

Dearly Beloved of God,

In our Christmas Series at Living Word, the series title is "Discover the Heart of Christmas." Each weekly message is entitled "in the Glory of XXXXX" This week we hope to make that discovery in the Glory of Self-giving. Anytime I think of service or sacrifice, I think of the words of Jesus, John 15:13 (NIV)

**<sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.**

Then I get this vision of going out in a blaze of glory, laying down my life for someone - especially someone who goes on to make great contributions to society. Why the word "hero" might even appear in my epitaph. Then I wake up.

More often than not, the sacrifices that you and I are called to make (be) are of the living variety. In the words of the Apostle Paul, Romans 12:1-2 (TLB)

**<sup>1</sup> And so, dear brothers, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living sacrifice, holy--the kind he can accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask?**

**<sup>2</sup> Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but be a new and different person with a fresh newness in all you do and think. Then you will learn from your own experience how his ways will really satisfy you.**

Serving God by serving others often involves sacrifice - not the kind that kills us, but the kind that would have us go the extra mile. It involves commitment. It involves effort. It involves compassion. It requires an investment of time, treasure and talent.

I had the pleasure of being in the midst of a couple real life object lessons concerning this subject over the past 10 days.

The first involved trying to find two identical pieces of furniture that would be needed for a change we were planning in our home. Try as we might, we could not find these pieces at any furniture store in our area. An on-line search indicated that what we wanted might be available from Target, but only on-line, and not really in an acceptable finish. During one last visit to an area furniture store, the salesman tried to convince us to buy the expensive pieces from him, rip off the unacceptable moulding and replace it with moulding purchased from Home Depot. Barb and I had already prayed about this purchase, so refusing the offer was a "no-brainer."

Leaving that store, we realized that we were near a Target store. We quickly prayed again and felt that we should check it out. This went against some of my cerebral inclinations. From some of my internet sources, Target was labeled as very liberal, anti "Christmas" and an enemy of the Salvation Army. I need to tell you that none of this proved true. All over the store were signs saying "Merry Christmas." (The fact that we consider this some sort of victory these days is another story). Although the Salvation Army bell ringers are absent, Target promotes the Salvation Army as a major charity, donating sizeable percentages of certain sales to them. I have no idea whether this is connected to the fact that

the new President of France is a friend of both the USA and Israel, but it's nice to see.

Next we were in the furniture section and there it was, just the item we needed - right size, right function, right finish, right price. The only problem was that there was just one, and it was the floor model, and it was scratched. So we asked the clerk if she could tell from the store's computer if any other Target stores had the item in stock. Immediately she took this big ray-gun-looking contraption from her holster and aimed it at the piece. Immediately after scanning the bar code and punching in a few numbers she was able to tell us how many and where. She advised us to call the store first because the computer is not always accurate. We exchanged "Merry Christmas" greetings and drove home.

Things were looking pretty good; however I was not enjoying the prospect of calling a huge department store, going through several options with the phone's key pad, only to talk to a voice mail machine. So, another prayer and we made the call. Two clicks later I was talking to a real live customer service person, in the furniture department. She verified that they had three of the items in stock and that they would set two of them aside for us. Things were looking even better. 40 minutes later we were at the store and in the furniture department. We saw one of the items (also a display model) and no more. So I went looking for someone who could help. Two aisles over I located two ladies who were stocking shelves. When they saw me they immediately stopped, asked if they could help. I hadn't spoken half a sentence before one of the ladies identified herself as the one I had spoken to on the phone. Our two items were on a dolly, up front near the cash register. She walked us up front, connected us to a cashier who was just about to open her machine and put in a call for a loading team. 3 minutes later we were out of the store, the items loaded securely in our vehicle.

The system that Target had in place was customer friendly. Besides that, we encountered 6 different Target employees who all seemed genuinely interested in meeting our need. To do so required going the extra mile; it required commitment and compassion. It all came together. It was a beautiful example of God's "Customer Service" to us, if you will. Philippians 4:19 (TLB)

***<sup>19</sup> And it is He who will supply all your needs from his riches in glory because of what Christ Jesus has done for us.***

And it was a beautiful example of the "Customer Service" we (the church) should provide to one another, and to the world.

May you Discover the Heart of Christmas in the Glory of Self-Giving.

Yours for His Purposes, Pastor Les

P.S. The other experience we had involved a computer and showed us that one person can make a difference, even when they are working in a corporate system that seems designed to produce customer dis-satisfaction. You and Jesus can always make a difference.