

"Shape Up!"

9 January 2005

Bible passage:

Luke 6:44 (*The Message*)

*"The health of the apple tells the health of the tree.
You must begin with your own life-giving lives."*

3 John :1 (*The Message*)

*"I pray for good fortune in everything you do,
and for your good health that your everyday affairs prosper,
as well as your soul!"*

You've probably heard the story about the 85- year-old couple who had been married for almost 60 years. They had been in excellent health the last ten years, primarily because of the wife's interest in health food and exercise. They both died at the same time, and arrived together at the pearly gates.

Upon their arrival, St. Peter took them on a tour of their mansion which was decked out with a beautiful kitchen and master bath suite with a Jacuzzi. As they oohed and aahed, the old man asked how much this was going to cost, and St. Peter told him that it was all free. "This is heaven," he said.

Next they went to see the championship golf course that the home backed up to, where they would have golfing privileges everyday. Every week, they were told, the course changed to a new one that was like one of the great golf courses on earth. The old man asked, "What are the green fees?" St. Peter replied, "This is heaven. You play for free."

Then they went to the clubhouse where a lavish buffet with the best cuisines of the world laid out. "How much does it cost to eat here?" the man asked. "You don't get it yet, do you?" St. Peter responded. "This is heaven, and it is all free!" "Ok," the old man said, "Where are the low fat and low cholesterol tables?" St. Peter answered, "That's the best part...You can eat as much as you like of whatever you like, and you never get fat and you never get sick. This is heaven."

With that, the old man went into a fit of rage, throwing down his hat and stomping on it. He was shrieking loudly. Both St. Peter and his wife tried their best to calm him down, and once they did, asked him what was wrong. The old man looked at his wife and said, "This is all your fault. If it weren't for your blasted bran muffins, I could have been here ten years ago!"

So much for staying in shape, eating right, and exercising, huh? Now you know, I hope, that this is a totally fictitious story....Heaven's not like that at all, and even though I believe it's a state of being united with God and loved ones, I suspect most of us are not in any hurry to die and get there- whatever it's like! That's why it's important that we take care of ourselves. As someone said, "Good health is a slow way to die." However, for many of us, that means that we need to shape up-big time!

We've just passed the beginning of 2005, and I would guess that at least some of us here made some New Year's resolutions about that very thing. We've made a commitment to ourselves to exercise, lose weight, eat right, and all the other things that will help us be healthier and happier. Last week, Marion talked about how each day offers us the opportunity for a fresh start. We can

start from scratch. Given all that, I'm wondering how we're doing at keeping those New Year's resolutions.

I would like to suggest that, whatever our status on our resolutions, that we begin today (even begin again, if that's where we are), and try to live out the Bible passages that we have for today. There are two different ones. The first reads this way, "The health of the apple tells the health of the tree. You must begin with your own life-giving lives." It's really saying to us that our inner intentions must be lived out with our actions. In other words, this passage is really talking about a sense of integrity and wholeness, where everything fits together. For our purposes today, I would say that it's not enough to make resolutions about changing our lives if we don't follow it with action. Our deeds tell about our health and well-being, and as the passage says, we have to begin with our own life-giving lives.

The second Bible passage is a greeting found at the beginning of a very short book of the Bible. No one knows for sure who wrote it, but the words are those that offer hope for both our own lives and those of all we encounter. It reads like this, "I pray for good fortune in everything you do, and for your good health that your everyday affairs prosper, as well as your soul!"

Both Bible passages indicate the kind of life most of us would like to have. We want to be healthy; we want to prosper-in body, mind and spirit. In my words, we want to be healthy, happy, whole people. As I think I've shared with you before, "wholeness" is my own core value, and it's the key word in my personal mission statement. By wholeness, I'm referring to the interconnectedness of body, mind, spirit, to everything that relates to the essence of life-faith, love, hope, peace, joy, health, and more. In fact, my mission statement is this: "My mission is to envision, inspire and create wholeness in myself and all who seek it." That's what I'm about this morning.

Well, you may be wondering, what does that look like-this wholeness, this shaping up business? I don't know that I can identify it for you, but I have a strong sense of what it is for me. It has to do with the mind/body/spirit connection; it has to do with being in shape physically, spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and every other way.

Those parts of who we are are not isolated segments, but they are very much interrelated and interconnected. Our mental state is affected by our physical, emotional and spiritual state. The well-being of our spiritual lives is connected to our physical well-being. Anne Lamott puts it like this: "You tend to your spirit through the body." George Bernard Shaw said, "We know now that the soul is the body, and the body the soul."

Given that, how do we go about getting in the best shape possible-physically, spiritually, mentally and emotionally? Clearly, I can't do a comprehensive job of addressing all of these, nor do I have the expertise to do so. However, I'd like to focus on two that I believe to be key to our sense of wholeness and well-being-our physical and spiritual selves, and at least highlight some of the ways I think we can shape up and take care of ourselves.

