

Sermon
St. Mary Nanoose Bay
March 1, 2017 ASH WEDNESDAY
Matt 6:1-6, 16-21

When our son Isaac was 5 years old, he longed to have the latest action figure, Bucky O'Hare. When his grandparents, who lived in Florida, asked us what they could get him for Christmas, we told them, "Bucky O'Hare," and just in time for Christmas, a shoebox-sized parcel arrived in the mail for Isaac.

On Christmas morning when Isaac opened that parcel, he was speechless. Not only was Bucky O'Hare staring up at him, but beside him were his sidekick, his pet, and various friends. Isaac had struck gold, he had asked for one action figure and received the whole entourage! Without even asking!

All that day Isaac set up scenarios and played with "his guys." He was utterly happy.

But that night as we were having snuggle time in bed, he seemed quiet and pensive. "Did you have a good Christmas, Isaac?" I asked. He snuggled in closer and said, "I thought getting Bucky O'Hare would make me happy," he said, "but I'm already thinking about what I want next." Out of the mouths of babes. We live in a consumer culture always thinking about what next purchase, vacation or experience will make us happy. And often we don't even notice that we're insatiable and trapped in the hamster wheel of forever seeking after the thing that will truly satisfy.

Things don't satisfy; relationships do.

We've known this from the beginning of time but the allure of being able to purchase, control and hold on to our own source of happiness has driven us all to do things we end up regretting. We sell ourselves and others short of the respect and freedom that is ours to give and receive.

People even become a commodity in this consumer model of the pursuit of happiness. The numbers of people condemned to human slavery is higher today than it was before slavery was abolished in England and the US.

So today we enter the sacred season of Lent where we are reminded of and called to live our higher purpose. Our purpose is simply to give and receive Love. It's that simple. And our lives are the way we develop this ability that God has given us. Theirs is mutuality in the process – we support others, and are supported in turn. And as we reflect on the important things in life, we drawn naturally into a posture of gratitude; even for the events and people we once may have thought were terrible.

Our scripture keeps us on track as we fall over and over into the charms of our consumer culture which promise fulfilment through the things that only decay and sour. We fall away from life in and with God, and again and again we are called back, like the people of Israel all those centuries ago.

Like them we need to be reminded to put our energy into our relationships with God and neighbour. Like them, we are called to be rebuilders, restorers, repairers. Not of temples, but of relationships. God is not looking for burnt offerings or buildings. God is looking to live in and through our hearts. Are we willing to act as God wants us to? God yearns for us to share bread with the hungry, house the homeless and be solid family members that others can count on and trust. After all, all these people we interact with are God's creation also. Every one of them has a purpose and a need to be in the circle of love – giving and receiving what is ours to share.

Lent is a time to look into our own hearts to see where we are keeping God out. Because when we don't allow God in to transform our fears, jealousies, anger, pride, we minimize our capacity for love.

Sometimes we need to be healed from the inside out and other times it helps to take an action with intention and let the practice change us from the inside out.

Can we take time this Lent to look honestly at ourselves? Can we trust God enough to love and forgive us so we can let go of the shame, anger, and desire for retribution that binds us up?

Instead of focusing on where we have fallen, can we focus instead of God's love for us? In this culture we act like falling down is a sin. Falling down is a given. We don't need to focus on that. It's much more powerful to focus on giving up the reactions we have to falling down. When we fall and crumple inwards with all our judgments of our selves and others, we stay self centred. Instead, God

calls us to receive his outstretched hand and get up and try again. The focus is on receiving God's love and forgiveness and trying to reach out to another who is struggling just as much with a sense of inadequacy. Of course we're inadequate! We need God! And when we pretend we don't, when we pretend we're perfect, when we judge others for falling, and when we pretend we can do life on our own terms, we miss out on the mystery and depth of God's love which is more satisfying than anything we could ask for, or imagine.

This Lent, I invite St. Mary's into a time of reflection. Where do we resist God's love? How do we resist God's voice? How can we let go, and let God?

God is calling us forward to the resurrection. To offer up our resistance to God's transforming love. To look beyond the luxuries of this world – the boxes of Bucky O'Hares – to the Love that creates, moves and sustains all life, and holds us in the most tender embrace.

Let us work together to hold each other up in prayer and love this Lent to be willing and enthusiastic servants of God's love in the world.

Amen.