**Lent 3**

**February 28, 2016**

**In the name of the God of all creation,**

**The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,**

**And the power of God known in the Spirit.**

**Amen.**

I first heard this story 20 or 30 years ago, and I know have used it in sermons before, but I’m not sure if I have used it here at St. Cyprian’s. The story is about a college professor who showed up for class one day with a large glass jar. He placed the glass jar on the lab table in front of him, and without saying a word he pulled out a box from under the table and began moving stones about the size of his fist from the box to the jar. When he had moved enough stones into the jar that they reached the top he turned to the class and, in the first words he had spoken to them, he asked, “Is the jar full?” The class, slightly confused, looked at each other until someone said, “Yes, the jar is full.”

The professor then pulled out another box from under the table. This box was filled with stones about the size of marbles, and he began carefully dropping them into the jar and they filled the spaces between the larger stones. When they had reached the top he turned to the class and asked, “Is the jar full?” Some of the class smiled at each other while nodding their heads and said, “Yes. Now it is full.” But there was at least one skeptic in the back who chimed in with, “I’m not so sure!”

The professor then pulled out a third box … this one filled with sand. Using a scoop, he slowly poured the sand into the jar while shaking it and the sand sifted into all the crevasses. When the sand reached the top of the jar the professor turned to the class with a slight smirk on his face and asked, “Is the jar full now?” The class seemed really confused. Some were certain it was indeed full. But others, having been fooled before, and skeptical of the professor’s question, were unwilling to accept the claim.

Finally, the professor pulled out a pitcher and began pouring water into the jar until it reached the top. He then put the top on the jar, turned to the class and said; “Now the jar is full.” As the class smiled at the professor he added, “What do you think might be the lesson learned from this exercise?” The young man from the back of the room who had been skeptical quickly responded, “No matter how full your schedule is you can always find time to do more.” “Sorry” said the professor, “that is not what I had in mind. The point of this exercise is if you want the large stones in the jar you have to put them in first. Those things in life which are most important to you … the people you love, the values you hold, the dreams you desire have to occupy a primary place in the way you order your life. This is about priorities … they are the large stones that have to go into the jar first.”

Years ago, when I shared this story with my brother, Kirk, he was very taken by it. So for Christmas that year I bought a fancy glass jar and filled it with large rocks that had words like “Love,” and “Kindness,” and “Health,” and “Patience,” and “Hope,” and “Dream” cut into their hard face. I also found some smaller stones with the same kind of words on them and filled in the spaces between the larger stones with them. I then carefully wrapped the jar and shipped it off to him. What I learned from this exercise was that one cannot put stones in another’s jar. The gift to my brother arrived with the glass jar broken into thousands of pieces. As disappointed as I was, Kirk found his own jar, and then he filled it with the stones I had sent and some he had found on his own. The priorities were now his … not mine imposed upon him. And the jar sits in his office to this day.

This Lenten season is a time … in the words to the “Invitation to the Observance of a holy Lent” for “self-examination and repentance.” In other words, it is a time to take stock of our priorities in life and then put the large stones in the jar first.

This is true in our corporate life as well as in our individual and family life. From time to time we have to look at those stones in the jar to make sure that we are putting our resources in the right places, and to see what new stones need to be added. St. Cyprian’s Mission Statement holds those values that make up those large stones in our jar … this congregation.

*St. Cyprian’s is an inclusive, historic, and progressive community of faith welcoming all into our life and worship as we creatively grow in faith and service to each other, the world around us, and a loving God.*

We have grown in numbers, ministry and spirit since that Mission Statement was first adopted in 2009, but it has driven our decisions about our common life during the ensuing years. The Commons at St. Cyprian’s is just one example of both honoring our history and at the same time living into the reality of being a progressive community of faith that welcomes all into our life and worship. A holy table where all are welcome to partake of the holy food and drink … to fill everyone’s spiritual hunger and thirst … is another.

And we are embarking on new ventures to expand that welcome by putting some new stones in the jar … large stones. We have too many families with young children who find it difficult to bring them into our worship. To include those families … especially the children … we will be developing a program for them in the near future. We will also be utilizing the space in the Mission House to better accommodate our growth in numbers and the various groups that meet in our space.

If it is important to us … if it is a priority … then it has to go into the jar first … otherwise it will be crowded out by all the minutia that occupies community life.

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