

FIRST FREE CHURCH
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A Season for Receiving By Pastor Jay

When I was growing up, Friday night was always family night, and for many winters that meant going to the YMCA. Many of those years we were able to go because of another family in our church, who bought my family a membership as a Christmas gift. Their generosity was a great blessing to my family, and the source of many wonderful family memories. And when they saw us at church, what they always wanted to know was, were we enjoying it? Had we put it to use?

Now on the surface that seems to perhaps be the obvious question, but it actually reveals something about the nature of the gift. As with many gifts, receiving that gift was not a one-step process. They didn't ask if we had received the cards in the mail; they asked if we were putting them to use, if we were enjoying them. That was why they gave the gift, not simply so that we would have YMCA cards in our wallet, but so that we could enjoy all of the other things that come with membership. To receive the gift fully, we had to use it, we had to incorporate it into our lives.

Receiving the gift that God gives is like receiving the gift of a membership, to receive the gift of salvation fully, we have to put it to use. Certainly accepting God's gift of salvation is the beginning, and a critical step, but it is far from the full measure of what God's gift has to offer. God's gift isn't merely for when life is over, it is for today. The promise of resurrection and eternal life are gifts beyond price; but like the membership, if we are to receive it fully, then we have to put it to use, to incorporate that truth into our lives today.

We often talk about Christmas as the season for giving, and that is most certainly an appropriate response to what God has given us

in Christ Jesus. But the first step—our first responsibility—is to receive, and then to give to others out of the fullness of God's great gift. And so while it might sound a bit odd, I want to challenge us to receive this Christmas: to let the gift of the gospel permeate our lives a little more fully. Let us not make the mistake of thinking that we have received it all already. As Scripture demonstrates repeatedly, God's capacity to give is always greater than our capacity to receive.

So I would encourage you to examine yourselves and see where you could receive anew the gift of God. Maybe you are stressed and worried – about work, money, or life. Then hear again the good news that in Jesus, God is here, and He will make everything right, and so receive the gift of His peace. Or maybe you need to receive the endless and unconquerable love of God, personified in Jesus, the perfect love that casts out all fear. Maybe you need to hear again the song of the angels and of Zechariah, and receive the gift of joy that comes from knowing that God has been faithful and has done all He has promised and more.

The gospel is the gift that never stops giving, but it is therefore also the gift we must never stop receiving. What God wants to know isn't just if you have received it, but if you are putting it to use, if you are enjoying it. Like the family that gave us a YMCA membership, God's desire—His purpose in giving the gift—didn't end with membership in His family. God's desire is that you would enjoy all of the benefits that come with being a child of God. And so let us receive them, use them, and enjoy them.

MERRY CHRISTMAS & HAPPY NEW YEAR!

VALUE #5—KINGDOM DIVERSITY

Seeking a genuine reconciliation of all people in love and oneness in Christ

At Christmas we celebrate the coming of our King! His arrival brought the Kingdom of God to earth. And this Kingdom is made up of a diversity of people – from all tribes, all nations, all ages, all genders, all ethnicities.

Ephesians 2:15-19 says, “[Christ’s] purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility... Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household.”

Paul, of course, was addressing the division between Jews and Gentiles. He could have just as easily been addressing us with all our differences. Jesus, he says, is our peace.

He has reconciled us to God and to each other, through the cross, breaking down any wall that would divide us. He takes our differences and makes us into citizens of the same nation and members of the same family.

This is our fifth value at First Free: Kingdom Diversity. We seek a genuine reconciliation of all people in love and oneness in Christ.

What will that look like? It means as a church we will be sensitive to our differences and extend grace to those who are not like us. It means we will grow in our diversity as a church – pursuing a body that reflects the multi-ethnic, multi-generational, multi-faceted people who live in our local community. It means we will seek unity in Christ—because we are a new people!



November 30 The King's Credentials
December 7 The King's Family Tree
December 14 The King's Birth Announcement
December 21 The King's Everlasting Rule
Christmas Eve The Bad News of the King's Birth

First Free's Mission – To help individuals become Christ-centered and Christ-sent together.

**FIRST FREE:
OUR MISSION
IS TO HELP
INDIVIDUALS
BECOME
CHRIST-CENTERED
& CHRIST-SENT
TOGETHER**

Want more info?

