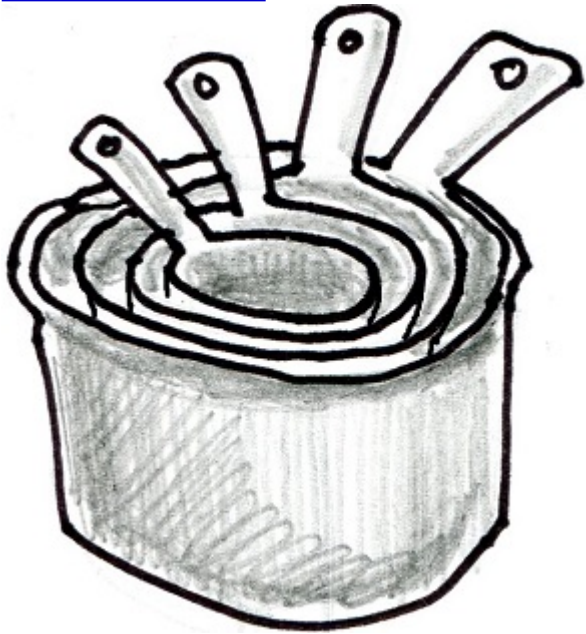


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by Pat Marrin

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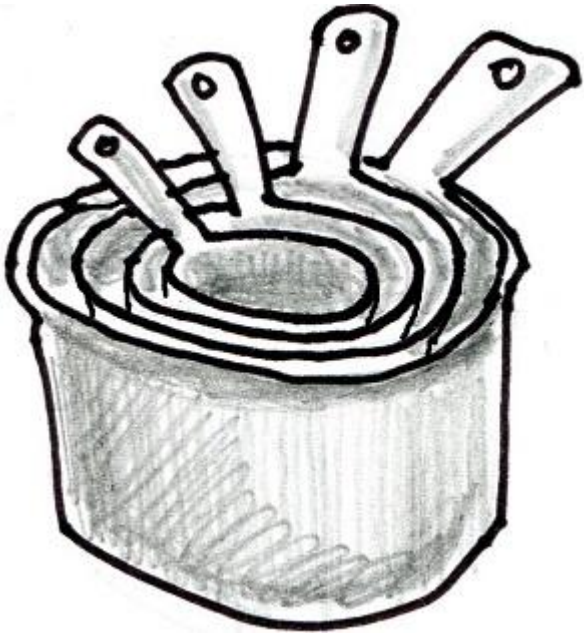
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“The measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you” (Mark 6:38).

Dan 9:4b-9; Mark 6:36-38

If Lent is a process rather than a good intention, part of that process is to acknowledge our need for help. Biblical conversion always begins with repentance. Psalm 51, used repeatedly in the liturgy, is a straightforward confession of sin and resistance to God: “Have mercy on me, O God, in your kindness, blot out my offense, wash me more and more from my guilt.”

Today’s reading from the Book of Daniel, a late work in the Bible, laments the failure of the people to keep God’s covenant: “We have sinned, been wicked and done evil; we have rebelled and departed from your commandments and your laws ... Justice, O Lord, is on your side; we are shamefaced even to this day.”

There are consequences for this failure. Internally, the nation lost its moral compass, and corruption and injustice ensued. Externally, the nation was caught up in foreign intrigue, invaded and exiled. During exile, profound reflection and grief produced the prophetic voices of Ezekiel, second and third Isaiah, all making repentance the foundation for renewal.

The message is clear: Without acknowledgement of sin, we remain closed to mercy. The great obstacle to healing is hardness of heart. It was this wall of denial that Jesus encountered when he preached God’s mercy. Sinners flocked to him, but the

“good” people, represented by the scribes and Pharisees, closed their minds and hearts against him.

Jesus’ response was to restate the most basic law of all, that there is a single measure for what we receive and what we give to others. “Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.”

Those who close their hearts because of pride or a refusal to forgive, end up limiting the love they can receive. God’s mercy, available all the time to everyone, cannot reach them. Those who cannot repent cannot change course, even as they move toward tragedy and diminished life.

Personal repentance is not easy, to say I was wrong or did wrong, I hurt another, I rationalized, refused to apologize or repair the harm I did. When a whole culture cannot admit historical injustice, economic theft, legal and social disparity, reform will not take place. Politics reduced to delusions of grandeur and refusal to move forward destroys civil discourse, stokes division and strains institutional ideals and integrity.

Jesus was about more than calling the Jerusalem establishment to a change of heart. He surrendered his life into the gears of history to defeat Evil itself, trusting that love was stronger than death, truth was better than lies, that service could fix what power kept broken for its own benefit. We repent to be part of his holy solution rather than remain part of the problem.

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