

As we continue to experience The Word of the Lord together, let us pray. Great Parent, Loving God, Great concerned and involved Lord, open up our hearts and our minds and stir up within us your Spirit, so that we might grow in faith and serve you with our whole hearts and minds. If these words are not your Word, may they be forgotten and come to naught, but if they be thy Word, may they adhere to our hearts, forever transforming us from glory into glory, into the creatures you would have us be, thou who art our rock and our redeemer, Amen.

Isaiah 25:6-10

*On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear.
And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;
he will swallow up death for ever.
Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the Lord has spoken.
It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is the Lord for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.
For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain.*

Mark 9:2-8

...Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

The Word of the Lord...

The passage John read from Isaiah is one of my all time favorites.

*On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear....*

Ahhhhh..... heaven. ☺

Do you think the Lord of hosts takes plastic?

It may flow in and out of the news depending on the political season, but most of us are very much aware that confidence in our financial status as American citizens is not quite what it used to be.

As a member of the generation that was first offered credit cards in our college mailboxes when we had NO consistent income to speak of because the companies realized they could make more money off of our debt than from their responsible patrons... please allow me to say, "Our bad."

I am from the generation that was told about the American Dream but most of us were *not told* that the American Dream means that you *make* your mark. You don't borrow your mark or assume your mark – you *make* your mark.

And so the American Dream has become the American Wake-Up call. And to be honest, I don't know where everyone here falls. Some of you may be snug in your beds, finances and future safe and secure. Others of you may have your eyes wide open with a job loss in one hand and a mortgage bill you can't pay in the other. A lot of us are somewhere in between.

No matter where you are, this message – yes, this *stewardship* message - is for you.

Did you know...

Jesus talked about money more than he talked about Heaven and Hell combined.

Jesus talked about money more than he talked about any other topic, *including* all of our favorite hot topics like sports and politics and those pretty people in all the vampire movies.

Here's a fun stat that proves someone has more time on their hands than I do: 1 out of every 7 verses in the Gospel of Luke talks about money.ⁱ

I think Jesus talks about money and values even when he is not necessarily talking about money and values. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that twice Jesus was hanging out with the masses and when it got late and people were hungry he didn't panic. There is no verse in the Bible that says, "Then Jesus sent the disciples into the village and told them to say to the bread man, "Give us 10 loaves of bread, our Master is good for it."

And from what we know about Jesus there is no reason to believe this is how he would have handled it. He was the original fiscal conservative – don't go there – he assessed the situation and recognized what was on hand to feed the masses. He fed them what was available not out of guilt

or out of needing to show he was 'The Man' but out of respect for who it was that God was calling him to beⁱⁱ.

And so now here we are over 2000 years later and we look around and it does not seem like there is going to be enough to go around. Do we panic?

Do we continue to build on a flimsy house of credit cards?

Do we walk away hands tightly gripped around what is rightfully ours even though we know deep down we can't take it with us anyway?

Or do we respond to who it is God is calling us to be.

In his legendary book, *The Celebration of Discipline*, Richard J. Foster writes:

Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep peopleⁱⁱⁱ.

Friends, this is the word for us today in our current financial climate – with the bully that kicked the kickstand out from under our bicycle of wealth being consumer debt and mortgages on blown up houses – the doctrine of instant gratification is *killing* us and it is bringing our very souls down with it.

Clergy friends and I have been shaking our heads at the daunting task of preaching stewardship during these economic times. But to be honest, in a lot of ways, the current economy has made my job easier. You don't need me to tell you that permanent joy cannot be found in money and material goods.

And you know enough about me by now to know that this challenge is not coming to you from someone who lives high up on a hill with no need or desire for material goods. I have already admitted to you once before that back in the days when I had a pick-up truck, I was caught hugging it! I loved it so much. Has anyone else researched what the planned 5-10am Black Friday specials are in our area? I have.

Of course a flat screen, HDTV on sale for \$800 may be a deal... but it's still \$800.

