

RENEWAL
THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT
MARCH 10, 2019
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Note:

I was present when the Rt. Rev. Herbert S. Thompson (of blessed memory) gave this “Stewardship Salad” sermon in the Diocese of Southern Ohio – it had to have been some 25 years ago – and it sure made an impression! I’ve since used the idea at least once in each of the churches I’ve served. The people of Good Shepherd actually asked me to give it again! The last time was in 2012.

The process: on Ash Wednesday, cards were posted on a board at each service. People took the cards, with instructions on the back to bring the items the next week. One set of cards was posted for the 8:00 service; two were posted for the 10:00, so that twice as much was requested.

5 RED APPLES	5 RED APPLES	5 YELLOW APPLES	5 YELLOW APPLES	5 ORANGES	5 ORANGES
20 RED GRAPES	20 RED GRAPES	5 BANANAS	5 BANANAS	2 SMALL BOXES OF RAISINS	2 SMALL BOXES OF RAISINS
20 GREEN GRAPES	20 GREEN GRAPES	20 MELON BITES	20 MELON BITES	20 WALNUT HALVES	20 WALNUT HALVES
		20 BERRIES	20 BERRIES		

When people brought the items on Sunday, they were arranged in bowls and plates on a large, low table in front of the altar. On the table were a large cutting board, knives, an apple corer/slicer, an apron, plastic gloves, and a bowl for the cut-up items to go in

If card was not taken from the board, or if a card was taken but the item was not brought the day of the sermon, it was not replaced. The point is: we work with what we have, and if people in the community are absent, choosing not to bring their gifts to the community, they are irreplaceable

When the time in the sermon came to make the salad, I removed my alb and stole and put on the apron and gloves, and tried to carry on with the sermon (including running the PowerPoint!) while preparing the salad. I have a new respect for people hosting cooking shows – it’s harder than it looks!

Today’s Collect and Scripture readings are at the end of the sermon text.

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This Lent, our theme is on spiritual RENEWAL.

We asked folks here to complete the RenewalWorks survey in January,
and the results are being used in a series of Saturday workshops
to discern the ways this Parish Family wants to be renewed spiritually.
We will create plans for those in the parish to accompany each other
in our lifelong journeys of faith.

3 of the 4 workshops are left, so please come if you are interested.

BUT, first, what is RENEWAL?

In Psalm 51, which billions of Christians recite on Ash Wednesday,
we pray: *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*

This verse IS our quest for Lent this year,
especially a renewed, right spirit that is rebuilt and strengthened
to be steadfast and strong, able to withstand the storms of life,
and with faith that God is accompanying us in the whirlwinds and trials.

Not only accompanying us, but is ALREADY giving us whatever we need
to make our faith journey with integrity, true to who we are created to be.

In Lamentations, we hear the cry of a truly forlorn person:

their city has been ruined by a foreign army; friends and families have been ripped apart,
some by death, some by capture, some by fleeing as refugees,
and some, like this one, left and alone, abandoned.

Once again, today's headlines in a 3,000 year old book.

Where is God in the storm? Where? All is in ruin!

How to be steadfast? We learn from both Lamentations and the Psalm,
the first step is to be quiet, to stop reciting the horrible things that have gone wrong, and just wait.
Then, in the stillness, we count our blessings from the past.

Next, we focus on our current blessings: what we DO have from God already, right now.

What DO we have?

We have our lives; 24 hours in each day, 168 hours in each week, to use.

We have our capacities, our talents, our memories.

We have the good earth and the things God creates to feed, clothe and delight us.

As we wait, and remember God's gifts, a right spirit begins to renew within us.

Now, who we are and what we have are indeed God's gifts to us,
and in 1st Corinthians, Paul tells to claim these, and ambitiously seek even greater gifts,
such as healing, teaching, serving and prophesying.

However, Paul said, there is an even better way to obtain spiritual renewal
than even all these beautiful ministries, and that is to love each other.

I've heard 1st Corinthians 13 read at countless weddings,
including Tiny Tim and Miss Vicki's on the Tonight Show in 1969.

If you are too young to have seen that,
maybe you can count THAT as a blessing.

Paul's letter is not, however, primarily about romantic love,
although couples could do worse than using it as a model.

It's not even first and foremost about Christian love, love practiced in churches,
though any parish meeting would do well to begin with this passage.

This is about divine love, agape love, the love GOD has for US,
a love which does what is best for the other, even if it costs us dearly,
and, in the case of God the Son, Jesus, it cost him everything.



The better way of being in a relationship is to love,
to love the way God loves us, and God does it FIRST.

God's love is patient and kind, and gracious;
it looks for the best in the other, puts the other ahead of self,
and doesn't keep track of what someone else does wrong.

