

“Good Things DO Come in Small Packages”
Micah 5:2-5a

December 23, 2018

4th Sunday of Advent

There is an old saying that goes, “Good things come in small packages.” Most of you have probably heard that saying before. Many of you have likely used that saying on more than one occasion. And some of you have probably knotted your heads piously as someone else spoke this saying to you. However, I’m not sure there is one of us here that really believes it, especially at this time of year.

When all the presents are put under the Christmas tree in the next day or two, which of them are going to draw the most attention in your family? It certainly will not be the small gifts – who cares about them? And it probably won’t be the medium-size gifts – they are probably just socks and underwear. If we are completely honest, the packages that will get the most attention will not be the small packages which supposedly have all the “good things” in them, but will be the largest packages under the tree. Children will gravitate toward them, try to guess what’s inside them, and look to see if the tag on the present has their name on it. If we are honest about it, the adults in the family may do the exact same thing.

All familiar old proverbs to the contrary, this world seeks good things in big packages. In our text today from the Old Testament, during the time of Micah, the prophet, the nation of Judah was under attack by Assyria. King Hezekiah sought deliverance from the powerful Assyrian army through big and powerful means. He increased the size of Judah’s armies and he sought alliances with other big and powerful countries. Although this made all the sense in the world, Judah was defeated and its citizens were sent off in exile to Assyria. The “good things” which they sought were not found in this huge military package.

We can’t be too critical of King Hezekiah. We still think and act the same way he did. We seek help and deliverance, not in small packages, but in big doses of power, resources, and technology. As the arms race with the Soviet Union demonstrated over 60 years ago, our hope in the military is based on having bigger and better weapons and armies. With our health, we seek help and cure for serious diseases in more medical knowledge, more and stronger medicines, and more surgical procedures. With the ills of our society – poverty, poor education, crime, and so on, we feel the best solution is a bigger and bigger pile of cash tossed at these problems. With all of our other problems, we think more and better technology will solve them all. Although the devices we use are getting smaller and smaller, the amount of memory and the amount of speed is growing larger and larger.

It is no wonder then that we adopt the same sort of thinking when it comes to our spiritual lives. We think the only way to have a successful ministry is to build larger churches with more members and the bigger bank account. We crave larger sound systems, more talented musicians, and more inspirational preachers. We feel that if we do not have these things, the church is in trouble.

How does it work for us depending upon finding good things in large packages? All the military might that we have has not prevented us from suffering defeats. 9/11

and subsequent terrorist attacks have hurt our nation. Despite all of the medicines that scientists have discovered and all of the medical procedures which doctors perform, some illnesses simply don't respond favorably. And ultimately, we all eventually die anyway. Simply throwing more and more money at societal problems has not solved them. In fact, one could argue that such policies have made things worse by creating a dependency upon this money. Technology may be able to solve some of our problems and certainly make life easier, but problems seem to always stay one step ahead of solutions.

The situation in the Christian Church in North America continues to falter and fail even with all the massive resources which we have, some of which we share and some of which we withhold. Denominations and congregations report declining membership, declining attendance, and declining offerings.

Now, none of these "big" packages are inherently or intrinsically bad or sinful. However, they often prove unreliable and ineffective in solving our problems. However, the worst side effect of this way of thinking is it can cause us to miss on God's blessings for us. The Almighty God, who created all that exists and certainly would have the right and the ability to deliver the best blessings in the hugest of packages to accomplish His will, chooses to bring His best blessing in the smallest of packages.

In our text, Micah, the prophet, prophesies a Savior to come. Everything about his arrival would be a small package, not a large one. It begins with the place of Messiah's birth. It would not be in a large city, like Rome, the capital of the world, or even Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. which would have been the most likely place for the birth of a king. Instead, it would be in Bethlehem in the region of Ephrathah. Bethlehem was so small (likely under 1000 residents) that it was not big enough to qualify as one of the clans (family groups) in Judah.

