

'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 logo for Living Compass features the words "LIVING" and "COMPASS" stacked vertically. The "O" in "COMPASS" is replaced by a stylized compass rose with four colored quadrants (red, green, blue, yellow). Below the main text, the tagline "outfitting for the journey" is written in a smaller, lowercase font.

LIVING
COMPASS
outfitting for the journey

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“Todos los días se reunían en el templo, y en las casas partían el pan y comían juntos con alegría y sencillez de corazón.”

Tuesday, December 20, 2022

The Gift of Simplicity

by Scott Stoner

*'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 (the entire song is on p. 44), 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.

Making It Personal: 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”?

Learn

Advent Day 24

Read Habakkuk 2:1-4.

Does this reading remind you of Thomas the disciple? Why do you think the folks who organized the lectionary picked this reading from the Old Testament for this friend of Jesus?

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