God's love for us includes the trust God has in us, the faith God has in us,
before we ever even think about having faith in God, trusting in God.

When we are CONFIDENT that we live actually in this divine love,
not because of what we've done but because of who God is,
then we can also be confident in the Holy Spirit's work in us
renewing our spirits to be steadfast through life's storms.

Of course, we are called to love this way ourselves,
and at least trying to learn this way of love is what Jesus is teaching in the Gospel lesson.

You see, as we become who we were created to be,
we become our ownmost selves,¹ as one wonderful author put it.

So when Jesus talks about treasures, and collecting treasures in heaven.
the paradox is that collecting treasures in heaven usually means
giving away something here on earth, which is a kind of fast.

BUT it's a fast that brings joy, because in doing it we find the better way.

When we learn to give, not for show, but to love like God loves,
this fast helps us to become our ownmost selves.

When we pray, not for show, but to renew and strengthen our relationship with God,
this fast helps us to become our ownmost selves.

These actions from seeking our own self-interest, fasts from collecting treasures that benefit ourselves,
help us learn to live the even better way of God, of love.

Sometimes fasts are about food, sure,
but they are ALWAYS about giving up anything and everything
that impedes us from following the even better way of God.

Today, I want to show you the expectations the church has for this fast,
and you'll see why there is no call for a sad face.

First, how much of earthly treasure should we give to get heavenly treasure?

The biblical standard is the tithe: 10%.

I want to give you a visual demonstration of this.
by making Stewardship Salad.

On Ash Wednesday, I asked people to bring things for a Stewardship Salad,
less for the 8:00 service, more for the 10:00.

You've brought the stuff and it's piled on this table.

Whatever is here is what we're making the salad of;

If someone signed up to bring something, but didn't bring it,
well, it's just not here. The salad will not be the same.

If you brought more than we asked – BONUS! Bigger salad!

We'll make this Stewardship Salad to share at coffee hour after the service.

First, let's bless these fruits and those who brought them.



10:00 Service		
20 RED APPLES	20 YELLOW APPLES	20 ORANGES
40 RED GRAPES	20 BANANAS	4 SMALL BOXES OF RAISINS
40 GREEN GRAPES	80 MELON BITES	80 WALNUT HALVES
	80 BERRIES	

¹ Bill Huebsch, *A Spirituality of Wholeness: A New Look at Grace*.
Twenty-third Pub., 1988.

- Bless offerings and givers.
- Take off alb, stole; put on apron and plastic gloves.
- Start with a big item – e.g., apples
- Take each group, one at a time, state the number in each group, ask congregation what 10% is.
- Prepare the 10% item(s) (cutting, etc., as necessary) and placing in the Stewardship Salad bowl.
- Make the following points while working:

10:00 Service		
10% of 20 = 2 RED APPLES	10% of 20 = 2 YELLOW APPLES	10% of 20 = 2 ORANGES
10% of 40 = 4 RED GRAPES	10% of 20 = 2 BANANAS	10% of 360 = 36 RAISINS
10% of 40 = 4 GREEN GRAPES	10% of 80 = 8 MELON BITES	10% of 80 = 8 WALNUT HALVES
	10% of 80 = 8 BERRIES	

Now, we're making Stewardship Salad out of 10% of the fruit,
but we can tithe anything as a way to practice the better way of love!

For example, there are 168 hours in a week;
a tithe is about 17 hours a week of the better way,
of loving as God loves us first.

We are called first to love God, then love our neighbors, then ourselves.

17 hours a week works out to be more than 45 minutes a day
to focus on each of the 3 ways of loving.

Loving God might include things like reading Scripture,
the Lenten devotionals from Episcopal Relief and Development,
or *Forward Day by Day*; it could involve journaling, prayer, meditation,
and, of course, gathering to worship.

Loving our neighbor includes sharing our resources, like our bagzilla food,
serving by working at one of our Thrift Stores, making pillow case dresses,
and sharing our God-given talents.

We have a gorgeous example of this in our Bells of Hope Handbell Choir,
which went to Mease Manor last Monday to give a concert for about 50 residents,
including Miguel Solari, a member of Good Shepherd.

For this choir to share their talents in this concert,
first they spent hours practicing,
then they had to pack up all the bells and schlep them to Mease Manor,
don their choir shirts, and ring their bells. This took LOADS of time and effort. Quite a fast! some
Do you see any sad faces? Me neither.

And what did the residents think of this sharing?

They loved it, of course; they said:

- It was wonderful! I taught music in the Pittsburgh school system for 35 years, so I really enjoyed it.
- It was great. It sounded like one giant music box.
- I liked learning about all the different bell ringing techniques.
- Thanks for coming to play for us, I hope you come again.
- Thanks for letting me ring your bell.



