

*Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”*

The former pastor of the Riverside Church in New York suggested giving each sermon a title. Having done that, measure everything you say against that title. If something doesn't fit, don't use it. This can work to shorten one's remarks—in your dreams! If too much doesn't fit, change the title and try again. Today's title is “Giving Up.” And I don't plan to give it up.

Giving Up is certainly un-American. We don't give up. We fight on to the last. How many times have you heard someone say something like, “Her body was riddled with cancer, and she was in constant pain, but she didn't give up. She fought on to her last breath”? Contrast that with Kit Carter who various people reported was having a good time waiting to die, and not worried about it. It's hard to say what any of us would do *in extremis*. But Kit's attitude, being ready to die and move on to a better place, is to me inspirational, evidence of real faith in The Resurrection. For the wise, there is often a time to Give Up.

Those of you who are into—or have at least tried—Centering Prayer, Mindfulness Meditation, Transcendental Meditation, Yoga, and the like know that emptying the mind of annoying thoughts is a worthy goal. For 20 or more minutes we sit there cleansing ourselves of whatever is distracting us in order to achieve inner peace, closeness to God, a feeling of serenity, something better, whatever. Let the distractions go. Give them up.

What are the things that keep you awake at night? For some of us it's menu planning, list making, packing for a trip, or even writing a sermon. One insomnia-buster is getting up briefly to deal with what is bugging you or at least to write it down. Keep a pen and paper by the bed or in the bathroom. Write it down, let it go, give it up, get back in bed, meditate, and go back to sleep. This sometimes actually works.

I wasn't aware until recently that St. Francis has his own Facebook page, but then again doesn't everyone? At any rate, EFM leader Carole Shriver passed this along:

Remember when you leave this earth, you can take nothing with you that you have received—only what you have given: a full heart, enriched by honest service, love, sacrifice and courage.

I don't know what the schedule is here at Emmanuel, but last week at Trinity there was a Stewardship Moment, a parishioner standing up to tell us what she particularly appreciates about the parish. And she urged us to give, to give up. If you aren't being asked to pony up yet, you probably will be soon. I don't think it's an accident in the fall of the year that today's Gospel is about giving up, specifically giving up money.

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Jesus tells the man to give up his money, but he can't bring himself to do it. In other places, Jesus tells us those who lose their life will find it. Those who take up their cross will find eternal life. In our spiritual lives, giving up control is a proven method for making progress. If you can quote scripture, but don't find a lot of irony in it, you're missing a lot, maybe the whole point. Jesus was a lot smarter than those who quote scripture and take it merely at face value. He rarely did. When the pledge cards come out, give up more than you were planning to. Giving more will make you feel richer. Ironic, but true.

I'll end with personal reminiscence. I'm different from many because I actually like to ask for money. Years ago, when I was in the Diocese of Louisiana, I was asked to go to a parish which had little use for the Diocese or the Bishop. My task? To hit them up for money for the Diocesan budget, to shake the money tree there and see what might fall out. Expectations, as they say, were low. I don't know about you, but I've been assigned a lot of hopeless tasks over the years.

I called and made an appointment to meet with the vestry. One dreary night I got in my car and drove across the Mississippi River and into a deep fog, symbolical perhaps of the clarity of my presentation, which I was still pondering.

In the past, I had been friendly with the rector and several other people on the vestry, but I was treated rudely. I arrived at 7:15, 15 minutes before the meeting. At 7:30, I was introduced. The rector said I was there to meet with the vestry. They would deal with me later. They talked about the roof, the coming parish picnic, a "scheme—sometimes the British word is better than

our “plan”—to attract newcomers. The treasurer presented the financial report, and there were a number of inane questions. (If you think this review is boring, you should have experienced it in real time, especially while you were waiting to be thrown into the Fiery Furnace.)

Finally, well after bedtime, they got to me. I had changed the title of my talk several times since I got there, and the content many more times. I got up and told them there are two aspects of stewardship: (1) trying to spend one’s money wisely, get more bang for your buck, that sort of thing. You look at a charity for instance, and see how well it fits your values, how efficient it is in getting the money to where it’s really needed; and (2) to give up control over your money. And I went on to say, what better way to give up control of your money than sending it to the Diocese. We have no idea what in the world they’re going to do with it, do we? I left and drove home. Symbolically and physically, the fog on the road had lifted.

A few days later, I got a call from the Diocesan Administrator. “What did you say to the vestry of St. Swithen’s in the Swamp?” For once, I was speechless, and just looked at the phone trying to figure out something to say. “Whatever it was, it worked. They raised their pledge to the Diocese by \$5,000!”

What did I say to the vestry? I thought it best not to tell him.

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