

Refugio & Goliad

6 January 2019

Matthew 2:12 Opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

#### FROM OUR TREASURE CHESTS

God's gifts to us are frequently the subject of sermons and meditations: They are the gifts of creation, love and salvation. In one form or another they form the basis of much that we hear in church. But we hear much less about the gifts we bring to God. Except, of course, during October when the Every Member Canvas reminds us of exactly what gifts we need to bring to the church in order to pay the real-world costs that churches all incur. For the next few minutes let us think about the most valued gifts we are able to bring to God. We need to open our treasure chests and examine those gifts.

**Faith:** The one gift, without which all of the others have no meaning, is *faith*. The Bible tells us that faith is "believing in things unseen and having hope for things to come." To me, faith is that kernel of certainty about which my doubts revolve. Faith is the sun and doubts are the planets. The existence of the sun is no less certain because the planets exist. Indeed, the planets confirm the nature of the sun. So it is with faith. My doubts make me reflect in such a way that I confirm that God is the center around which I orbit. Doubting Thomas, who would not believe in the risen Jesus until he thrust his fingers into the wounds of Jesus, did not apologize for his doubts, he simply gloried in the truth which only his doubts made manifest.

As we stumble through life experiencing the traumas of death, sickness, injustice and just plain bad luck, we all sometimes utter that cry from humankind's earliest existence, "why me God?" "Why do good people suffer injustice?" Theologians have written enough material on that topic to elevate a host of them from assistant to full professor. After almost drowning in an ocean of free will, natural law, sin and salvation, the answer seems to be "we don't know the mind of God", it is one of those mysteries which we accept by maintaining our kernel of faith. It is our bruised and battered faith that we offer to God as our greatest gift. From all of the spiritual evidence around us, we are assured that God accepts this tattered gift. He thanks us with the wonders with which She surrounds us. We have only to open our eyes and hearts of see that thanks.

**Control:** We give the gift of faith willingly, but our second gift warrants a real wrestling match with God. It is the gift of *control*. "I am the master of my own destiny. Ruler of my own fate. Creator of my own future." These are all mottos that permeate our Texas culture. To be asked to give control of ourselves to God is most un-Texan! Even in the Episcopal Church we like to say that there is a time to kneel in prayer, but then we need to get off our knees and get to work! And there is some truth in all of that. Somehow, we need to be able to give God control over our lives while simultaneously working hard to discern God's will for us.

How many times do we end our prayers with "not my will, but thy will be done." I subconsciously add, "but I know that you will see it my way!" Indeed, when I read the creation story in Genesis and see that God created all in six days and then rested on the seventh, I cannot help but think, "well if he had asked me, I could have concluded that creation business up in one less day and then the

five-day work week would have come much sooner! Control, my very being says “control is mine, thus says the sinner.” We can plan, work, think and act as vigorously as possible, but, in the final analysis, we don’t really control our destinies. So our gift to God is one that, in one sense, is illusory, we are giving to God something that we don’t really possess anyway: Control. If we can give that gift, we then can escape the pain of failure, even though we cannot escape failure itself. We can escape futile self-blame for events over which we have little control. We can free ourselves to spend our efforts discerning God’s need for us and to respond to that discernment with God-centered action.

**Wholeness:** Our third gift is *wholeness*. When we stop to examine our lives, we all too frequently see ourselves as fragmented. A piece to our family, a piece to our employer, a piece to the civic club and a piece, admittedly our Sunday best, to the Church, which may or may not be the same as saying that we are giving a piece of ourselves to God. Sometimes compartmentalizing our lives may be all that keeps us sane and functioning. But somewhere in the bushiness of living there is a wholeness that is striving to make sense of our lives and wishes to link all of our pieces into a flexible, but functional whole. That wholeness is our spiritual selves. That is our gift to God. In pleasure and in pain, in joy and sorrow, in boredom and in excitement, our core wholeness defines us. It is our very personal gift to God.

Let this meditation close with this little poem.

Oh God three presents we bring to you.	
No gold, frankincense and myrrh,	All made right, made whole,
No physical object to adorn the manger.	By your love.
But, gifts, most glorious, nonetheless	Faith, control, wholeness.
A vase of faith,	May these, our humble gifts,
Chipped around the edges by life’s doubts	Adorn your manger. Amen
And our contrariness.	
A bag full of control,	
Acknowledging your	
Presence and order,	
Even as we see chaos as we try to command	
The universe to stand still just for our convenience.	
And finally God, we give you	
Our wholeness –	
Not fragmented bits and pieces that we	
Jealously hoard, but a self complete	
With doubts, and sins and ignorance	