

Living well through Advent

Week Four

Tuesday 20 December 2022

The Gift of Simplicity

*'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift
to be free,*

*'Tis the gift to come down where we
ought to be,*

Joseph Brackett, Simple Gifts

The Shakers were a Christian sect known for their simple ways of living, as captured in the familiar song Simple Gifts, written in 1848 by Shaker elder Joseph Brackett. There are eight lines to this song and over the next several days, we will reflect on them, two lines at a time.

The opening lines of Simple Gifts appear above. Together we will unpack the wisdom they contain for us as we continue reflecting upon the connection between simplicity and our faith.

First, and most importantly, these first two lines of the song mention the word “gift” three times. If simplicity is a gift then it implies that there must be a giver. The giver, although not explicitly stated in this song, is clearly God. We are called to be stewards of this gift, in the same way a gardener stewards the conditions for a plant. We are to help it grow, knowing with time and attention God will create the growth. We each are called to be stewards of simplicity in the garden of our own souls.

Staying with the gardening image, the phrases “’tis a gift to be free” and “to come down where we ought to be” both speak of the fruit that manifests in our lives when we are being mindful stewards of God’s gift of simplicity. Of course, just as with any garden, our lives are a work in progress, and there will always be plenty of weeds and distractions that need tending. We do the tending, and God creates the growth.

Let us now consider the following questions for personal reflection and prayer:

- ◆ What words or phrases speak to you in the first two lines of Simple Gifts?
- ◆ What do you think of the idea that simplicity is a gift
- ◆ We are given and that our role is to be “stewards of simplicity”?

SIMPLE GIFTS

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'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,*