

THE GIFT  
John 14: 1-3, 29  
September 20, 2009

Today is a special day. For you see, 49 years ago Shirley Huseltine gave birth to her second son. She and her husband, Edgar, named that baby David Earl Huseltine.

Yes David Earl! I actually know two other David Earls, one of them is married to a cousin.

Today is indeed my birthday. Like most birthdays there will be a special meal with family, a birthday pie, I like pies more than cakes, and presents. At least I believe there will be presents.

As I have gotten older I find the gifts are not as important as they once were. I'm sure you would agree with that. It's not like I don't enjoy the gifts, I do appreciate them very much. What is meaningful is the time and thought people put in to buying the present.

What about cash or gift cards? I'm torn when it comes to giving and receiving them. It is easier to buy a gift card. With cash I can choose exactly what I want. But is it the convenience what a gift is all about?

Ultimately a gift is an expression of love. That gift, whatever it might be, let's the person know who receives it that they are loved.

Since it is my birthday today, I thought it would be fun to talk a little about gifts. A couple weeks ago Dale Milford was with us. He shared a statement that I am fond of: **"Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift, that's why they call it the present"**.

Those that have fought and won a battle with a life threatening disease, or those now in the struggle, know the importance of each new day. When you don't know how many more days you have left, you want to relish each day you have.

Last week Mary Lyle sang a couple songs in honor of September 11<sup>th</sup>. I remember right after that terrible day people took stock in what was

important. Across this country people placed family and faith over other demands. Here we are 8 years later and so many have gone back to the treadmill. We take for granted that tomorrow will come and the day after that and the day after that. So we lose the reverence for the day.

We have a little book at home. It's written by Max Lucado, titled "*God Thinks You're Wonderful!*" Let me read a portion of it.

**God is fond of you...  
If he had a wallet, your photo would be in it.  
If he had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it.  
He sends you flowers every spring  
and a sunrise every morning.  
So try this.  
The next time a sunrise steals your breath ...  
or a meadow of flowers leaves you speechless...  
remain that way,  
Say nothing and listen as heaven whispers,  
"do you like it? I did it just for you."  
If we give gifts to show our love,  
how much more would he?**

God gives us the new day as a gift!

As gifts go, a new day is pretty big, but our Scripture Lesson talked about an even greater gift. "I am leaving you with a gift ~ peace of mind and heart."

Peace of mind and heart! That's an awesome gift. Given the stress level and anxiety of so many it seems like this gift has not been received.

Now Jesus was not talking about some relaxation exercise or meditation. He states, "The peace I give isn't like the peace the world gives".

So what is this peace? It is the peace of mind knowing that God is always with you. No matter where you are, what circumstance you find yourself in, God is there.

This presence will not shield you from pain or loss, but it will give you confidence to face whatever is before you.

An example of this comes from John Wesley's own experience. John Wesley is the founder of the Methodist Church. He was traveling to America in the 1770's to do some mission work with the natives. While at sea the waves were terrible. Many on board were scared, including Mr. Wesley. But there were Moravian Christians, a German-speaking group that prayed, sung hymns and were at peace through the storm.

Could they have died? Yes, they could have, but death did not frighten them. Those Moravians like millions of others over the years have taken to heart John 14. Christ has prepared a place for us so that when we die we will be with our Lord for all eternity.

Paul wrote in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians "Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death is your sting? But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

I think it would be great to play *Hail to the Victors* at the end of every Funeral Service. I know it wouldn't sit well with folks from MSU or Ohio State or a number of other colleges to play the University of Michigan's fight song, but a Funeral Service is a celebration of victory over death.

Because of what Jesus did, we do not have to fear death. Unlike the football player who has to work hard for the victory, we don't have to do anything. Salvation is a gift! All we need to do is accept that gift and feel the peace of mind it brings.

This past Wednesday, Ernie Harwell was at the Tiger's Game. He wanted to express to the fans his appreciation of all the cards and messages he has received since it was announced he had cancer.

I remember when that announcement was first made. He stated clearly he was not afraid to die. He knew his Savior would take care of him. You just listen to Ernie talk and you sense that he has the "peace that passes all understanding".

That same calm, that same peace of mind and heart, is available to everyone. All we do is let Christ into our heart, be born again, and we will get that gift.

This morning, I invite us to appreciate that gift. As you have noticed I have some gift boxes beside me. Let me open the top box to see if there is a gift for me.

The gift in this box is not just for me but it's for everyone. In this gift box are tickets that say "Ticket to Heaven". When you turn the ticket over you find the Scripture verse John 3:16.

We can put this ticket in our purse or wallet. Carry it with you where ever you go. Whenever things get tense or scary, just pull it out and let it remind you of God's presence with you. And if you or someone you know is facing death, take comfort in the knowledge that death has been swallowed up in victory. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory in Christ Jesus our Lord.