

Advent Midweek 1 (Commemoration of St. Nicolaus of Myra, Pastor), December 6, 2017  
Text: Mark 10:13-16  
Theme: St. Nicolaus, the Controversial

**Few saints of the Church have been more controversial among right wing Christians than St. Nicolaus. I once had a man threaten to leave the church because I preached on St. Nicolaus on Christmas Day. I told him, "No wonder he doesn't bring you presents." Not a particularly helpful retort, but I couldn't help myself. He left. Oh well.**

**St. Nicolaus was the Bishop of Myra which is in the part of modern day Turkey that is in Asia. I think, St. Nicolaus is so controversial because Western thinkers require everything to make sense and to fit into their predetermined boxes or they become frustrated or angry. Perhaps this is why Western Christianity is so schismatic. Spiritually speaking, every human has a different sized and different shaped box. If we are rigid about what your spiritual box must look like, some things may not fit and when things don't fit, they get pushed out. The Eastern mind is much more open to mystery. They are not so dependent upon strict parameters when dealing with spiritual issues. In fact, to this day, in the Eastern Church, the Lord's Supper is referred to as "the Mystery." The bottom line is that we do not and cannot understand how everything in *nature* works and then sometimes, God works *supernaturally*. Our**

**job is not to box in God. Our gift is to explore and experience his work in this world.**

**So we celebrate St. Nicolaus today. He was an ordinary pastor in the church with extraordinary love for people. Legends of his love abound. There is the story of the man who had no dowry for his daughters. In those days, if a woman did not have a dowry, that is a big savings account to go into the marriage with her, she could not be married. So a woman without the cash would be relegated in that era to a life of prostitution or begging. St. Nicolaus is said to have gone by the home of this poor man with three daughters in the dead of night on three separate nights. Each night he threw through the window a bag of gold. Later on in the northern lands, the story evolved into the bags of gold being thrown down the chimney.**

**There is also a story of him rescuing drowning sailors. There is a story of him rescuing young boys from an evil man. There is the story of him defending men condemned to death. No matter what story you here of St. Nicolaus, it always revolves around his unencumbered and unconditional love for people, just because they were people and that is his legacy. That is why, to this very day, we still give gifts to one another during this time of year in celebration of his life and ministry. That is why he is said to live on and bring gifts to boys and girls on Christmas Eve in celebration of the Christ**

**child being born. St. Nicolaus was a model of pure love. He was a model of Christ.**

**In the Gospel for tonight, Jesus was teaching. The social norm of the day was to teach only men who could then teach women and children. That is the way the rabbis taught. So when people were bringing children to Jesus, the disciples tried to turn them away. NO! These gifts are not for children! They are for adult males only! No, according to Jesus, the gifts are for everyone and, in fact, the children are first in line. Like little children run to the Christmas tree to see what St Nicolaus has left for them, you and I run to the altar every weekend to receive the mysterious body and blood of Christ. Our celebration of St. Nicolaus is bigger than commercialism. It is grander than a loving pastor of long ago. It is the mystery of Christ's love that flows down through the ages through the water and the word and finally through the body and the blood. St. Nicolaus is the embodiment of Christ's love in action in our lives.**

**That's why we celebrate him. He is the mirror of the love of Jesus; miraculous, mysterious love that transcends our boxy little brains bound by space and time. That love breaks through barriers of space and time. That love is the love we often experience in this life as the love of a child, which is exactly what Christ suggests we have. See, there is no contradiction between Christ and Santa. Everything**

**Santa was and is, is just exactly what Christ gave him to give to others. You carry on the legacy of St. Nicolaus for Christ has given you that same unconditional love. That love empowers you to love others. Freely you have received. Freely give.**