



Dear Friends,

There are only 36 sleeps (a much better way to think of it than 'shopping days'!) now until Christmas! But only 11 sleeps until Advent begins, and just 12 sleeps before our wonderful Advent reflection series starts! Reading these reflections written by members of our congregation is one of the highlights of my year! *(There are still a few days left, so please get in touch with me – belinda@canbap.org - if you would like to write one!)*

There are, however, only 2 sleeps until Black Friday – another US calendar event that has made its way, thanks to its economic muscle, into our lives.

In case you do not know, Black Friday is the Friday after Thanksgiving in the US and traditionally marks the start of the Christmas shopping season. The idea is that this is the day retailers shift from being 'in the red' to being 'in the black'!

The idea of a 'traditional start to the Christmas shopping season' now sounds very quaint! And the concept that people might limit their shopping to one day of the year (Black Friday) or only continue to the following Monday (Cyber Monday) also now sounds very quaint. Most of the advertising I have seen this year has referred to 'Black November' – a whole month of shopping with only a brief reprieve before the Christmas sales!

I have, I must confess, been watching the Black Friday sales quite keenly this year. I have Christmas gifts for the family sitting in various 'carts' as I write this.

But I have also been thinking about the origin of the word 'gift' which comes from the Proto-Germanic root *giftiz* (or *giftja*), meaning 'that which is given'. In English, the word retained this original neutral sense, but in German the word evolved to mean a medicinal dose, as in the 'giving' of medicine, and then became a euphemism for poison.

And gifts (even in English) have the capacity to be poison! Whether it is dangerous manufacturing practices or the wasteful disposal of products, or the pressure to spend

money that places stress on households or the harm that too many gifts (and the corresponding lack of appreciation for what we already own) can do.

Perhaps we should think of Black Friday as our Red Friday or even our Amber Friday, a time to stop, or to slow down, and think more carefully about the gifts we are purchasing and the gifts we are giving. Are our gifts ultimately 'poisoning' the earth (or our souls), or is there potential to give gifts that will be medicine, that will heal? These gifts could be kind words, words of affirmation for those that we love; gifts that will be treasured, that will prove useful for years and decades to come; or gifts that will heal our world. *(We are also only 11 sleeps away from starting to hear about our Christmas Offering – split between Canberra Refugee Support for education scholarships, Hagar International to support people rebuilding their lives after slavery and the Baptist World Aid Church Based Community Development Fund supporting communities doing 'shalomification' (to borrow Josh Dowton's word from last Sunday) around the Pacific.)*

In the words of James 1:17, *"Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above..."*

Grace and peace,

Belinda