

5.3.2021 Easter 4 (James 1:17)

Do not be deceived. *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above...”* (James 1:17). A little girl that had just turned five was waiting with her mother at the checkout stand. When she saw a circle of glistening white pearls in a pink foil box, she said, “Oh please, Mommy. Can I have them? Please?” Her mother checked the back of the little foil box and said, “Jenny, these pearls only cost \$1.95. If you really want them, I’ll think of some extra chores for you to do, and it won’t take long for you to save enough money to buy them yourself.” Her mother was right. After only two weeks, Jenny had enough money for the pearls. Her mother took her back to the store, where Jenny proudly counted out her money to the cashier.

Jenny loved her pearls. They made her feel pretty and grown up. She wore them everywhere: Sunday school, kindergarten, even to bed. The only time she took them off was when she went swimming or took a bubble bath. Her mother said that if they got wet, they might turn her neck green. Jenny also had a very loving father. Every night when she was ready for bed, he would stop whatever he was doing and come upstairs to read her a story. One night when he finished the story, he said to Jenny, “I love you, little girl. Do you love me?”

“Oh yes, Daddy,” Jenny replied. “You know that I love you.”

“Then,” her father asked, “Will you give me your pearls?”

Jenny was confused. “Oh, Daddy, not my pearls,” she said. “But you can have Princess, the white horse from my collection. Remember, the one you gave me last year? She’s my favorite.”

“That’s okay,” Jenny’s father said. “Daddy loves you,” and he kissed her goodnight.

About a week later, after he’d read her a story, Jenny’s father said once again, “I sure do love you. Do you love me?”

“Daddy, you know I love you.”

“Then will you give me your pearls.”

Jenny was confused again. “Oh Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have my baby doll. The brand new one I got for my birthday. She is so beautiful. You can have the yellow blanket that matches her sleeper, too.”

“That’s okay,” Jenny’s father said. “Daddy loves you. Good night.” And as

always, he gave her a gentle kiss.

A few nights later when her dad came in, Jenny was sitting on her bed. As he came close, he noticed her chin was trembling and one silent tear rolled down her cheek. What is it, Jenny? What's the matter?" Jenny didn't say anything, but lifted her hand up to her father, and when she opened it, there was her pearl necklace. In a trembling voice, she finally said, "Here, Daddy, it's for you." With tears gathering in his own eyes, Jenny's father reached out with one hand to take the necklace, and with the other hand he reached into his pocket and pulled out a blue velvet case and gave it to Jenny. When she opened it, she found a beautiful strand of real pearls.

Do not be deceived. *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above..."* This is the Truth revealed in God's Holy Word, yet all too often in this broken world we are deceived. We spend our days like kids in the dollar store filling our baskets with everything we can get our hands on, placing great value on things that have no real value, worthless imitations which only get in the way of *every good gift and every perfect gift* that God our Father wants to reach out and give us. So, this morning I ask you the same question I've been asking myself after reading that story: What are you holding onto? What are you holding so tightly that you are unable to open your hands and receive what God your Father is patiently waiting to give you?

The struggle to let go of those things that keep us from a closer walk with God is nothing new and is seen throughout Scripture. An example from St. Matthew is the story about a rich young ruler who approached Jesus and said, *"Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"* So He said to him, *"Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."* He said to Him, *"Which ones?"* Jesus said, *"You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and your mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* The young man said to Him, *"All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?"* Jesus said to him, *"If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."* But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions (Mt. 19:16-22).

The conversation Jesus had with the rich young ruler is so similar to the story we opened with this morning, that you can almost hear Jesus saying to this young man, “Do you love me?” To which he replies, “Oh yes, Good Teacher, you know that I love you.” “Then,” Jesus says, “sell and give to the poor all of those possessions that are coming between us, and come and follow Me.” But the young man replies, “Oh no Jesus, not my possessions. But I’ll tell you what, I’ll keep all of the commandments, every one of them, even from my youth up.” So, Jesus says, “Okay, I love you.” We can hope that someday this young man, like the little girl in our story, changed his mind, and by the grace of God opened his hands, let go of all he held so tightly, and accepted the gift that Jesus was offering, the good and perfect gift of God Himself.

Consider one more example, an example that shows it’s not only possessions that can keep us from a closer walk with God, but other things as well. St. Luke tells this story about Martha and her sister Mary: *“Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to His teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to Him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.’ But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her’”* (Luke 10:38-42).

Martha started out with the best intentions. She welcomed Jesus into her home and into her life, and therefore we can be certain that she wanted to hear what He had to say, but the text tells us that she was *“distracted.”* Jesus describes her as *“anxious and troubled about many things,”* and a lot of us could probably be described the same way. We think our modern lives are so busy and so demanding, but it appears that people have always been busy. In the busyness of our lives we have a choice to make. Will we spend our days like Martha, holding onto distraction and anxiety and trouble, or will we, like Mary, choose *“the good portion”* which will not be taken away from us, that good portion which is the good and perfect gift of God Himself.

I’ll leave you with this quote. In his book *The Weight of Glory*, C.S. Lewis

described people as “half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

Lewis is correct, isn't he. We are far too easily pleased. We settle for fake pearls that turn our necks green, fill our homes with possessions that moth and rust corrupt and thieves break in and steal (Matthew 6:19), and we fill our lives with busyness and distraction instead of resting at Jesus' feet. May God help us not to be deceived. May God our Father help us open our hands and let go of all those worthless imitations, to the end that He may reach down from heaven with “*every good gift and every perfect gift*” that He so patiently waits to give us, through the merits of His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.