may think, “But he came. Jesus came. And the world is still shattered by war, hearts and lives are still broken and in anguish.”

This is a mystery. The full accomplishment of God’s purposes is still going on. God is at work, saving the world. He’s not finished yet. He calls us to be a part of it- to be his instruments. BUT AT THE SAME TIME, God’s saving of OUR HEARTS can come in fullness at any moment. Even this year. Even at the table where you eat Christmas dinner in December 2006.

That's one more thing we could put on our Christmas lists: Jesus. He's in a category all his own- category five, I guess. But if you want him, you can have him. And when he comes, he'll be bringing a gift in his hands- a gift just for you. Because no matter what you want for Christmas, no matter what you are longing for..... Jesus has what you need. Jesus brings you hope. Hope.

A promise that says "The days are coming when God will make things right"--- that's a promise of hope. In the midst of the challenges of our lives, when Jesus comes, he brings us hope and change. In the midst of the anguish of the world, God is acting to bring hope and change.

At every holiday table, let's save a place for Jesus. You could begin a new tradition of setting an ACTUAL place for Jesus, with an empty chair drawn close. Jesus is coming. Whatever you want for Christmas, whatever you are longing for.....Jesus is your hope, if you will accept God's wondrous gift.