

Sermon for Christ & Grace Church Petersburg, VA  
Christmas Eve, December 24, 2016  
The Rev. Bill Queen  
“The Gift and the Giver”

Joe lived by himself outside of a small town in rural Virginia. He didn't have any friends. He had outlived his old friends. He'd never gotten around to making any new ones. He'd outlived his wife and they had never been able to have any children. His Christmas was going to be a quiet one, all alone. On Christmas morning he went out to sweep some leaves off of his sidewalk. As he went out the door he was surprised to find a large package wrapped in brightly colored paper sitting on his doorstep.

He carefully bent over and picked it up. It was surprisingly heavy. He carried it into the house and set it on the kitchen table. He looked at the card on the package. The card didn't say who the gift was to or who it was from. It had only one word written on it—the word 'joy.'

Joe was not one to rip into anything. He carefully slit the tape holding on the wrapping paper with the knife he always carried in his pocket. Inside the paper was a cardboard box, inside the box a towel, and inside the towel was a metal pot with a tight lid. He took off the lid to find that the pot was full of hot soup, still steaming. It fogged up his glasses as he leaned over it and smelled the delicious aroma coming up from it—chicken... and vegetables.

Joe wanted to find out who had given him this gift so he could thank them. He walked over to his next-door neighbor's, with whom he had a nodding acquaintance, to ask if he'd given it. His neighbor said, yes, he had carried it over to Joe's house and set it on the step that morning, but that Joe would have to thank his wife for it. Joe thanked his neighbor for his part in the gift of the soup and went inside the house to see his neighbor's wife.

Joe began to thank her for the gift of the soup. She said, yes, she had reheated the soup that morning and wrapped it, but that he would have to thank the people down at the church for cooking the soup. Joe thanked her for her part in the gift of the soup and got in his old pickup and drove into town to the church.

A couple of folks were working in the church kitchen, getting coffee and doughnuts ready for the coffee hour following that morning's service. He told

them who he was and that he was looking for the people to thank for the gift of the soup. They said, yes, they had been part of the group that cooked the soup, but that he'd have to thank the farmer and his wife who had given them the chicken and the vegetables they'd used to prepare the soup. Joe thanked them for their part in the gift of the soup and drove his pickup out of town, following the directions to the farm that they had given him.

Beyond a crossroads Joe turned down a long gravel road and pulled up next to a barn, where he could see a man and a woman putting out hay for horses. Joe went up to them, told him who he was, and began to thank them for the gift of the soup. The woman said, yes, she'd tended the vegetables from seed and canned them at the end of the summer. The man said, yes, he'd raised the chickens from baby chicks, but they both agreed that he'd have to thank God for providing the soil and the rain, the sunshine, the seed and the baby chicks. So Joe thanked the man and his wife for their part in the gift of the soup and went outside the barn.

Joe leaned on a fence rail and took his time looking out across the fields and up at the sky. He had already thanked all the people who had had a hand in the gift of his soup. Now he thanked God. He thanked God for providing everything that went into the soup. He thanked God for everybody who had taken their time to think about him, and to care enough about him to make the soup, and to give that gift to him. Joe then realized, for the first time in his life, that everything he saw, everything he had, even life itself, were all gifts of love from God. There was only one word that could describe the emotion Joe was feeling that Christmas morning—joy.