

Sermon for Christ Church, Spotsylvania, VA
Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year B, April 22, 2018
The Rev. Bill Queen, "Thrift Shop Theology"
Acts 4:5-12, 1 John 3:16-24, Matthew 6:19-20, Luke 3:10-11

☞do you ever think about all of the stuff that clutters our lives?; I don't mean, do you ever notice the stuff that clutters our lives?; I'm pretty sure that you, like I do, probably stumble and grumble over the stuff that clutters our floors and closets, our counters and desktops on a pretty regular basis; but beyond noticing it, and stumbling over it, and grumbling over it, have you taken the time to think about what it means when we allow so much stuff to encumber us?; have you taken the time to think and pray about what it means when we, as Christians, allow so much stuff to encumber us, and what our faith has to say about it?

☞☞about ten years ago I had an experience with stuff that made me rethink my relationship with "the world's goods" as our 1st John reading today calls stuff; my older brother David died after a five-year fight with cancer and I unexpectedly became the executor of his estate; and his estate largely consisted of stuff: coin and baseball card collections; vinyl records, CDs, VCRs, DVDs, and books by the hundreds; electronic equipment and speakers and amps of all sizes; and the pistol he'd threatened to use if things got too bad (he didn't); and boxes and boxes and boxes of papers: papers from Social Security, papers from the Credit Union, papers from bills and all sorts of medical transactions and instructions; and that was just the stuff from his rental house; he also had a storage unit there in Florida and another in California; that one had not been opened in years; you get the idea of the magnitude of the stuff I had to deal with

now I cannot say that that experience led me to take care of all of my own issues related to stuff because, yes, Lynn Ellen and I do have a storage unit full of stuff, in addition to all the stuff that is under our roof; but that experience did give me a wake-up call to look at stuff differently and at least begin dealing with the excess stuff we own and clearly do not need; and it got me thinking about how that stuff affects my life, and how it affects my life of faith

and today, Thrift Shop Appreciation Day, is the perfect day for all of us to review how we might rethink and become more aware of our spiritual

relationship to stuff; so I'd like to take a stab at some Thrift Shop theology; theology, remember, just means how we talk and think about God and how we talk and think about our relationship to God

one part of Thrift Shop theology concerns the obvious need that the Thrift Shop fills for its poor customers; now I know that many people shop at thrift shops for bargains and for the fun of discovering unique stuff, but for most of its customers our Thrift Shop provides necessities of life at far less a cost than they would have to pay elsewhere; and the way our Thrift Shop is run, truly as a ministry, there are times when truly needy customers are given stuff at extra low cost, or even at no cost at all; that's how God's economy works

the other part of Thrift Shop theology concerns, what is perhaps not as obvious, is the need that the Thrift Shop fills for us; donating to the Thrift Shop helps us get rid of excess stuff that we don't need and makes needed stuff more readily available for others; remember that in the Lord's Prayer Jesus taught us to ask for "our daily bread"; that doesn't just mean food, it means that Jesus is warning us about desiring more of anything than what we really need; and look at the Bible quotes on the Thrift Shop insert page: "If you have two coats, give one away," says John the Baptist; and Jesus similarly warns us about cluttering up our lives in ways that distract us from our relationship with God: "don't hoard treasure down here" on earth, he says

volunteering at the Thrift Shop also gives us the opportunity to encounter poor folks we might not otherwise ever meet and the opportunity to serve them in a dignified way; our 1st John reading asks, "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?" through the Thrift Shop we can see, we can help, and we can demonstrate God's love

one way to sum up this Thrift Shop theology is seen in our Acts reading today; there Peter explains how a man has been healed; Peter says the man was healed by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth; that means that the man was healed because of the direct participation of Jesus in the ministry; Peter didn't heal the man; Jesus healed the man through the ministry that Peter was carrying out in Jesus' name; this is true for us too, in the Thrift Shop and in all of our parish and individual ministries — as long as we carry out our ministries because of our faith in Jesus, and as long as we prayerfully invite Jesus to be present with us and to bless our work; all that we do continues

Jesus' ministries; all that we do in our ministries strengthens our relationship with Jesus, and all that we do in our ministries strengthens our relationships with the neediest of our neighbors, with the neediest of God's children, children of all ages

please look at the Thrift Shop insert page in your bulletin, where you will find A Thrift Shop Prayer; take this home with you and keep it around as a reminder of the Thrift Shop theology I've talked about today; keep it around as a reminder of the needs that the Thrift Shop fills for our poor neighbors, and as a reminder of the needs that the Thrift Shop fills for us; please pray with me now from the bottom of that insert page:

A Thrift Shop Prayer

O Lord our God, you supply every need of ours according to your great riches: Help us to be grateful for all you have given us and to be generous in our donations to the Thrift Shop, that those in need may there find the necessities of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who came among us as one who serves. Amen.