

There are three words that everyone fears on Christmas Eve. "Some assembly necessary." Those words may appear on the box of any gift you give or receive. They announce that this gift will demand something of you. It will not be a simple gift, like a box of chocolates, a sweater, or a yo-yo from Toys R Expensive. A gift with those three words means you have to read instructions, find tools, search for parts, and apply skills you're supposed to have, while people you love wait and watch--and criticize.

As if Christmas didn't demand a lot already: Getting the right card to make up for the wrong gift, attending parties with people you'd never socialize with any other time of year, decorating your home with lights still burned out from last Christmas, and wearing clothes in colors no sane person would ever put on. Then just when you think you can relax you see those three dreaded words: "Some assembly necessary." Christmas demands smarts, patience, time, and money. Christmas is hard.

As if that's not enough, Christmas demands something more. It demands faith. Sometimes this makes Christmas hardest of all. During the course of a year, people can lose a lot--they lose someone in the family, something they've loved; they lose their temper; they lose control; they lose virginity; they lose at the boats; they lose a job; and they lose faith. Wherever there is sorrow it's hard to believe in a provident God. Wherever there is greed it's hard to believe that giving is good. Wherever there is death it's hard to believe in resurrection. In the quiet of our hearts, where we feel our limits, our doubts, and our debts, it's hard to believe in God. Christmas demands a lot. More than gifts, more than cards, more than friends, more than money, Christmas demands faith. That's why we're here, to believe in Christmas: to believe in God who made us, to believe in God who became like us, to believe in God who loves us, even in doubt, even in fear, even in death. That's why we're here.

We are the presents around God's tree. There are three words printed on the box of each one of us: "Some assembly necessary." We arrive at Christmas not quite put together. We need someone with the instructions, someone with tools, someone with patience, someone with vision, we need some One to assemble us, the gifts beneath God's tree. We need a savior. If you come tonight with doubt, with loss, with sin, you belong here, 'cause that's who we all are. And, can you believe it? That's who God wanted to become on that first Christmas day.