



Cleaning out the church refrigerator... (John 6: 24-35)

Since Christy is coming back on Tuesday I have one more opportunity to get in a good story about her. When I first met Christy, I was in Seminary at Pacific School of Religion and working as part of the Pastoral Team at University Christian Church in Berkeley. Christy had already graduated from Seminary and been ordained and was working in Church Relations at Chapman University. So she lived in Orange County. I had been to her house a couple of times in Orange County. And when I visited it was hard not to notice how she kept her house. It was absolutely immaculate. The clothes were folded neatly in every drawer. The refrigerator was spotless and the leftovers from the meals that she had prepared that week were organized in see through containers so she would not waste food. The books were arranged by author alphabetically, her clothes were organized by color and style, The dishwasher was loaded in a very particular way. The kitchen floor looked like the tile had been laid that morning and the vacuuming lines on the carpet all ran in the same direction. Christy would gesture grandly and proudly about her apartment and say "My philosophy is: Everything has its house and I am most comfortable when everything is in its house."

Which is largely why I had been reluctant to invite her to my house... Where my philosophy was more like.. "I know I threw that over here somewhere.." I didn't cook. If I was hungry I went down on Shattuck Ave or up on Telegraph to get something to eat. I kept everything in piles on the floor. And cleaning was just not really on my radar screen. One day Christy excitedly told me she was bringing a group of Chapman students to Northern California to see their partner churches and that she would love to stay with me for a few days after she got them settled with their host families. "I can't wait to see your apartment!" She said happily. "Yeah" I said gulping deeply "That'll be just swell."

So three days before she arrived I started cleaning. I dusted and swept and scrubbed and organized and tossed out papers and pizza boxes and went through stacks. I washed all the sheets and towels and threw out my funky old rugs and bought new ones. I stacked the clean dishes neatly on the shelves. I sprayed all the furniture with febreze and opened the windows. About an hour before Christy was to arrive I finished. And I must admit it looked awesome. When she walked in she was very impressed with my house and we had a really great time that evening. I thought I was in the clear. And went to sleep quite pleased with myself.

Now The next morning I heard Christy get up...And I could hear her walking around my apartment. I looked at my watch 7:45?! Its Saturday..What is she doing up so early? I pulled the comforter over my head. Then I heard her go in the kitchen..."Wonder what she is doing in there?" A fair question since I did not really ever go into the kitchen except to toss a pizza box in the corner. And then I heard the click as she opened the door...And then it hit me... Oh man... I forgot to clean out the refrigerator.



I listened as a bottle rolled out and fell on the floor. And then I heard a muffled “Uugh” And then I didn’t hear anything else for a few seconds. But I knew she was standing there with the refrigerator door open looking at the chaos inside. I was so busted. I hadn’t even opened that fridge for over two weeks. And I had no idea what was in there. I heard her scooting a few things around. And then there was more silence. Then I heard a cabinet open and then a drawer and then another drawer. And in a few more long seconds I heard a trashbag snapping open.... And water coming on in the sink. I listened as a few more things scooted around and I heard some muffled thuds. Then more long seconds of silence... then I heard a coughing sound and then a full round of gagging. I laid there and shook my head.. Great! I really wanted to impress this woman And now she is cleaning my refrigerator... I bolted out of bed and into the kitchen to go see what she was doing. And as I stood in the doorway my heart was touched by what I saw. Christy was standing there in her pink silk pajamas and fuzzy slippers wearing a pair of rubber gloves she had found somewhere with one of my black harley bandanas tied around her face holding some mold spores in a tupperware container in one hand and a three month old carton of rancid milk in the other. Steam was billowing from the hot water she was running in the sink. She looked at me sheepishly and very sweetly in her soft Arkansan way she said “I was going to fix you some breakfast. But I noticed you have a lot of perishables in here. And I think some of them are past the expiration date.”

Past the expiration date indeed. Those perishables had perished a long time ago. And that is the perfect lead in for our scripture reading this morning because Jesus is spending a lot of time making a distinctions between “Ftharthos” or perishable food and unperishable spiritual food that is very important for us to hear.

Last week we heard about Jesus feeding the five thousand, then he walked on water, two very impressive signs that there is something very different about him. And yet in our scripture reading this morning some of the people who were fed on the grassy shores of the sea of galilee by those loaves and fishes track him down ready for another sign and another meal. They seem to have the idea they are in a dinner theater where they are fed and entertained. (Does that sound like how some folks view church?) They even prompt Jesus a little about what they would like to see, “What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? 31Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

But Jesus sees what they are doing immediately. And says, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.”

