

Wednesday, February 18, 2015 | Ash Wednesday: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21; 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

by [Nanette Sawyer](#) in the [February 4, 2015](#) issue

For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be.” I’m wondering if it’s possible to treasure washing the dishes. This would mean treasuring the fact that I am alive—as Paul puts it, that I am “treated . . . as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.” If I could do it, I would remember and experience what a miracle life is.

I would wake up in the morning and notice right away how good it feels to take a long, deep breath. I would wiggle my fingers and my toes and notice the snugly weight of the blankets caressing my body. I would keep my eyes closed and notice that the light shines through my eyelids anyway, giving me a vision of orange and red with a layer of translucent black. And when I opened my eyes, I would notice that I see color: my spring-green quilt with cream-colored polka dots on one side, and—where the top is folded down—yellow and purple flowers on a cream background. I would celebrate color in my life, and it would be enough.

If I could remember that I am alive today, rather than just living my life without noticing, I would be grateful for the cool wooden floor under my bare feet, and I would be amazed that the dishes can be used again and again and again. They are there, waiting for me to put eggs and toast on them for breakfast, and sandwiches and soup for lunch. When I washed the dishes, I would think about all the people who have eaten off those plates while sitting around the dinner table with me. I would think about the laughter right along with the moments when tears welled up in the corners of our eyes as we told each other stories of real things happening in our lives. I would even be grateful for the awkward silences that have sometimes happened when new friendships were trying to be forged. Those silences remind me that I am vulnerable and that I want to be loved and accepted, just as other human beings do.

And I would commit myself to reaching for connection, as scary as it can sometimes be. I would commit to making myself vulnerable by telling the truth about myself. I would let my shy soul come out to play in the shadows and the light of my being.

If I could treasure washing the dishes, I would make more space in my life for mundane, human things like cooking food and eating meals, like baking cookies and going for walks. I would sweep the floor like I loved it, as though I was caressing it, because on that floor I walk and have my life. On that floor my family and friends kick off their shoes and head for the kitchen or the couch.

If I could treasure washing the dishes, I would not be storing up treasures on earth “where moth and rust consume” and “thieves break in and steal.” But I would be storing up treasures in heaven, treasures of the heart, treasures of love and honor and simple joy.

I would be fasting in secret, too. Secretly I would be giving up my fear that I am not enough, that my life is not enough, that there is not enough time or money or reward, that there is not enough suffering to atone for all that has been done wrongly in the world. I would be giving up resentment that life includes more work than play. I would let that resentment go, and I would find the play in work. I would do my work for the doing and not for the outcome. I would realize that I am alive for this—to serve, to try to make the world a better place, to love through the efforts I make. And sometimes I would serve the world by doing less, by having smaller dreams, by letting enough be good enough and trusting that our value comes from the fact that we exist.

I would not waste the treasure that’s in me by forgetting to notice that it’s there. And I would not let that treasure remain hidden in the shadows that I’m afraid to enter. I would boldly enter the shadowy places too, knowing that they can bring me to a deeper truth, a stronger identity—rooted in the steadfast and unchanging love of God. Out of the darkness shines a brighter light, and this includes my own darkness. If I could find that treasure, hidden and mixed with the darkness, then I would be free to love myself, to love God, to love strangers, and even to love my enemies enough to resist their hatred and fear.

Brother Lawrence treasured his chores in the monastery kitchen, and in this he found closeness to God. Richard Rohr writes of “falling upward” into the second half of life in which we develop a deeper passion and a spiritual maturity. He writes, “Your concern is not so much to *have what you love* anymore, but to *love what you have*—right now.” That’s an entirely different kind of treasure than the kind that moths can eat and rust consumes.

On Ash Wednesday, as we contemplate mortality and finitude, I wonder if we could treasure washing the dishes.