

Once For All

October 25, 2009

Hebrews 7: 23-28

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Many of you know that I enjoy working out at the gym.

I like to stop into Gold's Gym on my way home in the evenings.

In my gym bag, I keep a Master Lock, one of those pad locks that requires a numerical combination to open.

When I get to the gym, I put my things in an unused locker, put my lock on it, spin the dial of numbers around and around, and off I go.

One day after a good workout, I went back into the locker room, huffing and puffing and sweating.

I went up to my locker and spun the dial around to open the combination lock.

But when I pulled down on the lock, it wouldn't open.

So, I tried again.

Three turns to the right to the number 5.

One turn to the left to 16,

One turn to the right to 35.

Yet when I pulled on the lock again, it still would not open.

Then I began to get a bit frustrated, thinking maybe that I had forgotten the numbers.

So I stopped for a minutes, gathered my wits about me, and tried again:
5-16-35.

But once again, the lock would still not open.

Then I began to get really frustrated, and the guys around me in the locker room were noticing that I was having trouble.

But I kept trying, over and over and over again, to open the lock by turning the dial.

Then a man entered the locker room, walked right up to me and said:

“Excuse me, but I think you are trying to open up my locker.”

Sheepishly, I realized that *my* locker was one whole row over.

Over and over and over again, I had tried to open up the wrong locker.
And over and over and over, I kept getting the same result, a lock that would never open.

Albert Einstein once said:

“The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

And in the Letter to the Hebrews, the writer of that letter tells us that the ancient priests in the Jewish Temple would do the same thing over and over again and expect different results.

The priests in the Jewish Temple would offer up sacrifices, day after day after day, over and over in the Temple, hoping for the result of acceptance and love from God.

The priests in the Jewish Temple would slaughter lambs, day after day after day, over and over in the Temple, hoping for the result of forgiveness by God.

Yet the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus offered himself up on the Cross.

And when Jesus offered himself up on the Cross, we finally got a different result. We do not have to offer up daily sacrifices, or to slaughter any more animals, because we have already been accepted and forgiven and loved by God.

For God’s love for us is not earned again and again and again.
God’s love for us is permanent – once and for all.

Today, we don’t sacrifice and slaughter lambs, again and again, in the Temple anymore in order to earn God’s acceptance and forgiveness.

But today, we still do things, over and over again, things that do not give us an abundant life.

For some people, they come home from work, night after night, and pour themselves one glass of wine, then another glass of wine, then another glass of wine, hoping to drown their pain in alcohol.

And yet, the results are always the same:
Another night of loneliness and emptiness.

For some people, they open up the pantry, day after day, and tear open a bag of potato chips and plop on the couch.
They eat one potato chip, then another chip, then another chip, hoping to fill up and grow their lives with comfort food.
And yet, the results are always the same:
The stomach and the hips are the only things that grow.

For some people, they walk into the mall or to Target, weekend after weekend, and buy a new purse, then a few pair of shoes, then a golf club they really won't use very much.
And yet, the results are always the same:
Closets packed with stuff, maxed out credit cards and lives filled with guilt.

You see, we no longer sacrifice animals in the Temple, day after day after day. But we *do* offer up in the Temple, over and over again - alcohol and food and shopping and work and sex and busyness - to try to assure us that we are loved and forgiven and accepted.
And yet the results are always the same:
We never feel quite good enough or quite loved enough.

Yet Jesus, our great high priest, has offered himself on the Cross, once for all, to show that us that we don't have to do anything to earn love.

For God's love for us is not earned again and again and again.
God's love for us is permanent – once and for all.

One of the members of our St. Alban's family, JoAnn Stringer, shared a story with me yesterday.
And she gave me permission to share her story with you.

JoAnn works day after day after day in a very small company.
Day after day, she has very little interaction with other people.
And she realized that she needed to make a change in her life in order to make more friends, in order to get a different result.

So JoAnn saw in our St. Alban's newsletter that there was going to be an Episcopal Church Women's retreat at Camp Allen last weekend.

So she registered for the weekend and she went to this Diocese of Texas women's retreat.

At the retreat, JoAnn met new female friends, and she unexpectedly was reunited with friends she knew from her high school youth group.

Now JoAnn has come home to St. Alban's with some new ideas for making new friends and for interacting with others in the St. Alban's community.

And JoAnn discovered that by not doing the same lonely thing over and over again – she got a different result.

By opening herself up to a different experience in this church, she has made new friends.

So stop trying to open that combination lock, over and over again,
And start opening up the right locker.

Stop the day-to-day isolation and loneliness of life.
And start meeting and serving others in this church community.

Stop the indulgent eating and drinking and working and shopping.
And start believing that God loves you and forgives you, just as you are.

Stop the insanity of doing the same things over and over again,
And you will see different results.

For God's love for you is not earned over and over again.
God's love for you is permanent – once and for all.

AMEN.

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