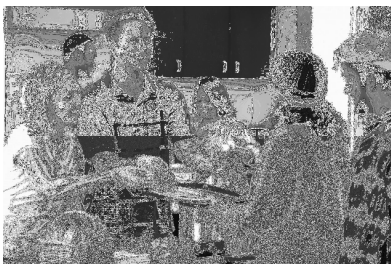


THREE GRACES OF THE FAITHFUL: STUDY - SHARE - SERVE



Scripture:

Luke 22: 24-31

²⁴Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.' ²⁵Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' ²⁷Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

²⁸As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.



AN INTERNATIONAL CROSS-CULTURAL PROGRAM

In researching my sermon today I came across an advertisement for a university international educational program. They call it the Tri-S program. Here's the description: *Tri-S* is a unique international and cross-cultural program that integrates service and learning, fosters spiritual, academic and emotional growth. Our students will travel the world to:

- *Study...* Become a world citizen and help bridge cultural divides by studying about other peoples and their customs.
- *Share...* Make a difference in someone's life by giving of yourself, sharing your time and your resources.
- *Serve...* Help build schools and church buildings. Conduct seminars, teach vacation Bible school, or nurse the sick. Minister through service, song, athletics and more!

Travel the world to study, share and to serve!

MY SECOND BEST SERMON

At one time I had developed a concise little elevator speech about our faith. I based it on the same three words. From them, I created the second best sermon I have ever written about a balanced approach to the study and implementation of Christian faith. I wanted to give that sermon to this congregation today.

But before I tell you about the second best sermon I've ever written, let me tell you what happened to the first best sermon I have ever written.

THE BEST SERMON I EVER WROTE

The best sermon I have ever written began with diligent research. I had a topic appropriate to my audience. I was in good health, and had not only a good message, but good energy with which to deliver it. I wrote it out completely, so that I had reference points in case I got lost or distracted. I

printed the sermon out on double spaced pages, and used a highlighter to emphasize the most important words. I practiced it. I took my loose, unnumbered pages into the sanctuary and laid them on the pulpit so they would be ready. What could go wrong?

Then I went out into the naarthex to visit with people prior to worship. My liturgist for the day went into the sanctuary to practice her parts in the service. She laid her notes on mine, and read some of it out loud. Then she gathered up all the pages on the pulpit and put them in one of the pews, and went into the fellowship hall to talk with people.

Attendance for worship was very good. The service had gone well until it was finally time for me to speak. I went to the pulpit, and looked down to refresh my memories of the sermon. There was nothing on the pulpit. Everything was gone. I never found the notes.

To cut to the end, I had to give my perfect sermon from my imperfect memory.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Later I figured out what had happened. Have you? The liturgist picked up my notes after she practiced. She took them to her pew and left them with her bulletin. The custodian tossed the trash out the next day. I hadn't made a copy. My best sermon is just a memory. Everything else I have ever written, spoken, or done has fallen short of that one shining moment. But if I ever found it, I wonder if it would really have been that good.

STUDY, SHARE, SERVE

Which brings me to my second best sermon.... I thought I had saved it on the computer, and wanted to give it this morning because it not only had a good theme, but also would lead up to the recognition of our Montgomery High School mission project.

It's easy to remember.

“Study, Share and Serve.”

1. STUDY

I selected important scripture this morning and created the litany that we read to begin our service. There is no shortage of scriptures about the importance of study. “The Hear O Israel” is one of my favorites. Writing the scriptures on your doorposts is a beautiful symbolic image. Orthodox Jews literally bind the scriptures around their wrists, and place a small prayer box against their forehead when they pray in a literal reenactment of this challenge. Study the scriptures. Stay current. Stay fresh.

It doesn't matter how many times you have been through the scriptures. What is important is how many times the scriptures have been through you.

Don't rely upon your own knowledge. Read the works of scholars and popularizers. Read a daily devotional, or read the religion columns of magazines and newspapers. Read a challenging scripturally based book.

Study is for a moment, but study is also a way of life.

Study a foreign culture. Study a person who challenges your thinking. Study the earth, waters, and outer space. Our brains are leaky, and we must constantly fill them with new information, or all our brains will leak out. So the first part of authentic discipleship is study.

2. SHARE

The second part is sharing. The Scripture I selected is about sharing adversity. It could be about sharing any of the dramas of your life with God and with other disciples.

From the New Testament, here is Jesus' simple challenge: if you have two coats you should share with the person who has no coat. This is the core of our faith, whether it is a coat, food, information, natural resources, earned income or stock appreciation. We are not remembered for what we

keep for ourselves, but we will be remembered for what we share with others because of our faith.

**Sharing information is like
sharing the light of a candle.
The lighted candle is not diminished
because of sharing the flame with others.
It can light many other candles.**

A candle dies for other reasons.

The more you give the more you get.

The more you give, the less you care about getting.

(I have many great quotations to support all that in my second best sermon.)

3. SERVE

And the third part is serving. From the Old Testament, Joshua challenged the Hebrews to choose who they would serve. Joshua concluded, "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." And so should we.

In the same way Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters." You cannot serve God and wealth. When the disciples quarreled about who was the greatest, Jesus said that the greatest is the one who serves the most.

