**The Junk Drawer**

*Rev. John Allen*

As far as I can tell, nobody *decides* to have a junk drawer. It just kind of happens.

The one in the house where I grew up was in the kitchen, a large flat drawer underneath a wine rack. I think it started out as an office supplies drawer. Pens and pencils. Paperclips.

Then stamps, a couple of nails.

A key to, who knows what. A spare button to something someone long outgrew

A sandwich bag full of coins. A screwdriver.

Actually, when Molli and I moved into the parsonage, we were determined not to have a junk drawer. Every drawer in our kitchen was meticulously planned out as to what would go where. No room for random things to accumulate.

Ahh, but there is a little table in the corner of the dining room, with a little drawer in it.. And now, it is filling up. A broken watch. Tic-tacs. Receipts. Junk.

There must be some core human trait that leads to the junk drawer. Because sometimes, when I stare down into that drawer facing the impossible task of finding what I need for that moment, I am reminded of how often life can feel like that.

Does your life ever feel like that?

Full of an odd assortment of things?

Like old grudges you are unsure why you hang on to.

Or worn out resentments that are long past their usable life.

A sadness you can’t quite place.

Or just plain old fear, so dusted over now you can’t even remember what it was you were afraid of to begin with?

Does your life have work that lost its meaning? Relationships that have gone cold?

Is your calendar cluttered?

Is your spirit a jumble?

It’s ok. It happens to everyone.

It is why we have Spring Cleaning.

Did you know that the practice of spring cleaning actually has a religious roots?

Some researches have traced the origins of modern Spring Cleaning to the preparation for the celebration of Passover, when Jews refrain from eating any leavened foods. In the days before Passover, observant Jews have, for thousands of years, thoroughly cleaned their homes to remove every last bit of leavened food.

Down to a crumb under the cushion. Or a piece of uncooked pasta that fell behind the stove.

In some families it is a fun tradition on the night before passover to give the kids flashlights and let them go hunting for anything that might have been missed.

In the Eastern Orthodox Christian Churches do not celebrate Ash Wednesday to mark the beginning of Lent, they celebrate a day called Clean Monday. It is a public holiday in Greece and Cyprus where folks get the day off from work and school to go to confession, and to clean their home.

It is a beautiful connection to make. Because the season of Lent is really like a Spring Cleaning for our souls.

It’s a time to open the windows, let a little fresh air in, toss out some of the stuff that isn’t working for us anymore. Rediscover that hidden gem that you nearly forgot.

It is a time to listen deeply. To refine. To cast out what is not working for us anymore and return, once again, to the simple truth of God’s love.

And yes, it is a time to open the dreaded junk drawer.

It’s a time to stare the old grudges in the face. To examine the worn out resentment and the fear.

It’s a time to recommit to a more organized and disciplined approach to our Spiritual life. To tend to some deferred maintenance in our relationship with God.

How? You rightly ask. Because if it were that simple, we’d all have done it by now.

I want to offer you one tool. It is not a magic bullet that will cure all your spiritual woes once and for all. But I have found this to be a uniquely valuable tool in getting a handle on my own spiritual junk drawer.

It’s called the examen.

The examen is a Jesuit practice of prayer that has its roots in monastic communities of the 16th century. It is a simple practice to sitting still, at the end of the day, and prayerfully reviewing what has taken place, and looking for where God might be in the midst of it.

It is basically like pulling your day like a drawer, looking down at all the stuff, and going rummaging through it in search of God.

In a very simple form, it is what we did during the Children’s sermon.

It is a time to ask questions like, “where did I feel close to God today?” “When did God feel far away?” “When was I most able to give and received love?”

It is an opportunity to listen for how God might be speaking to you through your own experience of everyday life. How and to where God might be guiding you. Tugging at your heart. This way, or another.

It is a simple set of questions, but asked each day, it has a cumulative effect. If you have ever wondered how you would know God’s voice, you will be amazed at the insight that can emerge from simply stopping to listen in a structured way.

So Lent starts on Wednesday —our Spiritual Spring cleaning— Perhaps you have already decided on a Lenten discipline. Giving up chocolate. Or the classic no meat on Fridays.

This year I want to invite you to do more than give something up.

I want to invite you to take something on.

I invite you all to join me in praying the examen every day in Lent. There are these [hold up] pamphlets with information about the practice and some ways to get started on the table, if you didn’t get one on your way in, pick one up on the way out.

Earlier this Fall, I led a small group of folks at the church through the examen. I taught them the basics, but encouraged everyone to make it their own.

I want to pause here for a moment and invite Doug Stewart and Betsy Disharoon to come forward now and share a bit with you about their experience using the examen.

 [Doug and Betsy]

This morning we read from the Book of Acts, a story about. Paul preaching in a public square in Athens.

Paul mentions that he had seen an altar, among the many religious statues and carvings of the city, that was dedicated “to an unknown God.” Now Paul pokes a little fun at the Athenians for that, but he also points out that this is a sign that they are extremely religious in every way.

Paul notices that the Athenians are so religious, that they can feel deep down that there is something more, something beyond even the objects of their everyday devotion.

They are so devout, that they have come to know that hidden somewhere must be some unknown truth that they have yet to grasp.

And so, to honor all that they have yet to discover, they erected a monument to an unknown God.

I want to encourage you to use the examen because I know that many of us sometimes feel as if we are praying to an unknown God.

I know that too often prayer feels like simply broadcasting our voices out into the ether, with perhaps an abstract sense that there must be something more, some unknown truth out there that we have yet to grasp.

Paul says thats a start.

What’s next, he says, is this:

Search for God. Perhaps, even feel around in the dark for God. Scripture says we are meant to go searching for God, rummaging through our lives, examining our lives, looking back over our days searching for the ways God’s hand might be guiding us, and God’s voice might be speaking to us.

It sounds hard. And it can be. It takes patience. Persistence. And discipline. It requires us to clean some of the junk out of our lives, so that we can find our way to God more clearly.

The good news is scripture also says this:

You will find what you are looking for. Because God is not far from us. God is not far away. In fact each one of us live, and move, and have our being *in God*.

It is hard to imagine God being any closer than that.

So the invitation this Lent is to clear a little space in your day to sit still, and listen, and search for God. It takes a little patience. And some persistence. And some disciple.

But God is not far away from any of you.

In fact, in God you live, and move, and have your very being.