

“Chrome-Plated Faucets”  
Isaiah 40:1-11, II Corinthians 4:6-7, 17-18  
December 15, 2019

Lawrence of Arabia tells this story of his trip, with three Arab representatives, to Paris in order to participate in the Peace Conference after the First World War. After all, Lawrence had assisted the Arabs in defeating the Ottoman Turks, who were allies of Germany against Britain and France. When all was said and done, Lawrence visited the Arabs’ hotel suites to help them prepare for their journey back to Damascus, which was to be the capital of a newly independent state which was to encompass what is now Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. What Lawrence saw going on in one of the hotel suites was an example of what would now be called “Cultures in Conflict” - the Arabs were trying to remove the faucets in their bathroom in order to pack them up and take them home with them.

Asking for an explanation of what would appear to be a random act of vandalism, Lawrence was told, “We thought how wonderful it would be to have these in the desert.”

What Lawrence’s friends failed to understand, of course, was that those faucets in and of themselves were useless. What they really were after was the water which flowed through them from its source. Otherwise the faucets, unconnected, would not be of any use to anyone, whether in Paris or Damascus.

Lest we think smugly that those Arabs “just didn’t get it,” I would like to suggest that some of us do something equally as nonsensical every year when we go through a season called Christmas, enjoying the inspiration and good cheer connected with it. We see the colorful lights and the bright decorations; we hear the bells and carols; we share the happy exchange of gifts; and we experience, generally, the joy of the season. But when Christmas is over, we somehow think that if we can cling to those external signs and associations we have had, we will continue, somehow, to enjoy the wonderful Spirit of Christmas throughout the rest of the year.

Well, the tinfoil and trimmings, the gifts and greetings, and the rather superficial atmosphere of merriment of the season we call Christmas, are not the things that can last. They are like shiny, chrome-plated faucets. And we shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking that if we just take them with us, that they could serve us during the rest of the year as they did at Christmas time. Of themselves, they are useless and would do us no good.

In fact, not only can't those shiny chrome-plate faucets sustain the Spirit of Christmas much beyond the 25th of December all by themselves, they even have a way of getting between us and the Spirit of the season itself long before the 25th rolls around. Peter Marshall, former Chaplain to the U.S. Congress, tells the story that once upon a time a child was overheard praying, "And forgive us our Christmases, as we forgive those who Christmas against us."

Well might we all pray those words, that we might strive to live so that others will not need to "forgive us our Christmas" ways, when pressures mount, our lists grow, and radio voices bring tidings of the approaching deadline, reminding us that we have only so many more shopping days till you-know-when. Add to that the extra social events of the season, and soon enough, we despair of being overwhelmed.

And so many of us say each Christmas, "Next year I don't get caught in the rush." But here we go again, clutching our wallets and tearing through the crowds, thinking, "Now what on earth will so-and-so like?" But it seems that we can't think of anything they need - which is rather strange when you take the time to think about it. Maybe there is nothing in a store that they "need." But what about the things that all of us need - things like love, friendship, understanding, consideration, a helping hand, a smile, a prayer? Christmas is not in the stores! It's not in the shiny gadgets that do not last.

Christmas, however, can give us something that is lasting, and something that we can take along with us after its observance is gone. For Christmas, unlike the deserts of Arabia, offers to every one of us a deep and ever-flowing source of supply. Each one of

us, at Christmas time, is brought into touch with the Spirit of Christ, which can be born in our hearts and can enter our living. It becomes a source of living waters, as it were, supplying our lives with a new and abundant life. That is the real and abiding significance of Christmas.

And when we've discovered that, we can discover that each day, no matter how rushed, can be Christmas-like if we look at people around us and respond to them with sympathy, forgiveness, and understanding.

And so, if you must find yourselves in stores over the next few days and your salesperson is too tired to smile, then smile yourself and make the chore of waiting on you as pleasant and as easy as possible. Bring them the gift of sympathy.

Or if you're on the phone to a catalog sales rep, who can't seem to get your order just right, try to remember that they'd rather be at home, like you are, or at least they'd rather be taking a break, and have probably been harried and hassled too long already. Bring them the gift of forgiveness.

And if the crowds and the lack of parking and the scarcity of ready cash get to you, give yourself the gift of understanding, and realize that God can be found whether or not you have a place to park, just as God is found in the many faces in the crowds, not in the balance of your checkbook or your credit card.

If we, therefore, have any desire to take with us something of enduring worth that this Christmas has to offer, let it be this: the Spirit of Christ born within our hearts. Then, the future will not lose what this Christmas promises, so when it comes time to leave the shiny gadgets behind, we'll find that maybe we've become the answer to someone else's Christmas prayer if we've accepted the gift of God in Christ, which this season so lovingly offers.

Let us pray: