



**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School**  
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**Reformation Sunday**

**October 28, 2018**

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**“De-cluttering the House”**

*(Hebrews 12:1)*

Rev. David K. Groth

*“Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles” (Heb. 12:1)*

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...  
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

**Collect:** Almighty and gracious Lord, pour out Your Holy Spirit on Your faithful people. Keep us steadfast in Your grace and truth, protect and deliver us in times of temptation, defend us against all enemies, and grant to Your Church Your saving peace; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

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I'm trying to do some de-cluttering around the house. I've always liked the minimalist look: bright, airy, rooms with just a couple of well chosen decorations, filled with light, devoid of knick knacks. Can you see it? I've always liked that look, but have never been able to achieve it. I have too much stuff, stuff that for me is hard to get rid of. Some of it is nice stuff. There's also sentimental stuff, useful stuff, attractive stuff. Some of it is expensive. Some of it I've inherited from parents, grandparents, even great grandparents. Some of it is stuff I never much liked, but Gail did, a lot, and it doesn't feel right just to sweep that away. It's easy to procrastinate when de-cluttering, because some of those decisions are hard and they're no sense of urgency. When you procrastinate, all that stuff becomes the physical manifestation of unmade decisions. It begins to attract stress as well as dust. Some of my stuff talks to me: "You can't throw me away. I've been part of your family for generations."

I thought maybe my daughters, now that they have their own apartments, would want some of my stuff, and would be glad and grateful to have it too. But they don't.

Even the low-hanging fruit can be difficult for me to get rid of. This stock pot needs to go. It's so big it's useless. But as you can also plainly see it's also beautiful and well-made. It also has a proud past, a fine pedigree having come from Karl Ratzsch's German Restaurant in Milwaukee. It needs to go, but I can't pull the trigger. One author's MO is if an object gives you a spark of joy: keep it. Otherwise get rid of it. This bad boy still gives me a spark of joy. Besides, one day I might need it, who knows what for, but I might. So, at least for now, I'm holding on to it, out of an attachment to the past and a little fear for the future. It talks to me: "*Du kannst mich nicht wegwerfen.*" "You can't throw me out."

Is it hard for you to get rid of stuff? Have you achieved the minimalist look at home?

About 500 years ago, Martin Luther looked around the church and said, in effect, “A lot of this stuff has to go!” God’s church had become cluttered, dangerously so. Just about everyone knew that the church needed a deep cleansing. Jesus and his cross were buried under the weight of so much theological clutter: the veneration of relics, the intervention of saints, the purchase of indulgences, the requisite pilgrimages . . . so much useless stuff. Less than useless, harmful; it gave people a confidence in something or someone other than Christ alone.

Someone needed to park a dumpster outside of God’s church, and start heaving that junk into it, stuff that should never have been let inside in the first place; stuff that was just in the way, and had no useful purpose; stuff that people were tripping over

Martin Luther was just the right guy at the right time. Posting the 95 theses was, in a way, the first effort to start hauling stuff out to the dumpster. He wasn’t afraid to drag out even the heavy stuff, such as the office of the papacy, or stuff that most everyone else seemed content with, stuff that had beautiful traditions surrounding it. I’m thinking, for example of the veneration of Mary, the art and statuary and the music that had accumulated around that man-made tradition. Not everyone was ready to let it go. Still today, in the city of Rome, there are some 80 churches dedicated to Mary. But Mary didn’t bear our sins. Mary wasn’t crucified in our place. Mary didn’t rise from the dead. So how did it ever come to this?

Sometimes we hold on to ecclesiastical clutter like I hold on to that stock pot: out of an attachment to the past, and some fear for the future, thinking we might need it someday.

This and so much other clutter in the church - useless knick knacks handed down and inherited over the centuries: a withered finger purported to be from some saint, a vile with a few drops of Mary’s milk in it, a piece of paper promising relief from purgatory to the one who purchased it. Most couldn’t even read what was printed on it, but they put

their trust in it and paid hard earned cash for it. They thought of it as an investment, maybe the most important thing they owned, when in truth it was a piece of litter.

So much stuff and clutter in the church, but people thought the stuff was priceless. You know they did because they'd put a fragment of a bone from some saint in a big golden reliquary encrusted with gem stones. They'd put it right up front and center, above the altar, where the cross should be.