IT'S EASY TO REMEMBER

We can be faithful to the Lord our God in three very concrete ways.

- Study the faithful, and learn from the bad examples of the unfaithful
- Share so that your life may be enriched because you have enriched the life of one of God's children.
- Serve. Serve the Lord with gladness, serve in the community, serve in the church, serve dinner, and do it with a smile.

Unfortunately, I *LOST* the second best sermon I ever wrote, because I got rid of the computer that I wrote it on, and lost the hard copy.

I will never be able to deliver it, and you will never be able to hear my best or my second best sermon. If you say, "Well that sermon wasn't John's best, then you will be right." If you think, "Well that one didn't quite work, or it contained a factual error," well, you've got me.

A LESSON FROM SOMETHING LOST: PERFECT IS NO LONGER IN MY VOCABULARY

But this experience provides another lesson: Perfect is no longer in my vocabulary. I may have had it once, but I lost it. And perfection is not possible for other people either. I don't expect you to be perfect, to be compassionate at all time, to understand with great wisdom. Maybe you have also lost one of the most valuable things in your own life, and can't get it back either.

And that's frustrating.

PERFECTION

- It turns out that the smartest people in the world, and the greatest government we can imagine don't know much about deep-sea oil-drilling. But I hope they will keep trying to learn more.
- People who make jillions of dollars in the stock market can't really tell you where to invest \$100 for a guaranteed high return. I hope they will keep trying too.
- Perfectionists are working out other kinds of problems, because the people we think are likely to be closest to perfection are not.

SPIRITUAL HEALTH IS THE BALANCE OF STUDY, SHARING AND SERVICE

Remember the formula: Study, Share and Serve. It is theologically balanced, spiritually sound, and it's easy to remember.

AN EXAMPLE OF SERVICE: MONTGOMERY HIGH SCHOOL BREAKFAST

And that is what brings me to service: The Montgomery High School Breakfast servers. It is one of the most outstanding programs in our Presbytery and beyond. It meets my criteria of studying the scriptures so that we might share and serve young people in a very practical way.

Marge Baur spoke about the program. It originated when our then Associate Pastor, Tom Nolen, heard that many students at our neighboring high school were going to school without any breakfast. Studies have found that students can do better when they have eaten before starting classes. So he suggested we start serving free breakfast to any Montgomery High School student who would come to Bowen Hall before school. Volunteers were recruited and the program opened the doors to students on March 27, 2000.

The money for the food was donated by church members.

On the first day, only Tom's daughter, Nina, was here. Now, ten years later, we serve an average of over one-hundred students each school day morning.

A few years ago, the program received a big boost when there was a very generous donation from the G. K. Hardt Foundation for which we were and are very grateful. This also enabled Church of the Roses to give small scholarships to two students who have been part of the group that comes for breakfast. This year the recipients are Marcos Tovar and Alex Andrade, who was in worship to gratefully receive his check.

Certificates and special thanks were given to the Montgomery High School Breakfast Volunteers:

(Mondays) Sharon Bressoud, Andy Bressoud, Sam Imbimbo, Glenn Schrader, Linda Burille, Diane Brown Ted Crouch (Tuesdays) Gene Michel, Gil Saydah, Bill Moberly, Nancy Hansen (Wednesdays) Mickey Marshall, Pat Russell/Joy Metzger, Una Skelly, Tom Timko Allan Goldberg (Thursdays) Brian Smith, Ann Palmer Mary Ann Iodence, Dale Trowbridge, Marge Baur (Fridays) Marilyn MacLean, Jack MacLean, Andrea Altman, Jackie Spahr Karen Bowles, Paul Bowles

Substitutes: Gladys Bates, Joyce Cairns, Pam Dunkelberger, Bob Flandermeyer, Frank Metzger, Joy Metzger, Jeanette Nichols, Diane Pierce, Norm Thornton, Jeanne Recknagel, Fred Recknagel

Food Buyers: Ellen Marks, Marilyn MacLean, Glenn Schrader, Jackie Spahr

Dr. Cushman then invited Dr. Sue Thomas, Chair of Church and World Committee to come forward to receive the following letter from the Gifts and Bequests Committee which Dr. Cushman read to the congregation.

MEMORIALS TO JAN HANSEN, LYMAN PINNEY, AND BOB STEELE PRESENTED TO THE MONTGOMERY HIGH SCHOOL BREAKFAST FUND.

Dr. Sue Thomas, Chair
Church and World Committee

"The sum of \$885 is being transferred from three memorial accounts held at Church of the Roses to the Montgomery High School Breakfast Program. This action by Roses' Gifts and Bequests committee at its meeting on June 1, 2010, honors the request of the families of **Jan Hansen, Lyman Pinney and Bob Steele.**

They are knowledgeable of the breakfast program and support it enthusiastically. We are grateful to these families, to you, your committee and the many volunteers who enable the breakfast program to be the vital community program that it is."

Blaine Goodwin, Chair
Gifts and Bequests Committee

So we offer our thanks to all these families for their support and to all who participate or contribute in any way to this outstanding program.

REMEMBER: STUDY – SHARE - SERVE



**Dr. John H. Cushman
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June 13, 2010**