



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

Sermon preached by Rev. Sharon Gracen

December 5, 2010

‘Tis a Gift to be Simple ...

Thanksgiving was such a satisfying time. It was the first time in over ten years that I had Thanksgiving with both of my kids. And there was the super bonus of their children as well. Lots of time was spent just watching Robbie, the six month old, reach for colorful things, smile at everybody, and try to eat the dog's leg. He played a lot, got fussy when he was hungry or tired and then he ate or slept. Little children are so uncomplicated. The only thing they think about what they wear is whether or not it is comfortable and warm enough. The only thing they think about their food is whether it is there or not when they are hungry. They like company and being held. It is a simple existence. It saddens me to know that we can't keep him that way. Jesus taught that children held the key to Kingdom of Heaven. The prophet Isaiah says that we need the simple, uncomplicated nature of children to find our way out of the mess that we're in. It sounds so simple and so unrealistic at the same time.

John the Baptist was someone who understood simplicity – his clothing consisted of some sort of animal hair tied around him with a belt and he ate what was available to him – bugs and honey. His message was also simple, stop doing what you are doing and get right with God! He used the word repent a lot. It means much more than just feel bad about something; it means to turn around and retrace your steps and return to the place from which you have strayed. Advent tells us to take time and go back to a place that is less complicated and less out of sync with God's intentions.

In this series of Advent Spiritual Disciplines we come today to the discipline of Simplicity and boy this is a hard one. I continue to draw on the wisdom of Richard Foster and his book *Celebration of Discipline; The Path to Spiritual Growth*. It's no surprise that he begins the chapter on Simplicity with the perfectly simple Shaker hymn;

'Tis a gift to be simple; 'tis a gift to be free...

Foster defined simplicity as “an *inward* reality that results in an *outward* life-style. The inward reality is spiritual centeredness – keeping everything in a state of awareness and connected to the two great commandments; love God and love your neighbor as yourself. Loving God sounds so simple, but what is lurking behind the obvious is the part where we strive love nothing more than we love God, things like our status and security, or the trappings of our success. The discipline of simplicity causes us to ask the uncomfortable questions about the things that we love in this life. Questions like; Do I need it, can I live without it, why do I want it? Asking these questions requires an inner awareness and willingness to hold up love of God and our spiritual growth with the madness flung at us this time of year.

I have been on a shoe buying spree since I came here – in my defense, most of my shoes were sandals when we arrived from California, so there was a certain level of weather related need but as I worked on this sermon, I realized that I don't really need any more and probably don't need all the ones that I have. The big question here is why do I still go weak in the knees

1100 Main Street, Branford, CT 06405

www.trinitybranford.org • 203-488-2681 • *e-mail* rector47@trinitybranford.org



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

at the sight of one more pair of killer black high heels? Well, so I can look good and people will admire my taste in shoes. Wow, how shallow am I? This simplicity stuff is no fun at all.

Trying to discipline our consumption and activities without developing our spiritual strength is doomed to failure. We will resent it, we will fall off the shoe buying wagon, and we will forget to connect our outer life to our inner life. Simplicity begins in the heart and it is the doorway to freedom.

The freedom that simplicity brings is freedom from anxiety about our lives. There is certainly anxiety for people who have lost their jobs and don't know how they will put food on the table but right now I'm talking about the anxiety that comes from having too much. Wealthy people are among the most anxious people on earth. If you don't see all that you have as a gift from God but rather of your own making your possessions will separate you from God. If you put your trust in security systems rather than in God's careful presence in your life you will always worry that what you have will be taken from you. And here's the really hard one; if what you have is not available to others you will worry all the time, holding it tight rather than sharing it. If you find these attitudes in your life, then you are not free.

The spiritual discipline of simplicity begins with a heart that knows that what you have is a gift from God, that God is your security and that what you have is given to you to share. When this inner transformation has taken place, then it will begin to show in your outer life. You will buy less because you'll know that you don't need more. You will take joy in things that you do not own, like the beach and the marsh and books from the library. You will be less persuaded by advertising and the latest toy that our neighbor has. People who engage in voluntary simplicity are always aware of how the goods that we buy affect others. If we want perfectly spotless apples and bananas, what happens to the people who are exposed to the pesticides used to keep them that way? Do we respect the dignity of every human being who harvests our food? Do we know anything about the companies that make what we buy? When we keep God at the center of our lives, these things will matter to us because they matter to God.