

First Sunday in Lent

Year C March 10, 2019

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Renewal

“When you come into the land that the Lord has given you, take the first fruits and put them in a basket and bring them to the Lord.” This our charge to return a portion of our blessings to God. Those alms are meant to relieve the hunger, the needs of those who are not enjoying the plenty we have. It is in giving, we are reminded that God cares for us.

We have enough, and enough to share. And as we give, we are to remember that we were granted salvation. We are given the assurance that all will be well for us. That God cares for us, and we in turn are to care for others. We needn't worry about having enough, we need to simply be grateful that we have plenty.

But what does it mean to have enough? I have a friend who enjoys a life of great abundance. Her husband, a physician, is very well paid. Has generous benefits through his employer. She also has a job that pays very well. They were able to give their children new cars when they were able to start driving. They were able to pay their college expenses. They have tickets to every home and most away games that MSU plays, in every sport they enjoy. They seldom miss the final four

in basketball, and attend whatever bowl game MSU football plays. They are on a first name basis with all the coaches, most players, trainers, and support staff of the athletic teams. They vacation at Disney every year.

But she laments that they don't have enough. She worries about not having enough for retirement. She assured me that they might not be able to attend a particular final four match, they might not be able to afford it.

These are very good people. Their very livelihoods make the lives of others better. They are both in helping professions. But, even in their wealth, they have lost a spirit of abundance. They fear not having enough. They fear losing what they have. They believe they are living in scarcity. There may be a time when there just won't be enough, and so they worry, safe guard their treasures.

We are told over and over again as we study scripture that we needn't fear scarcity. God will clothe us, feed us, keep us safe.

*For he shall give his angels charge over you, **
to keep you in all your ways.

*12 They shall bear you in their hands, **
lest you dash your foot against a stone.

Being chosen by God, being God's beloved, doesn't come with immunity from pain, or loss. It means we will have the love and support that we need when faced by the trials of this life. It has been my experience that even if you lose financial security. Lose property, income, savings, retirement, if you do not lose faith, you really haven't lost anything.

Sometimes loss is a new beginning. It's like cleaning out the closets. Reducing the dusty remnants of your old self, and giving space and time for renewal. It is the chance to start over, with less baggage. It calls to mind the young, rich man who wanted to follow Jesus. When he asked what he needed to do, Jesus said to sell everything and give the money to the poor. And the young man turned away, lamenting that he had so much.

After His baptism, Jesus went into the desert to fast and pray for 40 days. He left all he knew, home, family, work. He went into the same desert that his predecessors Moses and Elisha had gone to fast and pray. Fasting, especially fasting in the extreme, was often used as a method of discernment. It was found to bring one closer to God.

For Jesus, spent a lot of time alone with God during this time in the desert, communing and learning about what his place as the Chosen one of God was to be.

He was prepared to face whatever the world would throw at Him. Jesus relied on the Holy Spirit for sustenance in the desert. He needed nothing more.

Hunger was as painful to Jesus as it is to any human, but he said No to the easy fix.

At the end of the time of fasting, Satan met him and tempted him. Pointed out things to him that he may not have considered. Making bread out of stones; offering him the world; giving him the chance to have his father send angels to keep him from harm.

Just POOF! make these stones into bread and you won't be hungry any more. Bow down to Satan and you will have all the world at your beck and call. Jump from the heights of the temple and the angels will catch you. And Jesus said, "No." No. No to making bread of stones, no to worshiping anyone but the One True God, even if it meant being the ruler of the temporal world, and no to putting God to the test.

He began living into his legacy. He said yes to trusting in God to feed him. He said yes to the eternal. He would not be the king of this temporary life, but would take his place as God's beloved Son for eternity. And he said no to putting God to the test in a show of rescue. There was no need to test God. Jesus knew His place as the Son of God, and he knew that God is there, always.

What does that have to do with us? We aren't Jesus. We can't turn stones into bread, even if we wanted to. We aren't offered the world. We don't expect the angels to come and save us if we fall from the height of the temple.

Spend just a moment thinking about your own faith. Have you ever asked God for a sign that He is there? Just a little something. Have you put God to the test? I have. And no surprise, He did not take the bait.

But when I really needed Him. He healed me. He blessed my children. He spared them. When my husband of 23 years was dying, He gave us both sustenance. He showed us mercy. We had help from friends and family that was desperately needed, but unexpected. When I needed comfort, and assurance it was given in abundance. When I needed guidance, it came just at the right time. When I needed hope, love, kindness. God delivered.

And, He showed me the path to my new life. Filled with opportunities for renewal. Everyday there is a new opportunity, a new lesson, a new gift. There is no need for a sign. Living into God's call is proof enough. I feel I have learned by lesson. My lesson is to wait on the Lord. All will be well. All will be revealed. In God's own time. Not mine.