Currently my materialistic fatal flaw is buying stuff for Will. You've met Will... he of the dimples and the quick blinking eyelids. And don't try to shake your head at me for being conned by him, I have seen more than one of you look down at his face and score him a cookie from the snack table. We're all in this together, we've got some cute kids running around here most of them haven't eaten a Sunday lunch in years thanks to the constant flow of, "Oh, you're so cute don't tell your Mom but here's another cookie."

Truly, the only way I hold off on getting more stuff than Will could possibly need is because I am saving our money to take him to Disney in February next year. That's right... I don't buy him the little stuff because I am saving for the BIG STUFF.

Kathryn Z. Johnston – *Going Up?* – Mark 9:2-8 – Isaiah 25:6-10

So I am not offering up this challenge from a place that much different than yours.

It is time to extract ourselves from the earthly kingdom traps of stuff and bling and proof that we have achieved the American Dream. Who are we proving it to?

Our families?

Our neighbors?

Ourselves?

What about our God?

It is time to take our faith to the next level.

Like anything in life that we want to advance, a deepened relationship with God requires commitment, practice and a little bit of stepping outside of our comfort zone.

Are any of you really into roller coasters? I like them enough but I am a little weird about them in that what really makes my heart race on roller coasters is not the coming down, but instead the going up.

Click – click – click... every heart-pounding click brings me closer and closer to an edge that I cannot see over! I have reason to believe that there is track on the other side of the incline but I can't exactly see it clearly so the higher we go – the more I cling to the harness that is around me.

At Cedar Point in Ohio I waited two hours to get on a ride called the Millenium Force. The top speed of this roller coaster is 92 mph. It stands at 310 feet and so I thought I had plenty of time to gather my breath and wits as it ascended into the air. But NO, because it has such a long distance to go it uses an elevator cable system to go up the hill so instead of click-click-click it goes zooooom to which my deep, theological response is, "AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

Then at the very tippy top it pauses so you can get a good look at the view of Sandusky Bay and Lake Erie around you... and then it drops.

But by then, I am fine... content to know that once again I faced my fears and went up the mountain and that I have nothing to fear coming down the other side. Quietly I say to myself, "wheeeeeee."

I chose the Transfiguration passage as my New Testament lesson today because I often wonder if Peter and James and John had a similar roller coaster experience as they headed up the mountain with Jesus. Really their entire relationship with Jesus had a roller coaster quality to it as they clung to who they thought he was as he pushed them farther and farther outside of their familiar territories. Finally they reached the top and in this mountaintop experience were able to pause just long enough to get a good look at the dazzling scenery around them. And once that was achieved

Kathryn Z. Johnston – *Going Up?* – Mark 9:2-8 – Isaiah 25:6-10

there was nothing to fear coming down the other side, “wheeeeeee.”

It is the same for the spiritual discipline of giving back consistently to God a significant portion of the things that were first given to you.

It is the same for the spiritual discipline of pushing yourself to give back more to God.

Going up?

The vehicle is the church.

The harness is the pledge card. It is where you write down your commitment to go up and it holds you accountable to staying on the ride.

The ‘thrill’ is sitting down every month or every week or whichever time you choose and regardless of the other forces pulling on you, continuing to rise to the level God is Calling you to be.

Then as you walk through the church building enjoying the chatter and laughter of youth and children...

Or as you participate in an opportunity for mission...

Or as you walk into your favorite fellowship event or Sunday School class...

You take a good view of the scenery and all that is good around you, walk into worship and quietly say, “wheeeeeeee.....”

This is not an offering made out of guilt.

This is not an offering made so that others will see, although they might.

This is not an offering made out of thanksgiving or joy – although it may very well bring you those things.

This is an offering made in response to a God who is calling us to a place that is higher.

Going up?

In the Name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ⁱ <http://wiki.answers.com> – As in any ‘wiki’ site, I don’t stand by the fact it contains but found it entertaining none the less.

ⁱⁱ Matthew 14:13-21; 15:32-39.

ⁱⁱⁱ Richard J. Foster. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1988). p. 1-2.