

## Spring Cleaning April 6, 2008

Spring cleaning—I don't know if folks really do much of that, at least officially, anymore, but I certainly recall that that was a yearly ritual with my Mom. As soon as the first warm day of spring arrived, the windows would be opened wide, letting the breeze blow in fresh air and drive out the staleness of winter. Anything that could be put outside to get some sun was put outside, and then Mom set to work. She'd go storming into the closets and piles of things would be set aside to go to the rummage sale or some other benevolent endeavor. That was spring cleaning the old-fashioned way.

I can tell you that the McCoy household could use a little of that kind of labor. Last summer, as I've mentioned before, we rented a dumpster, and cleaned out tons of trash from our attic and garage and basement. However, one of the things we never seem to get around to is cleaning out the closets. Both of us still have way too many clothes hanging there, and we don't wear most of them! We need some spring closet cleaning.

The problem is that when we start this cleaning out, we have to make those decisions about what to keep and what to let go of, and I have a hard time with that. All the "experts" seem to agree that, if we haven't worn an item for a year, it needs to go. That's good in theory, but it's hard for me to do. Gosh! Some of the stuff is almost brand new, and some, quite frankly, I'd forgotten about. And then I'm convinced that, as soon as I get rid of this dress or shirt or sweater, I'll lose weight and could wear it again, or it will come back in style. It's not an easy task deciding what to keep and what to let go of.

It occurs to me that the same thing is true when it comes to sorting things out in our lives. Some dear friends gave me a framed wall hanging that reads: "**Life is a balance between holding on and letting go.**" The longer I live, the truer that seems to me to be. On an almost daily basis, we make choices as to what we'll hold onto, and what we'll let go of, even though we may not be intentional about it, or even very aware of it. The reality is the choices we make are pretty evident in the way we live our lives. The living of each and every day spells out to anyone who wants to observe what we consider to be important enough to value and hold onto, and what we consider less essential for our well-being.

What we're really talking about here is our sense of priorities: what do we say is important about life, and what do we think is less important, and maybe even expendable. As we look at our own lives and at the lives of others, we'll see all kinds of priorities that get lived out regularly, and the truth is that sometimes the things we say are important are not in synch with the way we live. Our life is off-kilter, off center, out of alignment when what we profess as a priority is not actually being lived out. So, it seems, that with every

word and action, we are making decisions about what to hold onto, and what to let go of.

In some ways, the Bible passage we have for this morning is talking about the same sort of thing. The speaker is said to be Jesus, and he's trying to urge us to be clear about what really matters, about what's lasting, and about what's important when it comes to life. Our version from The Message reads like this: **Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars. It's obvious, isn't it? The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being.**

My simple interpretation of what Jesus was saying is that we need to pay attention to the things that really matter, the things that last, instead of spending so much time and energy pursuing those things that are so superficial and temporary. The "things" of life, he's saying, are not what really counts when it's all said and done. I think Jesus wants us to realize that, if we focus our attention of getting and acquiring all the toys and "things" of life, we're going to wind up eventually being very disappointed, because those things don't last. In his terminology, they rust, are eaten by moths or stolen by thieves. Any pleasure or sense of accomplishment can be quickly erased and eroded.

Instead, Jesus is urging us, figure out what really counts, what really matters, and live true to that. I guess each of us has to do that for ourselves, but I'll share with you a couple of what are for me basic priorities that might be yours, too. I will admit right up front that I believe it is a daily challenge to try to live true to these priorities, but at least in my heart, these are things I say and believe are important to me.

There are really only two or three, and they have to do with relationships. First is my relationship with God, which is closely intertwined with and interconnected with my relationship with others—family, friends, strangers, enemies. The last has with trying to live true to myself and to being the person I believe I am created to be. That's it. That's the best I can come up with, but I have to be honest and say that a casual observer might not always look at me and see those as priorities.

What about you, and you? Can we name our priorities? If so, as we review the way we live, what can we say about how aligned our living is with what we say counts and matters? If we're not pleased with what we find as we sort through things, what can we do about it?

A story one of you sent me via email might offer us one way to begin to figure out what's important and even to begin to live in tune with our priorities. You may have heard it or read it before, but even so, it bears repeating. It's about a guy and his appreciation for Saturday mornings. The guy happened to be a ham radio operator, and one of his Saturday treats was listening to a swap net. Along the way he came across an older sounding man who was telling another person about something called a "thousand marbles."

The older fellow was lamenting the difficulty the younger listener was having being so busy with his job, working 60-70 hours a week just to make ends meet. In the process of living that hectic pace, the father was missing some of those once-in-a-lifetime experiences that his kids were going through. That's when the older gentleman shared something that had helped me keep his own priorities—the theory of a “thousand marbles.”

He shared that he knew that, on the average, most of us live 75 years—some more and some less, but on the average 75 years. Then he multiplied 75 times 52 to come up with 3900, the number of Saturdays that the average person has in his or her entire lifetime. Then the storyteller shared that, by the time he figured that out, he was already 55 years old, and had already lived through over 2800 Saturdays. He realized that, if he lived to be 75, he only had about a thousand Saturdays left to enjoy.

So, the older man said, he went to a toy store and bought every single marble they had. It took several stops and multiple purchases, but finally he had bought 1000 marbles. He took them home and put them in a large, clear plastic container right next to his ham radio gear. He told his listener, “Every Saturday since then, I have taken one marble out and thrown it away. I found that by watching the marbles diminish, I focused more on the really important things in life.”

Then the man shared one more thing before he closed. He revealed that that very morning, he had taken the very last marble out of the container, saying that if he made it until next Saturday, he had an extra bonus. Then he signed off, but his listeners had a lot to think about. Maybe that's what we should do—get ourselves some marbles, and use them as a reminder that life is too precious to live it in trivial pursuits. Rather, our lives are more meaningful and purposeful if we determine what's really important and become determined to live in tune with them.

Someone named Jane Mitchell shared a story that has a similar image to capture a sense of what might really be the priorities in our lives. She said that each of us has two balls, one in each hand that we have when we are born. One ball is made of rubber, and one is made of glass. The rubber ball represents all the materialistic things we acquire in life—things like money, your jobs, our houses, cars, clothes, and so on. The glass ball represents us as persons—our spirits, our faith, family, friends—all that makes us who we are.

When life gets busy, we need to remember what happens when these balls are dropped. The rubber ball will always bounce. We can always get another job, more money, a different house or car or whatever. However, if we drop the glass ball, it will shatter, never to be the same again. We can try to pick up the

pieces and glue them back together, but it's never quite the same.

So maybe we should each ask ourselves how we're doing with our glass balls. How would we respond?

CLOSING:

Kent Nerburn has written, “Life is an endlessly creative experience, and we are shaping ourselves at every moment by every decision we make.” As we leave here this morning, I hope and pray that we are making those decisions according to what we believe is important, that we're honoring our glass ball priorities.

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.