

The Elizabethan



The Newsletter of St. Elizabeth Episcopal Church Burien, Washington

June 2019

From Fr. John: Taking the hit as a gift

I don't love making mistakes. Maybe it's just that, the older I get, the easier it gets to admit when I am wrong. Mistakes happen. Some are superficial and some are far more consequential. And then there are some that have seeds of creativity in them.

Did you know, for example, that "Post-it Notes," those sticky bits of colored paper that seem to be everywhere now, started as a failed glue? In the early 70s, an inventor named Arthur Fry at 3M went to a seminar given by another 3M scientist named Spencer Silver. Six years earlier, Silver had accidentally created an adhesive that was strong enough to stick to things, but too weak to create a lasting bond. He had no clue what his flawed stickum could do.

Fry, at the time, was singing in his church choir. At evening practices, Fry used small bits of paper to mark his hymnal. But whenever he opened his book, his bookmarks moved or round or fell out. One Sunday, it occurred to Fry that Silver's failed glue might help create a better bookmark. If it could be coated on paper, Silver's adhesive would hold a bookmark in place without damaging the page on which it was placed.

The next day, Fry asked for a sample of the adhesive. He began experimenting and found that if he coated only a portion of one edge of the paper, the untreated paper sticking out of his book would stay clean and he could write on them or move the paper around. Fry used some of his experiments to write notes to his boss. The company was skeptical about the product's profitability at first, but now Post-it notes are sold in more than 100 countries.

If we don't hide or deny them, we can follow some of our mistakes into something entirely new.

Here's a slightly different kind of mistake leading to innovation. In 1853 at Moon's Lake House near Saratoga Springs, New York, there was a chef named George Crum. The story goes that he had become irritated with a customer who kept sending his fried potatoes back, complaining that they were soggy and not crunchy enough. In an act of passive aggression, Crum sliced the potatoes as thin as he could get them, fried them in hot grease, then doused them with salt.

Of course, the customer loved them and "Saratoga Chips" quickly became a popular
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item at the lodge and throughout New England. Eventually, potato chips were mass-produced for home consumption and now they are found all over the world in an amazing array of flavors.

Our fear of making mistakes can limit our learning, affect our relationships and harden our stubbornness. There is another path.

George Leonard was a sensei, a teacher, of the Japanese martial art that practitioners use to defend themselves while also protecting their attacker from injury. Aikido is often translated as "the way of unifying with life energy" or as "the way of harmonious spirit." In his book, "The Way of Aikido," Leonard teaches a philosophy of "taking the hit as a gift." It applies not only to physical hits to the body, but to any misfortune including our mistakes.

When we receive the hit (or make a mistake), we have a variety of responses available to us. We can become immediately defensive and fight back reflexively. We can whine about how we are the victim in the situation and forfeit all possibilities of a positive outcome. We can entrench ourselves in denial or finger-pointing and surrender to the opportunity to grow.

Or we can take the hit as a gift. With a dose of humility, we can open up to the possibility to change a pattern, belief, behavior or relationship in our life that is no longer serving us. Here are some ways that you can take your next hit as a gift:

1. Notice where you are focusing. Are you so fixed on how your mistake affects your own life that you are anxiously avoiding your responsibility for how the mistake may be affecting others? Are you beating yourself up? Are you denying, minimizing or explaining away mistakes to rescue yourself from not looking good? These are ways that we disown our mistakes and a little of our humanity. More importantly, these kinds of responses shut down our options for acting.

2. Find the resistance and breathe into it. Instead of immediately labeling the mistake as a problem or as negative, pause and simply acknowledge the truth of the mistake to yourself. Take a couple deep breaths and remember that mistakes happen. The pain you are feeling or causing can be a wake-up call to really look at your behavior and ask yourself if you are enhancing well-being or detracting from it.

3. Open the gift. Reflect on what there is to learn from the mistake. Sometimes becoming aware of what NOT to do is a valuable baby step. Take the opportunity to create lasting change. These are moments that we can all engage to gain perspective and reorient ourselves to what really matters.

4. Choose your response. Define a next step. If your mistake impacts others, own it and name it. Seek forgiveness by genuinely apologizing. A true apology never includes the word "but" as in "I'm sorry, but..." Keep the emphasis on your actions, not on the other person's response. "I'm sorry if you felt hurt..." is not the same as "I'm sorry about what I did (or said)" and be specific without overdoing it

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What is Ascension Day?

For forty days after his resurrection on Pascha Sunday, scripture says that Jesus travelled and with his apostles, preparing them for his departure. Ascension Day marks the moment Jesus ascended into heaven before his disciples, at the village of Bethany near Jerusalem.

Christian of most denominations celebrate Ascension Day on the sixth Thursday after Easter, exactly forty days after Easter Sunday. It is not a major event in most Protestant parishes, but for Roman Catholics the Feast of the Ascension is a Holy Day of Obligation, meaning that believers are obliged to attend Mass.

At St. Elizabeth, we celebrated a Mass on the Eve of Ascension. Episcopalians don't have to think about heaven as "up there" – as a place literally up in the sky, Something much more life-giving fills us if we allow ourselves to consider that heaven is not "up there" in a physical sense, and is instead "in here" and "still here."

That larger perspective doesn't depend on whether or not Jesus levitated. It doesn't depend on how concretely we interpret the line in the Creed that says Jesus "ascended into heaven." More often, we see the ascension as the transcendence of the Risen Christ, in which humanity and divinity are joined in a universal and inclusive way. The ascension of Christ is the ascension of our humanity with Christ.

