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THE ROY OF CHRISTMAS

Pastor James Winderlich

I'm sure that it was around September that I saw Christmas stock being put out in our supermarket. I've heard people say that it comes out earlier each year, but this is the first time that I've really noticed it.

I can't remember what it was that I saw, but there was no mistaking that it was for Christmas. The quantity wasn't great. It was almost as though it wasn't a serious attempt to kick Christmas off, but it still sent me an unnerving message. It was saying, "You know that it's going to happen, better be ready."

I've heard people complaining about how early Christmas merchandise comes out each year. People claim that it trivializes the season. That it's crass and unnecessary. That it strips the traditional beauty and peace away from the festival. I guess that I would agree with their complaints if it weren't for the fact that a lot of people must be buying the merchandise, otherwise the store owners wouldn't do it.

We have all sorts of expectations around Christmas, and quite often these expectations cause conflict within us. On the one hand we yearn for a nostalgic, traditional Christmas. One that takes us back to the good memories of our past. And so we use old fashioned language like joy, peace, goodwill, family time and so on. On the other hand we crave something new. We easily become bored with the predictability of our Christmas celebrations and so we scour endless catalogues searching for that new thing that might appeal to our appetites. We latch onto new words like; lifestyle, retro, the new black, and gigabytes. The absurdity of this blunt contradiction is where our seasonal carping begins. We're never satisfied, and it's so long since we have been, that our whining has become ritualized. Our drone begins in September. No wonder shops need such a lead time. They're waiting for us to get it all out of our systems before the season proper starts. Then we might be ready for some good old unrestrained spending.

So where's the joy of Christmas? Surely by now we must be getting some delight from the season.

I want you to meet a bloke called Roy. Roy has nothing outstanding to do with Christmas, but Roy is an outstanding human being, and I think that Roy's example might just curb our plaintive yuletide.

Roy would have to be one of the most generous people that I've ever met. He delights in sacrificially serving his family, his community and the environment. As unusual as it might sound in this day and age, Roy's joy really is in giving rather than receiving.

Roy never had a family of his own, but there was always his brother's family to care for. Over many years three of them, his brother – his brother's wife – and his niece, all fell seriously ill and died. In my time I watched Roy visit his brother at our local nursing home. There, every single day of the year, he fed him his lunch and attend to his other needs. His brother, a strong strapping man had experienced a severe and debilitating stroke and Roy was now his carer. Roy was there every day until his brother died.

While all of this was going on, Roy accepted the responsibility for caring for his brother's remaining daughter. He welcomed her into his home and supported her in her own remarkable journey of grief and growth. His love and generosity was truly outstanding.

Roy didn't just limit his generosity to his immediate family. There were people who he cared for from our local community. People who, themselves, were isolated and who needed the openhanded care and concern that Roy was willing to offer. He would pay them visits, and make sure that he was there to share a meal with them at special times during the year.

Roy also had a great love for the environment. He didn't just limit his care to people. He also had a deep concern for the environment and particularly the animals that were a part of it. It was a joy to go out bush with Roy and learn from him. We would find obscure reptiles and rescue animals caught in the deadly mud on the edge of dams. Seeing the land and its inhabitants looking healthy gave Roy joy...so much so that he would spend countless hours chipping away at noxious weeds.

If this story sounds simple that's because it is. Roy didn't shun the prickly ends of festive seasons: The hype and the commercialization. He didn't need supermarket shelves to stimulate him but neither did they disturb him. Quite simply, they had nothing to do with him. It's just that he was too busy with Joy to be bothered with the empty trappings and trimmings. And the joy that was his came simply from his bubbling generosity. It's not that his generosity earned him joy, instead it led him to where joy was to be found, in the life of another.

Jesus' friend and follower Paul once said:

Rom 15:13 May God, the source of hope, fill you with all joy and peace by means of your faith in him, so that your hope will continue to grow by the power of the Holy Spirit. (GNB)

Joy is a gift from God, a gift that is always to be shared with another. It's a gift that comes through the living relationship with God that we call faith. And it's that faith that produces all sorts of amazing things in people's lives. Things like:

Gal 5:22 love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness. (GNB)

Has the joy gone out of your Christmas? Maybe it's time to put some Roy into it. Why keep doing the same things year after year that don't produce any joy, and then expect the outcome to be different. Ignore the loaded shop shelves and discover some Roy. Give of yourself and share yourself around. And if you're struggling with that maybe it's time to meet the Christmas child Jesus. He's the reason for the season bringing God's abundant joy, generosity and Roy to each of us.

Have a *Royful* Christmas.