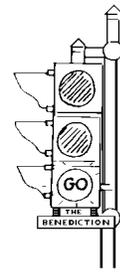


The Benediction

December 29, 2006



As a small child she would stand before me, arms spread apart to their limits, offering her best and most appreciated gift, "Daddy, I love you T-h-i-s M-u-c-h!" And she would throw herself into my arms plastering me with noisy, little-girl kisses.

As time moved on her expressions of affection became more sophisticated--expressions created and marketed by Madison Avenue, designed for the person too busy to be original... But my little girl never forgot my day. And as it approaches once again, she readies herself for the affection I must remember for 364 days, **until Christmas comes again.**

(Isaiah 1:11-12)

Favor and
Obligation (Numbers
20:11-12)

"Are you giving me a tip?"

"I think you do great work and my Bible tells me it is a blessing for me to bless my brother." It was the wrong thing to say.

"No, really--I was told to give you this amount. I had nothing to do with it. I wish it came from the goodness of my heart, but it didn't." And I preserved favor.

The Christmas Gift

(Matthew 2:1-2)

I needed to be rescued. I was desperate--couldn't take it any more!

At my lowest point I cried out in embarrassment and need, and He gives me a baby?

Never mind that I'm already stretched to my limit.

And the baby starts making demands--kicking, growing inside of me, controlling what I do, what I say, what I hear, pushing away all the mess! --declaring himself King and making me strong.

A HAIR'S BREATH

(Galatians 5:16)

It was in my heart to do; and I meditated on the joy to be. Yet, there was the gall to pray His will.

Though feet stayed my purpose, the course was altered.

Omnipresent

(Matthew 18:6)

The tone was clearly offensive, for no cause. Perhaps it was racism. Perhaps it was merely the acceptance of pervasive stereotyping. Perhaps there is a difference.

But clearly there was no cause. I should have responded in kind. Perhaps I yet will. But perhaps not--they too are in your hand.

The Soil (Mark 4:13-20)

I am the soil and I have heard the word by the wayside.

I am the soil.

I have heard the word and I have received it with gladness for a time into this stony place.

I am the soil.

I have heard the word and received it to flower among thorns in this unfruitful place.

I am the soil.

I have heard the word and I will hold it tightly so none can take it away. And the word shall be planted even in this good ground, and it shall bring forth fruit, some thirty fold, some sixty fold, and some an hundred fold.

*The Good Father (John 3:16)

I wanted to be a good father--give my child the proper time and attention. So I determined to only have one child and that's what I did.

There is no one to come between us. The closeness--he only does the things that please me, only says the things he hears me say.

That's how close we are.

I tell you--I'm a proud father. I get so happy hearing him and seeing him.

And when I see you, I see Him in you, and you too, and you.

And every now and then when you really delight yourself in me, I hear Him calling from you to me--

And I Am so happy.

**poem commissioned by Ulysses Reed*

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