

ASH WEDNESDAY  
February 13, 2013  
8 am & 12 Noon services

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17  
Psalm 103:8-14  
2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10  
MATTHEW 6:1-6, 16-21

## GIVING UP GRUDGES FOR LENT

So today is Ash Wednesday and tomorrow is... Valentine's Day. Let me think about this. No, my head hurts. This seems like such an incongruous juxtaposition: ashes, flowers. First "O Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world," then Barry White singing about *love*. Is this just weird, or is there something unexpected, maybe even "deep" here?

Some people may have never fallen in love, some love *falling* in love but panic when the relationship starts to get serious, others know what it is to *be* in love and understand that real, committed love involves, among other things, periodically *asking for forgiveness* from the one you love.

Now we're getting somewhere.

And real love also involves *resisting temptations* -- ouch, we're getting positively Lenten here -- including the temptation to *hold grudges*.

Grudges can be "satisfying" in a spiritually unhealthy sort of way. Grudges involve nurturing and in fact *growing a grievance* which may (or may not) have had a legitimate basis but which persists as a grievance *as long as it's not resolved*. Grudges can help us strengthen our own senses of *self-righteousness* -- which is *not* the same as righteousness. Grudges turn the focus of our grudge into the recipient of our anger, sometimes of our pettiness: the person becomes an object, not a fellow child of God with whom one can have a healthy and growing relationship. A sufficiently nurtured grudge can turn the other person into a cartoon villain version of him- or herself. But that can't happen without spiritually damaging the person who *holds* the grudge.

Grudges are *jealous* creatures: they like to be *held* and resent it if we want to hold someone else more. And so yes, grudges can really torpedo a romantic evening -- or sometimes an entire relationship. Maybe it *is* a good thing that Ash Wednesday comes the day before Valentine's Day this year.

Sometimes people hold grudges against certain categories of people, maybe based upon personal experience, maybe not, in ways that slaps a dreadful stereotype upon a whole category of people. Ever heard (or said), "Men are just like that" or "Women are just like that" -- or, fill in whatever category or group of people.

Feuds can be based on this. Memories can be very, very long. There's an old story about two neighboring churches on the North Sea Coast of England who, for economic reasons, had to share a priest, but who *really* did not get along with each other. Finally, their exasperated bishop asked the leader of one congregation, "Why don't you like them?" He pointed his finger in the direction of the other church and said, "They didn't tell us when the Vikings were coming."

That may sound silly, but remember, getting warning of a Viking raid might have been the difference between life and death. Twelve hundred years ago. In some parts of the world there are grudges which are centuries old and create far more pain than that one right now.

Some couples hold grudges against one another. "You didn't call me" turns into "You never call me," "You didn't pick up the house last week" turns into "You never pick up the house" and so on -- all steps in a dysfunctional dance.

And sometimes people hold grudges against God.

I picture a grudge starting out as a cute, furry little creature about the size of a hamster, a creature which is really fun to pet and holding it makes us feel *so* good. *But the more we hold the grudge, the bigger it gets*, no longer the size of a hamster but the size of a wildcat, then the size of a grizzly bear. In fact in time, *it feels like the grudge is holding us*. Some people are holding and being held by grudges the size of dinosaurs. So how's your T-Rex doing today?

But to make them stop holding us -- which limits our own freedom enormously -- and to shrink them -- we have to *let go*. Letting go of a grudge can be hard. And important. But if we don't, we may be held by our grudges *forever*.

So here's a thought: **let's give up holding grudges for Lent.**

Imagine if every Christian in the world gave up holding grudges for Lent [I sing "What a wonderful world"]. Well, it all starts with each of us. From now to Easter, and by then it just might be habit-forming, and the freedom we feel grudge-free will strengthen our resolves to continue to LET GO.

After all, would you rather be held by a grudge -- or by God?

Let's LET GO AND LET GOD hold us for Lent -- and after. Forever after.

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