

## Pastor's Letter - October 2014

*“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.” – Philippians 2: 5-7a*

Within my weekly rhythm, I find Monday to be a day both “ridiculous and sublime”, as it’s the day when I clean my house and write my sermon. (I leave it to you to decide which activity is “ridiculous” and which is “sublime”.) My sermon work is generally a matter of filling up a page with words. But my house-work is more likely a matter of EMPTYING things – all sorts of things, including the trash can, the washer, the dryer, the dish rack, the lint trap and the compost bucket. Stuff just seems to pile up, stack up, and creep up! The challenge becomes one of discarding all manner of accumulated stuff.

The expression holds that “nature abhors a vacuum”, as do many of us, which is why the living rug gets so dirty! But abhorrent or not, sooner or later we have to run said vacuum and, in time, EMPTY the vacuum. Just a house-hold tip I learned some time ago: never empty the vacuum canister outside in a strong wind. You will likely end up wearing some of that living room rug you just vacuumed.

It takes effort and a bit of common sense to keep a house-hold empty enough to sustain human life. (Lower life forms have a much higher tolerance for the accumulation of stuff, it seems. In fact some organisms LOVE it!) When we fail to expend that effort...when we stop throwing things out...grievous conditions develop. We’ve all heard the horror stories of folks whose homes are so choked with debris that it becomes impossible to pass from one room to another. Movement comes to a virtual standstill due to the amassed material of life.

Clearly, there’s a spiritual corollary to this, as well. Jesus is said to have “emptied himself” for the sake of all. He became a vessel of blessing because he was NOT “full of himself”. Though difficult to crawl into the mind of Christ, the broad sweep of the gospel story suggests a man who set aside self-aggrandizement in order to walk a path that led to disgrace and even death. In so doing, he emptied something else: the tomb...forever.

Jesus’ journey was very dramatic. Most of ours’ won’t be. And yet the call to self-emptying is still there.

Sometimes we are quite conscious of our efforts to “empty ourselves” for the sake of others. We sit quietly as a friend shares a burden, at some length. The gift of listening requires clearing a space in our heart...and in our day...to receive another.