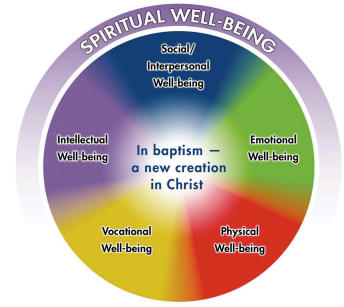


Sacrifice

From the Bethany Lutheran Church Health and Wellness Cabinet

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”
– (Hebrews 13: 15–16)



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During Lent, one of the things we are asked to do is to commit to a sacrifice in our daily lives. I have to confess that my typical sacrifice in past years was to give up something like eating doughnuts. Although heartfelt (and not easy!) my gesture may not have quite risen to the level of being a prime example of the kind of sacrifice called for, but at least it did something for my health.

Of all the multiple themes that our church has chosen for this year’s Lenten season, “The Blessing of Fasting” was the one that really caused me to wince, and this helped form the basis for this month’s column. I mean, really? A blessing? Giving up food? With all its ability to sustain me, comfort me and reward me? And how is fasting an activity that could be a blessing to me as well as an expression of faith? Sounds more like a sacrifice.

But I have every faith that the pastors know their theological stuff, so I set out to explore this radical idea of the Lord asking us to sacrifice for the sake of devotion and also receiving a blessing for doing so. The concept of sacrifice is very ancient, of course. The Bible is full of examples of sacrifices both great and small. In many cases it was apparent that sacrifice was done to avoid God’s wrath (*“Now let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword.”* – Exodus 5:3), or to make good for our sins (*“Moses said to Aaron, ‘Come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and the people’ ...”* – Leviticus 9:7).

But how is this kind of sacrifice a blessing? Looking at the scripture from Hebrews that introduces this month’s column helped me realize that my reaction to the term “sacrifice” was coming more from the images of the Pentateuch, or Old Testament. Because this is not what Christ asked of us when it comes to sacrifice. God’s love, through Christ, does not demand of us, but blesses us when we sacrifice. It is the giving of self that provides blessings, and places us firmly in the role of being God’s agents on Earth. And this is where the blessings of wellness come in.

It has to do with what and how we sacrifice. As was mentioned in an earlier column, being mindful about what we buy, prepare, and eat (or sacrifice eating) can have real impact on whether someone else in the world is hungry. Giving of our time to help others is also a worthy sacrifice. Sacrifice, or giving back to others unselfishly, is a way of blessing others *and* yourself. It can even help you find a sense of direction and purpose. Physically, claims are made that this kind of *altruism* can have benefits that boost your immune system, help with pain management, and reduce the effects of stress. There is even a brain-based euphoria that some people experience that is called “helper’s high.”

Remembering last month’s column on heart health, there is one final quote that I think illustrates how sacrifice is healthy for you. Bernard Meltzer, one of the first radio call-in advice givers, once said, “There is no better exercise for your heart than reaching down and helping to lift someone up.”

So, what are you sacrificing for Lent this year? – JL