According to international relief agencies, in Haiti, 3.67 million people are in danger of starvation or 35% of the population. And according to these same agencies if things do not improve over the next three to four months that number will exceed 4.1 million people or 40% of the population. But that's just a statistic. Let me make it real for you and share a story of one of our kids in Lacroix...

He’s a student at the New Testament Mission School but he’s not in school because school hasn’t yet opened this fall because of the unrest and violence in Haiti. His name is Yves. So he does not receive the free daily hot lunch prepared by the school because its closed. He’s in the L’Arche Orphanage up the road from Lacroix, his Father, Mother and younger brother all having died over the past three years. He was found fending for himself on the streets of Gonaives. And when you go on mission trips you meet the actual people, and you come to know and love them, and so it is no longer a statistic for me. Yves recently sent me a picture of what he had to eat. One very small plate, with the tiniest little pile of grits, interlaced with perhaps five kernels of corn. No rice, no beans, no protein. A growing young man, and that’s now his one daily meal. Not a statistic –a real, live, living young man slowly starving in Haiti. One whom I know and like...He’s not a statistic; his name is Yves...

Our scripture from 2 Corinthians reminds us that we are “enriched in every way for great generosity” (2 Corinthians 9: 11) We are enriched for the purpose of generosity. We receive great blessings from God not to use them all on ourselves but to empower us to great generosity in Jesus’ name. As Christians we understand that all we have, and all we are, and all we possess, are given as a trust from God to us. We are fiduciaries, trustees, and keepers of these blessings for the higher purposes of God. Its not about us. Its about Him. Our possessions are not about us. They’re all about Jesus. We have been blessed by God in order to be a blessing. Somewhere deep in our heart we all know that. Christmas is not about us. Christmas is about Jesus. Whose birthday is this, anyway?

A church I served many years ago had a wonderful idea. A group of families would sacrifice their own Christmas and go down to Haiti and celebrate it there with the children in the Good Shepherd Orphanage in Port au Prince. Their only Christmas gifts to themselves would be traveling to Haiti as a family. Noble idea. As a side idea, the people from the team collected toys from the congregation. They had noted in previous trips that no children in Haiti had toys. So, you know as good Americans, we knew that Haitian children needed toys at Christmas and so we would provide them. As Americans we have solutions for everything. Its true. To this day, children in Haiti have no toys. So Christmas Day comes and the mission team distributes the toys. Merry Christmas! And the team feels pretty good about itself. But a couple days later, they notice that the toys had all disappeared. They were worried and went to the Director of the orphanage, a saintly man by the name of Pastor Ernst Cassy, and asked him where are the toys? And he told them that he had gathered up the toys and took them to the market and had sold them. And then he said: “Because in Haiti where children are starving to death there is no room for toys.” The reaction of the team members was instructive. First they were stunned. And then they were angry. “We came all the way to Haiti to sacrifice our own Christmas and to bring these children toys!” And they’re all gone and sold. But what really offended them was --Maybe when children are starving there is NO ROOM FOR CHRISTMAS GIFTS.
That’s thirty years ago. And I’ve thought a lot about it since. As Americans we think that a gift is something tangible that costs a lot of money. The more you love someone the more expensive is the gift. Somehow we’ve messed up Christmas with the idea that its about tangible gifts you wrap up with a bow. Its about excess and going into debt and consumption and ME, ME, ME, ME, ME. What I want, What I get. My experience of Christmas. We make Christmas all about ME. We make Christmas all about toys. So of course that team was angry when Ernst Cassy gathered up all the toys and sold them for food. What’s Christmas without toys? Children need toys, right?

To be sure, Christmas is about a gift. O, but it is no toy. The gift that team gave was their self-sacrifice at Christmas and traveling to a difficult place and bringing the love they had in their hearts to the little children at the Good Shepherd Orphanage. The love of Jesus alive in their hearts and the desire to share that with others at Christmas was the true gift they brought with them. And it was costly. It cost them more than a plane ticket. It cost them their viewpoint that Christmas is about gifts we buy and gifts we give and wrapping paper in piles on Christmas morning. They could never quite see Christmas when they went back to the states the same way again. Ouch! You mean, its not Christmas just when I give extravagant gifts to my own family? No, that’s not what makes Christmas, Christmas. That was costly insight for that mission team, paradigm shifting, life changing. Their life would never be the same.

So what is the gift given and received at Christmas? Maybe we do need to go down to Haiti, at least in our minds and hearts. Maybe we do need to find a little child quietly and slowly starving in an orphanage. Maybe that’s the manger? Maybe that’s Bethlehem? Maybe that’s where Jesus is to be born in us this year? Maybe Jesus was born in a stable? Maybe Jesus made no crying because starving babies make no sounds? Maybe the Christchild was placed in a feeding trough and wrapped in rags, because there was no room for Him in the inn. That’s the story, isn’t it? That’s Christmas, isn’t it?

Jesus is the gift. The gift of Jesus is what makes Christmas, Christmas. He is, as our scripture says, “the inexpressible gift” (2 Corinthians 9: 15). He is inexpressible. We cannot articulate fully and completely the nature of the gift given. We cannot quite put into words the meaning of HIM coming and being born and reborn into our heart at Christmas. He is the gift of life. He is the gift of hope. He is JOY to the world. He is the gift above every gift. He is the One born in Bethlehem, born a child and yet a King. It is His birth we celebrate, not the way the world celebrates it, but as HE would want us to celebrate it. He is the giver and He is the gift.

Yet there was no room for Him in the inn. Is there room in your heart for the Baby Jesus this year? He is so little, such a tiny infant, so frail. But He cannot come if your heart is too full of other things. Too many toys fill up the heart and mind and then there is no room in that heart for the birth of Jesus. The love of the world and all its toys casts out the love for Jesus from the human heart.

I think of that mission trip 30 years ago. And I think of little Yves in the orphanage in Lacroix today. And I think of a little baby born our Savior. Is there room in our heart? Is there room in our heart for the gift to be given and the gift to be received? Do you want Him born in your heart this year? Whose birthday is it, anyway? (How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given...)

“Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!” (2 Corinthians 9: 15) Amen and Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!