We have lots of opportunities to tithe our time and talent here at church,
but does it have to be here to count? No! of course not!

Not only can you do things with other agencies and groups,
but you also can do things in your everyday life:

talking to a lonely neighbor, taking someone shopping or to the doctor,
letting someone turn into your lane in heavy traffic,
giving a buck to a homeless guy or being kind to a meanie-head,

ANYTHING we do, intentionally, to make Creation thrive in God's love,
to respect another human being, to nurture another spirit,
to share generously – it all counts.

And then loving yourself. Yeah, that counts, too.

Do you need to take a break, practice some sabbath? Exercise? Learn something new? I think that if you're intentional in taking 45 minutes daily for each of way of the three ways of loving – God, our neighbors and ourselves – you'll find the 17 hours add up quickly.

Now, about money:

When we tithe our monetary resources, it's not huge generosity.

Remember God entrusts 100% to us to care for; when we hoard it, when we don't share it, we are taking something that doesn't belong to us.

Remember, we get to keep 90% of what God gives us. That's a LOT.

Consider also that we'll get what we put in.

When we give our first and our best, we'll get a great salad, when we give the moldy berries and the wormy apples, we won't.

Simple, really.

Now, our Stewardship Salad is done. What do you see?

A heap of fruit outside the bowl, one lovely salad inside it.

Like I said, we'll share the salad at coffee hour.

The rest of all this blessed fruit, this mound of what we didn't use, 90% of what God has entrusted to us – all this goes back, back to the person who brought it so that we don't ever forget that God wants us to have life and have it abundantly.

Thank you for bringing it!

Now, I know that for some of you, even 10% seems overwhelming whether it's time or treasure. If that's true, then just start where you are, and add a little bit as long as you can do so with gladness and gratitude.

If resentment or weariness creep in – STOP! Wait in stillness. Remember.

Only when we experience joy in the giving

are we acting from a clean heart and a renewed, right spirit. Give God time to work in you.

I hope that this Stewardship Salad makes this whole idea of loving as God loves a lot less about what you have to give up and a lot more about what we have:

God, each other, and God's gifts to us.

We get to enjoy this Stewardship Salad, this treasure of heaven, not bye and bye, pie in the sky, after we die, but right here and right now.

Bon Appetit!



COLLECT OF THE DAY

Lord God, our strength, the struggle between good and evil rages within and around us, and the devil and all the forces that defy you tempt us with empty promises. Keep us steadfast in your word, and when we fall, raise us again and restore us through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

LAMENTATIONS 3:18–26

I thought: My future is gone, as well as my hope from the Lord. The memory of my suffering and homelessness is bitterness and poison. I can't help but remember and am depressed. I call all this to mind—therefore, I will wait.

Certainly the faithful love of the Lord hasn't ended; certainly God's compassion isn't through! They are renewed every morning. Great is your faithfulness. I think: The Lord is my portion! Therefore, I'll wait for him. The Lord is good to those who hope in him, to the person who seeks him. It's good to wait in silence for the Lord's deliverance

PSALM 103:1-8

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy Name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

He forgives all your sins and heals all your infirmities;

He redeems your life from the grave and crowns you with mercy and loving-kindness;

He satisfies you with good things, and your youth is renewed like an eagle's.

The Lord executes righteousness and judgment for all who are oppressed.

He made his ways known to Moses and his works to the children of Israel.

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great kindness.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:31, 13:4–8A

Use your ambition to try to get the greater gifts. And I'm going to show you an even better way.

Love is patient, love is kind, it isn't jealous, it doesn't brag, it isn't arrogant, it isn't rude, it doesn't seek its own advantage, it isn't irritable, it doesn't keep a record of complaints, it isn't happy with injustice, but it is happy with the truth. Love puts up with all things, trusts in all things, hopes for all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

MATTHEW 6:1–6, 16–21

[Jesus said,] "Be careful that you don't practice your religion in front of people to draw their attention. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

"Whenever you give to the poor, don't blow your trumpet as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may get praise from people. I assure you, that's the only reward they'll get. But when you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing so that you may give to the poor in secret. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you.

"When you pray, don't be like hypocrites. They love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people will see them. I assure you, that's the only reward they'll get. But when you pray, go to your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees what you do in secret will reward you. "And when you fast, don't put on a sad face like the hypocrites. They distort their faces so people will know they are fasting. I assure you that they have their reward. When you fast, brush your hair and wash your face. Then you won't look like you are fasting to people, but only to your Father who is present in that secret place. Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don't eat them and where thieves don't break in and steal them. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

SERMON HYMN: *God is Here!*

BLESSING: God give you open ears that the Word may revive you; an open mind that the Spirit may refresh you, and an open heart that Love may renew you, and the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with you and remain with you always. Amen.