The Ascension is Christ's return to living in the presence of the fullness of God, and as we each share in Christ's body and blood, so too do we have the promise of living fully with God as well. Our own humanity and our own souls have a place in God's in-breaking heavenly realm because our brother has ascended there to prepare that place for us.

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The Elizabethan is published monthly by St. Elizabeth Episcopal Church. The deadline for articles is the fourth Friday of each month.

Articles, calendar items and ideas may be mailed or emailed to the addresses below or left in *The Elizabethan* box in the Parish Office.

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to the point of making your own embarrassment or shame the focus. You can say "I am sorry for my part..." but don't get distracted by drawing other people into your apology. You'll only weaken it!

Back up your words with corrective action if at all possible, and make sure not to repeat the behavior. Be aware that not all apologies are welcome. Making amends may be part of your healing, but if your speaking to them risks hurting them further, you'll have to look find another way. A serious hurt or betrayal requires repair work over time to restore trust.

5. Express your gratitude. Take a moment to pray in gratefulness for gift once it has opened you to new growth, fresh opportunities and expanded awareness. This allows God to illuminate what really matters in your life and provide a path for learning, for repairing or strengthening relationships and for softening our own stiff necks.

Mistakes happen. Joining with God's creating actions, you can own them and learn from them. Who knows, maybe your mistake will be an innovation that benefits others or at least goes well with hot dogs!

Garden update

"You're grounded!" Forbidding words to a ship's crew and, perhaps, a teenager, but a goal for an increasing number of people today both spiritually and in relation to our environment. In the mid-twentieth century, the theologian, Paul Tillich, used the phrase "ground of all being" to describe God's relationship to our creation and to us, echoing St. Paul's address to the Athenians when he spoke of the God "in whom we live and move and have our being." The soil related images seem quite different from those of a God quite apart from us in a distant heaven.

A similar shift in viewpoint is also going on today when we think about the literal ground or dirt under our feet. As the physical and chemical sciences created new approaches and products post-World War II, plants and soil came to be viewed as problems to be solved.

Laboratory discoveries affected the way we treated our farms and landscapes. Today, microbiology is the lens through which we view an amazing ecosystem of ground rock and dead plant material but also hundreds of thousands of microbes (living beings) that help plants convert sun energy to food energy and carbon dioxide to oxygen. Nurturing healthy soil supports healthy vegetation, an increasingly vital need today.

Diana Butler Bass reports in her book *Grounded* that in 2011, about the time she was writing, already 250 Episcopal churches in the US had converted part or all of their more traditional landscapes to food gardens and/or sustainable landscapes. Gardens are available for community members who don't have access to land or the crops are shared with food banks for people who have limited access to fresh

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produce. The term "sustainable" refers to gardening that is low water, relatively low maintenance, and pollinator and creature friendly. This trend continues today in our church and others.

In 2016 and 2017, heavy rainfall poured into our north building basement and washed around our foundations. Much of the original landscaping had to be removed from around our building in order to build proper drainage. Some of the plants were old enough to be growing up into the overhead wires and down into our sewer lines as well. We have chosen to use this challenge as an opportunity to create more sustainable gardens around the building which are a slow work in progress as funds and workers are available.

We have also chosen to devote the garden area south of the worship space to be a vegetable garden for the families associated with the Neighborhood House pre-school. Two years ago we received a grant from Les Dames Des Escoffiers that allowed us to have a fence constructed. King County Conservation district paid for the gate and for two replacement faucets on the east side of our north building where we had no easy access to water. Le Dames have given us a second grant for a small garden shed which will be erected and placed on a concrete pad, allowing us safe and convenient storage for tools and garden materials.

We are waiting to hear whether our diocesan Bishop's Committee for the Environment has awarded us a third grant that would allow us to buy some raised beds. King County Conservation District is furnishing us with compost and two galvanized tanks for ADA beds (great for tomatoes). We are applying for another grant and other forms of aid. We hope to have a modest version of our garden growing this summer.

We would really benefit from gifts of used or new garden tools like trowels, hand weeders, shovels, a wheel barrow, hoses, and so forth. If you have some gardening items you no longer need or want to make a gift we would greatly appreciate them. We will also have a work party or two to put everything together. Stay tuned for further news. Questions? Carolyn Terry (509-230-4986)

Book ribbons

Please join us in thanking Sue Kaas and her niece for the colorful ribbons now in every one of the Hymnals and Books of Common Prayer in the narthex! Crafted by hand and affixed into the spine, these beautiful ribbons will help worshippers mark the forms of the Prayers of the People and Eucharistic prayer at each Mass, and other special rituals such as Baptisms and Renewals in the BCP. Presetting the Hymnal will allow a little more ease in following along and these can be handed to a guest or a visitor as a lovely gesture of hospitality!



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“You are called to be truly human, but it is nothing short of the life of God within you that enables you to be so, to be remade in God's image. As C.S. Lewis said in a famous lecture, next to the sacrament itself your Christian neighbor is the holiest object ever presented to your sight, because in him or her the living Christ is truly present.”

~ **Bishop N.T. Wright**

Tell your story!

We want to encourage your participation in creating content! Please give some thought to writing a few paragraphs about your history and experience with St. Elizabeth. The more we tell people about what happens here and why people are drawn to this place, the more people we attract. How did you come to find St. Elizabeth? From where? More importantly, what keeps you coming back? Tell your story and send it to Fr. John or let us know that you'd like some help and we'll provide an interviewer!