

Leaves... and Lessons

The old Post and Blackjack oaks had covered the yard and driveway with its annual winter blanket of leaves several inches deep. The elderly couple who still called the old place “home” were well past being physically able to do anything about them beyond noticing. Other family members, who normally took care of such things, had been recently stretched to and likely beyond their limits looking after matters of much more importance- life and death matters. But the crusty brown and brittle leaves in their millions didn’t care about such things. They did what leaves do. They fell from their tree-top perches and covered the black, asphalted driveway so completely as to make the difference between it and the rest of the yard imperceptible.

The tools at hand to tackle the job reminded me of myself, either by contrast or comparison. The leaf blower, bought second-hand and mostly worn out several years before, unlike me, was out of gas and wouldn’t start. But the rake and broom were all too like me. The rake was old, rusty, weak, and missing several teeth; and the broom probably had lost more of its bristles/hairs than it had left. But they were still there, available, waiting in the corner of the carport.... and there I was, now at last on hand, and with time and nothing else really to do.

Initially, the old stand-by excuses marched forward and presented themselves. In the overall scheme of things, those leaves didn’t matter much. They didn’t look good, but they weren’t really hurting anything. Besides, someone else, with better tools available, could do the job in half the time it would take me (and with a whole lot less effort required!). But I was *here* and *available*; they were somewhere else dealing with much more important matters than leaves. I could go and buy a new blower, broom, and rake (the old “throw more money at it” solution), but the old couple would surely feel obligated to reimburse me, and their money was certainly better spent on other things. Then too, taking care of those leaves would probably cause my arthritis to really flare up. But I *could* still rake and sweep leaves. So I did. It really wasn’t or isn’t a big deal, and I only mention it because several lessons came to mind while I was using that rake with half its teeth missing and that broom with many of its bristles long gone....

- Jesus said of the woman who broke the alabaster vial of ointment to *anoint* Him, **“she has done what she could,” Mark 14:8**. What an immortal epitaph! How much better a place would the world be, and especially how much more successful would our churches be, if we all were willing to just *do what we could*. No more excuses. No more waiting for someone else to do what I *can* do. No more thinking the task at hand is beneath me. No more exempting ourselves because someone else could do it better than me. Just doing *what I can when I can*, and understanding that A Need + My Ability to Meet It = An Opportunity to Do Good + Make a Difference (as per the good Samaritan in Luke 10)! There are spiritual leaves everywhere- and “no” you can’t rake them all; but you can rake the ones currently in front of you. Do that.
- **The tools don’t have to be the *latest and greatest* to get the job done.** The Parable of the Talents well-illustrates this point, cf. Matthew 15:14-30. The *one-talent man*’s problem wasn’t the *tool* he was given (in fact, it was specifically matched to his ability, cf. v.15). It was his attitude; his unwillingness to *work* with *what* the Master had given him. Furthermore, the *five* and *ten-talent men* weren’t successful because they were given better or more tools, but because they faithfully used the tools they were given. Since there is no “zero talent man” in the parable, we need to be willing to do our best with the tools God gave us to work to His glory

and the benefit of the His Cause. Just rake and sweep the leaves the best you can with the tools you have available.

- When you start raking leaves, the wind will: begin blowing when it wasn't previously; or, shift and start blowing in the opposite direction; and/or begin to swirl and constantly change directions. In any *spiritual raking* or *cleaning* process much the same thing happens. **As soon as you make a start to *clean up your life* (aka *repentance*) Satan and his emissaries** (who may look a lot like your "friends" by the way) **will make every effort to discourage you and get you to quit.** He will make sure to provide you with every conceivable excuse not to do the right thing(s). His agents (those who regularly succumb to temptation and do his bidding) will do all within their power to drag you back into his world of darkness, filth, and sin. They will do so for a simple reason: the *light* that is beginning to shine in your life through repentance and godliness *exposes* their own dark deeds, cf. John 3:19-20. But *the right thing* remains *the right thing*, and those who *know* and *do* it are faithful and blessed, cp. James 1:12 and 4:17. The wind is going to blow; just keep raking the leaves!
- **The *little things* matter too.** Raking those leaves off and sweeping the driveway saved no ones' life. It didn't even improve anyone's quality of life. And in truth, its benefits were only temporary since there were still leaves on the trees. But everyone noticed and appreciated the effort. In life, and certainly within the kingdom and cause of Christ, there are countless opportunities to do *small things* that have positive impacts. Don't discount or dismiss these opportunities for Jesus said, "*He who is faithful in a very little thing is also faithful in much; and he who is unrighteousness in a very little thing is unrighteous in much also,*" Luke 16:10. Raking *spiritual* leaves, like its *physical* counterpart, doesn't require big muscles or lots of brains; even *little* folks can do it, cf Luke 19:1-10. *Will* you?

Well, I guess that's probably more than enough for now. Thanks for reading, and please give some consideration to these simple little lessons from God's Word brought to you by leaves. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)