After feeding the crowd with the loaves and fishes and taking care of their physical needs, Jesus now points the necessity for spiritual food. And he tells us clearly here and elsewhere in John’s gospel we are spiritually fed by building relationship with him. “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which I



the Son of Man will give you.” The spiritual food, the unperishable food, comes by our building relationship with him. In fact Jesus is pretty big on relationship. He makes it the focus of his ministry. There are two commandments that are the most important he tells us, that we are to “Love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love neighbor as self. We are to love God, love our neighbors, and love ourselves which is all about building healthy relationship while we are here on this planet. I have talked with you a lot in past weeks about building relationship with God through abiding and prayer and sitting with the scriptures. We have talked about how we build relationship with and love ourselves too.. by being gentler with ourselves, and not having unrealistic expectations, and believing that we are enough. So this morning we are going to talk a little more about building relationship with each other..

For my relationship with Christy to continue it was obvious we were going to have to boldly go where neither one of us had gone before... we were going to have to clean out the proverbial refrigerator so our relationship could grow and so we could eventually live under the same roof. I would like to suggest this morning that we also have some things in our church refrigerator here at FCC San Lorenzo that need to be cleaned out if our relationship with Jesus Christ and with ourselves and each other is to flourish so we can revitalize this church community in healthy ways. So get the hot water going and put on your rubber gloves...

Back in the corner of our church refrigerator there is a very old but closely guarded Tupperware container that has something stinky and very unrecognizable growing in it that several years ago was food. But instead of throwing this old tupperware container away or scrubbing the dickens out of it and putting something new in it so we can use it.. we seem to like to get it out and wave it around so the smell can overpower everyone and we can all gag and complain and be stuck some more. Somebody doesn't like something and somebody else doesn't like something else. Somebody doesn't like somebody's hair or somebody doesn't like somebody's clothes, or somebody doesn't like my shoes or my message or something else that has more to do with your physical pain, or your emotional pain, or with your pain about the past that anything that is going on in the present. Oh yes, we have one of those little Tupperware containers.. And instead of opening it up and cleaning it out or getting rid of it which would be the sane thing to do... we toss it back into the refrigerator and try to hide it only to pull it out again and wave it around. There is a faint label on the top.. It says “Complaining, Criticism, and Negativity.” And that little funky container that we have stuck in our church refrigerator will destroy our relationship with God, our relationships with each other, and any chances we might have to revitalize this congregation.

Now if you take a closer look in our church refrigerator...next to that tupperware container is a big old half moldy hunk of cheese. We take it out of the refrigerator once in a while and set it on the counter with the intention of either cutting off the bad parts or getting rid of it. But then somebody decides well it isn't really so bad. After all, there are still a few good spots on it (it was good in 1970 so it should still be good now.) So that big old half moldy hunk of cheese ends up getting put back into the refrigerator shoved into the back where nobody can see it until we take it out again and decide we should



still keep it. There is another faint label on the bottom of the wrapper. Let me see if I can make it out. It says "Resistance to even the smallest changes" that might revitalize our congregation.

Oh and there is that carton of milk that sits back in the corner of our church refrigerator. Once in a while we pick that one up and think maybe its time to do something with it cause it is so old and funky it has the consistency of rotten cottage cheese. Its full of pain, and old wounds. Every little bit somebody adds a little something to the carton by doing something hurtful, or dropping the ball on an important project. But that old milk container presents a real problem because it just feels like to big and too gross a job to open it and pour it down the sink because if we open it we are gonna have to confront each other in love, hold each other accountable, let go of the past and act like we are the body of Christ in the present. God help us we may be thinking. "if we open that carton it is just gonna stink" It needs to go. But because of our fear ..we end up sitting that milk carton back in the refrigerator and shoving it back into the corner and shutting the door where we think nobody else can see it. But its there. And its gonna be there keeping us from moving forward until we are willing to do something with it. There is another worn label on the side of that carton. It says "lack of trust."

Cleaning out the church refrigerator is not an easy task. But it is a necessary one. Its easy for us to get stuck. And one of the reasons we get stuck is because our relationships with each other, ourselves, and Jesus Christ are being derailed by the presence of that hidden old rotten moldy stinky stuff in the refrigerator.

I invite each of you this morning to put your bandanas over our mouths and get out your gloves and get the hot water going so we can do the work that we are being called to do so we can come together as a community and be a mighty force in the world. I invite you to go through, look at, discard, forgive, process with each other if necessary, and let go of what you need to let go of. If there is something big you are stuck with talk to me about it. We will walk through it together and we will walk through it as a community if necessary, no matter how painful it is, so we can acknowledge it, let go of it, and move on.

Jesus Christ has given us spiritual food abundantly here. We have bread of life, the cup of blessings, manna from heaven, and streams of living water. And we have Jesus Christ in our midst and we have each other. We are blessed with these incredible relationships, gifts and graces. It is my prayer today that you are filled to overflowing with unperishable spiritual food and willing to put on the gloves and get the hot water running with me... Because its time to make room in the church refridgerator for the spiritual food we will be taking out these doors and into our hungry and thirsty world.