

After hearing Mike this morning, it's easy to focus in on what we don't have. It's easy to become anxious about today and about tomorrow. To look at our empty cupboard and wonder where the food is going to come from. But I want to invite you into a story of a family that had very little and what they did about it.

It was December of 1984 and the Patterson family was eagerly shopping for a teenage boy they had never met. This particular shopping spree was part of an Angel Tree adventure they were undertaking. This was the third year in a row the family had agreed to help a family in need. This year it was a mother, father, and five children.

After purchasing the presents, they drove through a constant drizzle to a small house that sported the address given to them by the local relief agency. "It looks small," said the oldest daughter as their car pulled up to the house.

Gingerly the Patterson family carried the boxes to the front porch. Four noses pressed against the window as the recipient family's younger children looked on in excitement. Not knowing exactly what to do, the donor family all gathered in the freezing rain and started to sing Christmas carols. At the end of the second carol, the father inside the home took pity on the Pattersons and begged them to come in to the small home.

Minutes later as they all stood cheek to cheek, the father in the home began to talk. He explained that he had undergone back surgery earlier that year and hadn't been able to return to work quite yet. It hadn't been an easy choice, but he had decided that if they were to have any presents for the kids, he'd have to call on one of the local agencies, which he did.

The man then shared a story. He told them that eight years ago when he had only two children and was just getting started in his career, they were facing a rather meager Christmas. They bought their oldest son, who was eight at the time, and his sister who was four, two presents.

One was a pair of socks, the other a toy. The son had asked for a basketball, and from the size and shape of his two packages under the tree, there would be no surprise for him that year.

One evening two days before Christmas the father came home with an announcement. A new family had moved in not far from their house, and since this new family didn't have two pennies to rub together, they wouldn't be having a Christmas. They had a boy and girl the same ages as their family and the father was thinking that maybe they could share Christmas with them.

"We could each give them one of our two presents," said the mother as their two children looked on in suspicion." Finally, after staring at his two presents under the tree for what seemed like ten minutes, the teenage son walked over, picked up the package containing the basketball, and said, 'I'll share this one.' Each of them then grabbed one of their two presents, put it in a box, and carried their gift down to their new neighbors who seemed very grateful."

Later that day, the father continued to explain, he received a phone call from a lay leader at their local church. It turned out that there were a few families in their little church group that didn't have any money for Christmas that year. A group of generous people had put together several boxes of presents and food for the families in need.

Since he was driving a rather large and beat-up station wagon that had a lot of hauling space, the lay leader asked if he would be so kind as to drive to the church on Christmas Eve, load up the wagon, and make the various deliveries.

The man immediately agreed to lend a hand. But he knew in so doing he was in trouble. He was in trouble because they had spent all of their money on Christmas, and the station wagon was almost out of gas. They had to find a way to raise some cash to fill the gas tank to make the deliveries."

"We could collect Coke bottles," the daughter quickly suggested. This was at a time that if you retrieved a discarded soft drink bottle by the side of the road and took it to a local grocery store they'd give you two cents for it.

So the family agreed. They bundled up against the wind and snow and all day long the day of Christmas Eve they hunted for bottles. Finally, just before they were due to make the deliveries, they cashed in the bottles, put a couple of gallons of gas into the old wagon, and drove over to the church."

As the lay leader loaded box after box filled with beautifully wrapped presents into their dilapidated vehicle, the son and daughter looked on in wonder. They sniffed the air with a look of longing as he loaded in a carton containing freshly baked pies and a ham along with all the trimmings. They squished over to the edge of their seat as the boxes stacked one upon the other until their wagon was filled to bursting."

The lay leader handed the man an envelope containing a list of the various names and addresses of the people they were to visit, and then thanked them profusely for helping with the deliveries. As the Clerk of Session drove off the man opened the envelope to see the extent of the task in front of them. The small piece of paper found inside the envelope contained but one name and address. It was theirs.

You and I have a challenge laid out in front of us. And our challenge is not to save the church. Your challenge is not to save Allison Creek Church from disappearing. Our challenge is to share the gospel, the good news of God's love. Our challenge is to use the gifts that have been given to us and bring these gifts to the new born king and say, "here is what I have. Use me to serve you."

Maybe we have but one or two or three gifts. And maybe it is time you and I set one of these gifts aside and say to God, here is my gift.

Use me.

Use my gift to share your life giving kingdom. AMEN.

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-Patterson, Kerry, "Crucial Skills" newsletter, Vitalsmarts, Vol 8, Issue 51, Dec. 22, 2010

-Text: Matthew 2: 1-12

-Given: Jan 2, 2011 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)