Let's think about our physical well-being first. There are tons of articles out there right now about becoming fit, eating right, exercising, and more. Nothing I can say is new. We all know what the statistics say about the lack of physical fitness in this country, and we've all seen our health care costs skyrocketing. I think that we can change that.

A good starting point is eating in healthy ways. Perhaps instead of saying that we have resolved to go on a diet this year and lose some weight, we might be better off to say something more along the lines of, "I will eat nourishing foods." If we succeed at that more times than we fail, I believe that we'll begin to be healthier, have more energy, and live life more fully.

Certainly exercise is an important part of our well-being, and often it's a habit that we can acquire. Fitness experts suggest that we begin with short segments of exercising, say 10 minutes at a time.

Doing that three times a day can lead to some astounding benefits!

One of the best exercises, I'm told is walking, and that's something most of us do quite a bit of every day. Dr. Kenneth Cooper said, "Walking can be shown to be of considerable benefit, whether your goals are health and longevity or just improving quality of life." Exercising for even a short period of time can improve our overall mood, and improve our stamina and conditioning. Working on our physical well-being can have a big impact on our overall well-being.

I was taken with something our new bishop in Indiana, Bishop Mike Coyner, did when he was in the Dakotas. It was called "A Step Toward Health and Wholeness." Each pastor in his area was given a pedometer and materials urging them to move toward wholeness of body, mind and spirit. They were challenged to follow three simple disciplines: take 10,000 steps a day, drink 8 glasses of water each day, and spend 15 minutes of devotional time each day. I'd love to see each one of us try to follow the same disciplines. Since the first of the year, I've been trying to follow those three disciplines. I'm wearing my new pedometer today, as I have everyday since Christmas, and I encourage you all to go to a fitness store and equip yourselves with one. Join me in trying to walk 10,000 steps every single day.

Clearly, Bishop Coyner was tying the challenge to our spiritual lives, too, because he understands that mind, body and spirit are connected, so let's focus on that connection. It's important that we keep centered spiritually. I'm convinced that our spiritual lives revolve around our relationships—our relationship with God and with one another. If our connections with others are ruptured in one way or another, there's probably a bit of an issue in our relationship with God. On the other hand, if our relationship with God is sporadic or non-existent, that has a way of affecting the quality of our relationships with family, friends, co-workers and others.

One key to the well-being of our relationships with one another is forgiveness. If we insist on harboring grudges, if we constantly replay the mistakes and wrongs of others, then we're probably not very happy people. What we need is a good infusion of the ability to forgive. I'm well aware that we suffer some hurts that are very difficult to deal with, and that it may take a long, long time to forgive, but as people of faith, it seems to me that has to be our desire. For one thing, clinging to bitterness is destructive of our lives and the lives of all those we encounter. I'm guessing that most of us would agree that the last thing we want is to poison our kids or other loved ones with our venom.

That's why we need to learn to forgive, to let go of the hurt that's attached, and to want the well-being of the other. Maybe we need to make a list of all the hurts we're holding onto and replaying in our minds. Then each and every day, we need to ask God to help us learn to forgive the person for this hurt or that one. My guess is, that if we do this with honesty and sincerity, we will find the pain lessening, and we will come to the point of being able to forgive.

It's not something that we can do on our own. It takes help from God; it takes looking a new way at old hurts; it takes daily effort to erase the bitterness from our lives and to replace it with hope and a desire for the well-being of all those we encounter. It does take willingness on our part to let God work in and through our lives, and if we do, God will help us become more forgiving, more loving people.

One of the ways we can connect better with God and experience the ability to forgive is through prayer and reading the Bible. I'm quite sure that's one of the things the Bishop was thinking about when he challenged his pastors to spend 15 minutes time each day with God. It sounds as though it shouldn't even have to be stated, doesn't it? However, let me tell you, our lives are very much like yours, and sometimes it's hard to find the time, or take the time, each day to be in prayer with God.

One thing I would recommend as a piece of structure in connecting with God each day is The Message 365 Day version. This is a very readable and comprehensible version of the Bible that

we use here frequently. The Message by Eugene Peterson is one of the versions of the Bible we use frequently here at The Garden. I really like it, and a little research has turned up that this is the translation that comes closest to the original rendering of the Bible. The 365-Day version can be helpful in keeping that daily connection with God.

I'm convinced that if you and I shape up spiritually, physically, and mentally and emotionally, we'll find ourselves feeling more centered, less stressed, more energized, more loving. We'll be moving toward health and wholeness. Are you with me in this endeavor?

Closing:

As we leave here this morning, my hope and prayer for each of us is that we will shape up in 2005!

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