Visit www.firstfreechurch.org

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@FEFCMpls

FIRST FREE STAFF

JOEL SUTTON
SENIOR PASTOR
joel.sutton@firstfreechurch.org

JAY POUND
ASSOCIATE PASTOR
jay.pound@firstfreechurch.org

BETH BROWN
CHILDREN'S MINISTRY DIRECTOR
beth.brown@firstfreechurch.org

MIKE GRAFF
WORSHIP MINISTRY DIRECTOR
mike.graff@firstfreechurch.org

DEE HUANCA & MAUREEN JUAREZ
FAITH COMMUNITY NURSES
nurses@firstfreechurch.org

KAITLIN GRAFF
ADMINISTRATION
kaitlin.graff@firstfreechurch.org

SHELBY ANDERSON
DESIGN/COMMUNICATIONS ASSISTANT
shelby.anderson@firstfreechurch.org

SCOTT BECKETT
FACILITIES TECHNICIAN
scott.beckett@firstfreechurch.org



SEE MORE INFO AT
www.firstfreechurch.org

OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD! BY: BETH BROWN

98 boys and girls at Creekside Clubs on Wednesday night each packed a shoebox full of gifts to bring Christmas joy to a needy child across the world. Thank you to the 30 parents and church family members who showed up to help the children. And thank you to all who prayed for Operation Christmas Child and who donated items and money to make this happen. Here are a few quotes that some parents shared with me following the packing party...

"It was wonderful to see the kiddos praying for their boxes and the thoughtfulness that they put into their boxes! Absolutely an amazing night!"

"OCC is such a wonderful event! We come to volunteer and give to others, but then we receive a gift as well when we leave with hearts filled of love and prepared to celebrate the season of our Savior's birth."



"It was a very fun night to be a part of. Was so much fun to see the children 'shop' the choices as they thought about other kids their ages. They each spent so much time thinking about what they had in their boxes to be sure it was 'fun and usable but special' as one girl told me. I was really amazed at how they went for so much more practical choices over the toys and such."

"Thanks for coordinating another wonderful OCC event!! It was just great and so special for everyone. I so appreciate this opportunity you create for our kids to get outside of themselves and get really excited about sharing the love of Christ through Christmas giving. You really do a good job of helping the kids understand the deep joy of giving. THANKS!! Also super special for me was to see kids that we've invited all there and all packing boxes. From my experience with these families, they have always been on the receiving end of this sort of thing. They are always the ones in need, the ones that are less fortunate, the ones struggling to meet their own basic needs. What a FABULOUS experience for these kids to be put into a position to be the givers and to learn what it feels like to give to someone else in need. To experience that no matter what you face in life, there are always others struggling as much and more than you are. So heart warming!! Praise God!!"

OUR ANNUAL "HAPPY THANKSGIVING!" CES FOOD DRIVE

Thank you to everyone who donated to our annual Thanksgiving Food Drive! We gave an incredible 1,180 pounds of food to those in need that was donated to Community Emergency Services!



UPCOMING @ FIRST FREE

EXPRESSIONS — DECEMBER 7TH FROM 3:30-5:30 P.M.

For those struggling with chronic illnesses or pain, join us from 3:30-5:30 P.M. in room 103.

THE DEEP — DECEMBER 17TH @ 6:30 P.M.

Come, be refreshed and encouraged. Join us for a time of worship and prayer at The DEEP, December 17th at 6:30 p.m. Childcare will be provided.

CREEKSIDE CLUBS & YOUTH GROUP LAST NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS BREAK — DECEMBER 10TH @ 6:30 P.M.

Join us for the last night of Creekside Clubs and Youth Group before Christmas on December 10th at 6:30 p.m. Clubs and Youth Group will resume on January 7th.

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES — DECEMBER 24TH @ 3:00 & 4:30 P.M.

Join us in celebrating "The King is Born" at our annual Christmas Eve Services on Wednesday, December 24th, at 3:00 and 4:30 p.m. Childcare will be available at the 4:30 p.m. service.

OFFICE CLOSED — DECEMBER 24-26 DUE TO THE CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY

OFFICE CLOSED — AT 12:00 P.M. DECEMBER 31 & JANUARY 1 DUE TO THE NEW YEARS HOLIDAY

Church Family News

CONGRATULATIONS to Donald Johnson as he recently celebrated his 90th birthday on November 9th and to both Donald & Ann Johnson as they celebrated their 62nd anniversary on November 22nd!

WELCOME TO THE FIRST FREE FAMILY, NEW MEMBERS!

Dave & Keri Graden Ronn & Sara Kreps
Jorge & Rebecca Chiques Darla Melander
Kristie Livingston

FROM OUR FAITH COMMUNITY NURSES Peanut Avoidance Guidelines at First Free Church

Out of concern for persons with peanut allergies, First Evangelical Free Church will try to reduce the risk of exposure by the following measures:

1. Bakery items with peanuts will not be served during the Sunday coffee hour.
2. Food served to children will not have peanuts.
3. Signage in the kitchen will ask that groups using the kitchen to refrain from using peanut products to avoid exposure and to prevent cross contamination with surfaces.
4. Items brought to church functions (such as potluck meals) should be labeled if they contain peanuts or peanut oil.
5. Registration forms for children and youth events will have space for allergies. Parents are asked to speak with the children or youth director if special accommodations are required.

Due to multiple users of the kitchen facilities, as well as food prepared in homes and brought to the church, First Evangelical Free Church cannot guarantee peanut free safety.