The Savior would not come as mighty warrior, influential politician, or powerful king. He would come as a tiny baby, born in this small town. His birth would not be in the huge and magnificent royal palace, but in a small and smelly stable where animals were kept. His baby bed would not be a large plush king size crib, fitting for the child of the King. It would be a manger, a small wooden box, filled with straw, where cattle and other animals fed on the straw there.

Not only was the Savior's place and method of entrance into the world very small, unnoticed, and unimportant, but His whole method in working to save us came in small packages. He did not come with a larger-than-life image, possessing great power, to rule the entire world with his might, even though as the Son of God, He possessed all power and authority. Instead he came in the smallness of humility, weakness of a human being, as a servant.

Now, he could have come in a big and glorious package, but he chose to come in this small package of a humble and weak servant. As St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians, "[Christ Jesus], though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God is a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of the servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:5-8)

Instead of coming as a mighty king to be served by His servants and saving the world with huge armies and powerful weapons, Jesus came as a servant to serve, not His friends or loyal subjects, but His enemies – you and me – who had rebelled against the Law of God, doing the evil He condemned and failing to do all of the good He commanded. He came to save the world, not by big things like force, punishment, or death of his enemies, but with small, almost unnoticeable things, such as love, service to all, and sacrifice for his enemies.

Jesus did two huge jobs which were considered to be small and unnoticed, even today. Jesus perfectly obeyed the Law of God in our place and to gain us His righteousness. Jesus offered up His sinless life on the cross in order to earn sin's forgiveness for all people. He did this huge job of saving the world in the small package of a humble rabbi, in a tiny town, long ago. However, His suffering and death on the cross earned forgiveness for all sinners by making peace with God once again. His rising from the tiny tomb outside of Jerusalem three days later to life again has gained eternal life for all who believe in Him.

Not only has Jesus earned these huge and magnificent blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation in these very tiny packages, but He still distributes these big blessings in small, almost unnoticeable and uncared about packages. A little water poured on the head in Holy Baptism has connected us to God's word of promise – forgiveness, a new life, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and salvation.

A morsel of bread and a sip of wine in Holy Communion connects the earthly elements of bread and wine to the true body and true blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They connect us to God's Word of promise, also. Our faith is quietly nurtured and strengthened in this way.

The still small voice of a mortal man, called by God, clad in special robes, mortal like you and me, proclaims the eternal truths of the Word of God and all of its promises, for now here on earth and hereafter in heaven forever.

As God delivers his bountiful blessings in small packages and we receive these great gifts in small packages, we are free from the pressure and worry of either finding the power to save ourselves or wondering where God's power is to save us. Instead, we trust God's promise for these small packages which contained Bethlehem, Christ's birth, Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, as well as those tiny packages of Holy Baptism, the Holy Supper, and the ordinary voice of a man commanded to speak God's words with God's authority. In them, God promises and delivers these great blessings.

This means that we now live in peace with God and with one another, a peace so complete and wonderful that we cannot begin to understand it. As Paul writes to the Philippians, "The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7)

We live without fear and unafraid of any spiritual foe. As small and weak as Christ's Church on earth appears to be, nothing can overcome it or destroy it, not even the gates of hell themselves.

We live with excitement and anticipation of Jesus coming again. For this Savior which Micah prophesies, as little and insignificant as He, His birthplace, and His

mission seemed to be, His mission had a worldwide scope. The Savior comes not only for Judah, and not only for the “the rest of his brothers” (that is, the rest of Israel), but He comes for all of us – “to the ends of the earth.” Micah says, “And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure.” We live secure now because of Jesus. We die secure by virtue of Jesus’ work. And we shall live eternally secure with our God and all those who have gone before us in faith to be with Him.

As you open many presents in the coming days, some big and some small, you will notice that not all of the big presents are necessarily good ones and small packages can, and often do, contain very good things. It is easy to get distracted by the size of the gift and package while missing out on the value of the gift itself.

In the same way, do not allow the commercial Christmas celebration which surrounds us to distract or deceive you about what the true gift of Christmas is and how it has been given by God and received by us. For the seemingly unimportant and tiny gifts which God brings are far more important than the seemingly huge and valued gifts which our world offers. Good things – no, great things – do come in small packages. Amen