

Matthew 2:11b  
December 19, '10

"FOUR LITTLE WORDS"

THERE WAS A FASCINATING MAN NAMED HENRY VAN DYKE WHO WAS VERY FAMOUS JUST ABOUT A HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

IF YOU'VE BEEN USING YOUR ADVENT DEVOTIONAL BOOK, YOU READ ABOUT HIM THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT.

HE'S PROBABLY BEST-KNOWN TO US AS THE MAN WHO WROTE THE HYMN "JOYFUL, JOYFUL, WE ADORE THEE" THAT WE SING TO THE MUSIC OF BEETHOVEN.

HE WAS ALSO THE MINISTER WHO PRESIDED AT THE FUNERAL SERVICE OF MARK TWAIN.

HENRY VAN DYKE WROTE HUNDREDS OF WONDERFUL STORIES.

PROBABLY THE MOST WELL-KNOWN IS "THE STORY OF THE OTHER WISE MAN."

IF YOU HAVEN'T HEARD THAT STORY, IT WOULD BE GOOD IF YOU DID.

HENRY VAN DYKE WAS A PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER & ONE OF HIS SERMONS WAS USED AS THE BASIS FOR ANOTHER STORY THAT YOU *DO* KNOW – "WHY THE CHIMES RANG" – THE STORY THAT YOU JUST PRESENTED FOR US.

NOW, IN YOUR BULLETIN TODAY, THE SERMON IS TITLED "FOUR LITTLE WORDS."

HMMMM. WHY – THE – CHIMES – RANG.

IT WOULD SEEM LOGICAL THAT THOSE WOULD BE THE FOUR LITTLE WORDS I'M TALKING ABOUT WHEN I USE THAT TITLE.

THEY COULD BE – BUT THEY'RE NOT.

I'M TALKING ABOUT FOUR OTHER WORDS – FOUR WORDS THAT COME FROM ANOTHER CHRISTMAS STORY – THE REAL CHRISTMAS STORY – THE STORY OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS.

I REALLY COULD HAVE MADE THE SERMON TITLE LONGER BY SAYING "*FOUR LITTLE WORDS THAT CHANGE EVERYTHING*" BECAUSE WHEN YOU HEAR THEM, YOU'LL PROBABLY AGREE THAT THEY DO.

IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW, WE READ THE STORY OF THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN TO JESUS.

CLOSE TO THE END OF THAT STORY, THE WISE MEN FIND JESUS WITH MARY & JOSEPH.

THEY ENTER THE HOUSE WHERE THEY'RE STAYING & MATTHEW THEN SAYS – AND HERE THEY ARE – THE FOUR LITTLE WORDS – "*THEY GAVE HIM GIFTS.*"

NOW YOU UNDERSTAND WHY I SAID THOSE WERE "4 LITTLE WORDS THAT CHANGE EVERYTHING," DON'T YOU?

WHAT IF THOSE "4 LITTLE WORDS" WEREN'T THERE?

WHAT IF – INSTEAD OF THE WISE MEN GIVING JESUS GIFTS – THEY JUST GAVE HIM A WAVE & "HOW DO YOU DO?"

WOULD THAT, THEN, BE OUR CHRISTMAS TRADITION?

CAN YOU IMAGINE WAKING UP ON CHRISTMAS MORNING & HAVING YOUR PARENTS GIVE YOU A WAVE & “HOW DO YOU DO?” INSTEAD OF PRESENTS UNDER THE TREE?

SO YOU CAN SEE WHY I SAY THAT THESE ARE “4 LITTLE WORDS THAT CHANGE EVERYTHING.”

BUT, YOU KNOW, THE GIFTS THE WISE MEN GAVE JESUS AREN'T THE MOST IMPORTANT GIFTS OF THIS SEASON, NOR THE REASON WE GIVE GIFTS AT CHRISTMAS.

IT IS JESUS HIMSELF WHO IS THE MOST IMPORTANT GIFT & THE THINGS THAT *HE* GAVE TO THE PEOPLE HE MET.

WHEN THERE WAS A WEDDING FEAST & THEY RAN OUT OF WINE, JESUS WAS THERE TO PROVIDE THE GIFT OF REFRESHMENT TO THE GUESTS – BUT IT WAS LIVING WATER THAT WAS MOST IMPORTANT THAT HE GAVE.

WHEN PEOPLE WERE HUNGRY ON A HILLSIDE, HE GAVE THE GIFT OF FOOD – BUT IT WAS SPIRITUAL FOOD THAT HE GAVE THEM THAT WAS FAR MORE IMPORTANT.

WHEN PEOPLE WERE BLIND OR SICK OR CRIPPLED, JESUS GAVE THE GIFT OF HEALING – BUT IT WAS THE HEALING OF THEIR HEARTS THAT MATTERED MOST.

IN THE STORY YOU TOLD US TODAY, THE REASON THE CHIMES RANG, WASN'T BECAUSE OF ANY OF THE VERY EXPENSIVE GIFTS THE PEOPLE GAVE.

IT WAS BECAUSE PEDRO WAS WILLING TO GIVE THE GIFT OF HIMSELF – HIS LOVE & HIS CARE TO THE POOR WOMAN HE & HIS LITTLE BROTHER MET ALONG THE WAY.

THE FINEST CHRISTMAS GIFT ISN'T THE ONE THAT COSTS THE MOST MONEY, BUT THE ONE THAT CARRIES THE MOST LOVE.

REMEMBER THAT THIS CHRISTMAS & ALL THE CHRISTMASSES TO COME.

AND, BY THE WAY, THE IDEAS IN THIS LITTLE SERMON WERE TAKEN FROM ANOTHER CHRISTMAS SERMON – A SERMON BY A MAN BY THE NAME OF HENRY VAN DYKE. AMEN.