

God's Gift of Love

Christmas 2A

Text: Ephesians 1:3–14

January 2, 2011

God Is Not the Object of Faith!

The title of this sermon is *God Is Not the Object of Faith!*

As you hear that you may be wondering,
if God is not the object of faith then what is?

After all, every Sunday when we come to worship we worship God.
If we worship God,
doesn't that makes God the *object* of worship.
And if God is the *object* of worship,
doesn't that make God the *object* of faith?

Hold onto that for a moments while we turn back the clock to Sunday, November 29th.
The Buffalo Bills were playing a football game at home
against the Pittsburg Steelers.

Considering the records of the two teams,
the Bills surprisingly were tied with the Steelers,
and the game was in overtime.

About 4½ minutes into overtime,
Bills receiver Steve Johnson was streaking down the field
toward the Pittsburg endzone.

The Buffalo quarterback dropped back in the pocket
and threw a long pass to Johnson for what would have been
the game-winning touchdown.
As the ball sailed down the field, Johnson got behind the Pittsburg defenders,
ran under the ball
and reached out to catch it.

The pass was perfect;
the ball hit him right in his hands
—and he dropped it.
To Johnson's dismay, the Steelers went on to win the game
after they drove down the field
and kicked the winning fieldgoal.

After the game Johnson said,
*I had the game in my hands, and I dropped it.
I'll never get over it. Ever.*

Had Johnson left it at that
and accepted responsibility for his failure to make the play,
we probably would have empathized with his disappointment.
It's bad enough to make a mistake that costs your team the game,
but to make it in front of a stadium filled with the hometown fans
must be absolutely humiliating.

Instead of walking off the field the hero for making the play, Johnson was the goat.

I had the game in my hands, and I dropped it. I'll never get over it.

Had Johnson left it at that, we would have understood.

Unfortunately, he didn't leave it at that.

After a few moments of replaying the drop in his mind

and thinking about *what might have been*,

Johnson decided he needed someone to blame.

Rather than manning-up

and accepting responsibility

—rather than saying *I blew it*—

Johnson got on his *ipod*

and twittered that it was God's fault

he dropped the pass.

I PRAISE YOU 24/7!!!!!!

AND THIS HOW YOU DO ME!!!!

YOU EXPECT ME TO LEARN FROM THIS???

HOW???!!!

ILL NEVER FORGET THIS!! EVER!!!

THX THO...

Johnson's twitter is a poignant commentary

on a misperception of faith that is

rampant in the world today.

Too many people, Christians among them,

do not understand the fundamental truth that

God is not the object of faith.

As I say that, you may be scratching your heads and wondering,

Pastor, what do you mean by that?

If faith is not about God, what is it about?

When I say that God is not the object of faith,

I am using the word *object*

in its grammatical sense.

In a sentence, the subject is what does the action—

it is what gives life to the verb

which describes the action taking place.

The subject makes the action happen.

The object

is what is acted upon.

Take the simple sentence, *I buy a DVD*.

The subject, the pronoun *I*,

carries out an action, in this case the verb *buy*.

What *I buy* is a *DVD*,

which is the object

of my action.

The DVD doesn't do anything until *I buy* it
 —it is just there on a shelf in the store
 doing nothing.

When I take it home and put it into the DVD player,
 it will take action,
 but until I act upon it, it does nothing.

Now think about that is regards to the dynamics of faith.

God is the subject of faith, not the object.

As the subject of faith, God is the one who acts upon our lives.

The action of faith is on God's part, not ours.

In other words, the relationship of faith is not about our focus on God.

It is about God's focus on us.

Faith is not what we do to or for God;
 faith is what God does
 to and for us.

As the subject of faith,

God is at the center of
 everything that happens.

Our forgiveness and salvations is a gift of love God gives to us;
 it is not something we coerce with our prayers, our piety, our worship
 and praise or our acts of kindness and compassion.

Our prayers and praise and our acts of kindness and compassion
 are a response to the love
 God first shares with us.

Steve Johnson's twitter

shows that he doesn't understand that.

He doesn't *get it*.

He sees himself as the subject of faith.

He believes that if he *praises God 24/7*,

then God is obligated to help him catch the ball
 or whatever else might be needed at any given moment.

And if God doesn't come through,
 then whatever happens is God's fault.

Well, let me say it quite plainly,

*God is not obligated to do anything for Steve Johnson
 or for any of us.*

God doesn't owe us anything.

It is we who owe God—

for the gift of life in creation

and for the gift of life eternal

through the death and resurrection

of his son Jesus Christ.

And the sooner we accept that,
the healthier and stronger
we and our faith will be
When we come to understand that
God is the subject of faith rather than the object,
a great weight is lifted from our shoulders.

With the focus of our faith on the actions of God
and all that he gives us in the gift of Creation and the gift of his son,
we gain a perspective that enables us
to live lives that are meaningful, purposeful and filled with joy.
God doesn't owe us anything.
Rather, in his grace he chooses to
bless our lives with his great love.

