

There is nothing worse than finding an animal has gotten into your garbage can and spread it all over the drive. But there are many kinds of garbage. How do you respond to the trash that often is dumped in your life? Like anger, revenge, divorce, the loss of a job, slander, gossip, sickness and even death! Life often stinks! And too often it is filled with rotten waste of sin. And we know how that "stench" can overpower our living.

We know that we often are dumped on and that life isn't always sweet and clean. But what do we do when the garbage that overpowers living is not expected or deserved, when we didn't see it coming or are ill equipped to clean it up. What do we do?

Joseph's slavery was the smelliest, dirtiest, foulest garbage ever! Out of jealousy, his brothers first plotted his murder but changed their minds and sold him to a slave trader. He wound up as a house boy in Egypt, but his master's wife lied and he wound up in a smelly prison. We know that eventually he worked his way out of that mess, and years later, when his brothers unexpectedly showed up begging for food, he had the opportunity to give them what they deserved.

His response to his brothers' hatred different than expected. It was unbelievable as somehow he showered them with grace rather than the garbage they might have expected. And this unexpected turn of events is more important than all that had happened in the years leading up to this reunion.

Consider how we respond to the stuff that gets dumped on us. Especially when we are caught by surprise by events we don't deserve or the insensitivity of others. And think about all the garbage and waste that we litter in lives around us. We are used to talking about landfills and decay and pollution when it comes to water and air and land. And we know that recycling has become a secular answer for the normal garbage and waste of the world.

Recycling makes something useful out of garbage. It breaks down what we see into it basic elements so that they can be reshaped and given new purpose, using what was there all along.

Here is the real question: If the secular world can understand the need for recycling, how much more can people of faith offer in terms of changing wasted into opportunities for grace? The today remind that recycling is not a brand new answer. Joseph was thrown on the trash heap, but faith created fresh opportunity. And the life and word of Jesus brought the same sweet smell to an imperfect world. His words were simple: "do good to those who hate ... bless those who curse you ... and turn the other cheek ...!"

From garbage to grace is exactly what the Gospel is all about!

Jesus entered a world full of foul smelling garbage (wars, jealousies, anger, abuses, addictions, revenge ...) Jesus took MY GARBAGE (not w/curbside containers), but in

his very own arms and loving embrace carrying ALL to the cross where a "recycling" began

Out of the darkness of the tomb (the ultimate symbol of the waste and garbage of life) Jesus came, carrying those same lives, which he returned as free gifts -- cleansed, purified, resuscitated! Sounds good. But how can I walk away when DUMPED ON? How can I turn other cheek when HURT? How can I live in love and peace when UNFAIR and SMELLY stuff is piled on me?

Daily we have choices. Do we add to the garbage dump? Are we insensitive to the pollution of our wasted opportunities and lack of sensitivity and love? Or do we learn from Jesus to recycle what is broken and allow God's miracle of love to bring about new life?

Recycling involves someone equipped to take what you can't dispose of and making something useful out of WASTE. That is why JESUS is such GOOD NEWS! He takes what we can't handle (beginning with death) recycles and restores! Look at what he did on the cross and how the instrument of death became a proclamation of love. Look at what he did to the tomb where a dead end became a door way to eternal peace! Recycling is another word for what we call "the Gospel."

Joseph's faith recycled slavery into new opportunity for service. Jesus' words of "cheek-turning" and "loving the haters" similarly involves climbing out of garbage and living with the sweet smell of Easter on hands and hearts and minds. Such efforts remind us not to return to others what they certainly deserve (more sin) but to share what none deserve (forgiveness and new life!) For that is essentially what Jesus has done for me!

When car knocks and rattles it's time for mechanic ... when back stiffens and aches it's chiropractor time ... when living fills with whiny complaints it's time for Christ. Human misery is like a chain letter – keeps going on and on – one solution is to "opt out" / break the cycle! Respond with a new and different message (gospel.) What Christ has rescued us for! ...to be forgiven & to forgive (loved and to love)

Life can stink! You can get dumped on! Life is full of decay! Recycle your garbage! Let it go! Throw the hatred / sickness / anxiety / anger / pain / fears at the foot of the cross. And Jesus will do what we cannot, as he makes all things new.

Someone as close to me as anyone can be was dying of cancer. She was a young mom with three kids who she would not be able to hug and hold for much longer. Someone had given her a guardian angel pin , which was so helpful for her as a visible reminder of God's presence in her pain.

During one trip to hospital for chemo, she met a young girl with a similar bleak earthly future and gave her angel pin to the young girl with the message it had been for her. Such a love is contrary to the world's approach to living and dying, but shows how the love of Jesus can be recycled over and over and over again!

It isn't as difficult as we think. We have gotten used to putting cardboard and glass and plastic into containers for recycling, and trust that every other week someone will pick up that trash and recycle it into something useful. By grace and with God's help, I believe we can also learn to forgive, turn the other cheek, forgive and love and start all over again, and again, and again ...

How can I turn other cheek, or love when dumped on? Why react to garbage with love?
UNLESS and because that is what Christ has done for me, and in reaching out w/Jesus love I announce WHO I am and the GOD who loves even me! Remember. Joseph's brothers!? What do you think his love did for them? - tws