Luther saw all that man-made stuff, and the traditions surrounding it, and knew it had to go. His MO was simple: if it was contrary to Scripture it needed to be pitched. As simple as that! Even if it would cost him his life, *someone* had to take the garbage out. So Luther started cleaning house until he himself was thrown out of the house, having been excommunicated by the pope himself.

That was 500 years ago. What about today? "What stuff inside *your* house needs to go?" I'm not talking stock pots and curio cabinets. I'm talking stuff that gets in the way of the faith; stuff that causes you or others to trip. What stuff was brought inside your house that should never have been allowed? What well-worn habits need to be changed?

Word and Sacrament, for instance: God seems to think you need it, frequently, weekly. It's the Third Commandment. (See him about it.) But you have other things going on right, stuff cluttering your calendar on the weekends, trips and distant athletic competitions. It all gets out of hand and pretty soon it's been a month of weeks or more since you've allowed God to speak to you or feed you. Clearly, some of that clutter on your calendar needs to go.

What else needs cleaning up? Starting to drink too much? One possibility is to allow yourself a drink or two on the weekends, but nothing during the week. If you know you're past that point, throw out the booze altogether and admit yourself into a treatment facility. Alcoholism can derail a person's faith, and nothing is worth that.

Porn inside the house? It can put you and your salvation at risk. Get rid of it. Put a filter on your laptop,

throw out the password, and make yourself accountable to someone.

Dabbling with superstitions, astrology, spiritists who consult the dead, omens, mediums? It's all garbage to the Lord. He says it's detestable to him (Deut. 18). Throw it away.

What stuff is inside your house for which there is no biblical justification? Are the clear teachings of Scripture disappearing under the clutter of the culture? For example, the hook up culture on college campuses, and moving in together outside of marriage . . . these things are not of Christ. They are not for his people.

Cultural clutter in the church and in our own houses too. Many Christians are starting to think there might be multiple paths to salvation offered through various religions. Do you really want to make Jesus out to be a liar? Get rid of that worthless knick knack, and hear again his words: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Have the sneaking suspicion God loves you because you're good? That garbage reeks. Bag it up tight and put it outside, for "By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one may boast."

Feeling secure because your investments are solid and well-diversified? "The Lord is your stronghold and sure defense." Everything else is transient, passing, fleeting as the length of our days.

What's inside your house that's no longer useful? What habits of the heart? You know what I'm talking about. Maybe it's a stubborn streak that runs hot and strong in your family. You inherited it from your mother, and she from hers, and part of you is even proud of it. You laugh about it. But usually stubbornness is just a form of self-indulgence. Chuck it, and start serving those around you rather than lording it over them.

If it cannot stand the scrutiny of Scripture, get rid of it. That's our MO as Christians, not whether it gives you a

spark of joy, but how does it stand in the bright light of Scripture. However cumbersome and heavy, however long it's been part of your life, drag it out and throw it away.

This last week there was a lot of hype surrounding the Mega Millions lottery jackpot, a record \$1.6 billion (with a b). Hopeful gamblers dreamed what they would do with \$1.6 billion, envisioning extravagant shopping splurges, exotic travels, beautiful homes and other pie-in-the-sky dreams. The odds were astronomically stacked against you, but you don't need \$1.6 billion anyway. In fact, it could be the worst thing to ever happen to you. Wealth puts a target on your back. The devil sees it, the world does too, and our own sinful flesh can hardly resist the trappings. Remember what Jesus said about the rich man and the camel and the eye of the needle? Can you imagine how much stuff \$1.6 billion could buy . . . clutter of every kind in the hands and in the heart. Not even God can give us a gift when our hands are holding on to other stuff. Not even God can pour his Spirit into our hearts if our hearts have already been filled to the brim with other treasures.

You don't need \$1.6 billion. You have Christ, so you already have boundless treasure. You have Christ, so you already have a security no money could buy. You have Christ, so you already have the Good Shepherd leading you , keeping watch over you, walking with you with his rod and staff. You have Christ so you already own a home in heaven that 1.6 billion could never buy. You have Christ. You already are blessed beyond any measure.

You have Christ. He died for you. He redeemed you. He rose for you. You've been baptized into his death and resurrection. You believe in his name. You're about to eat and drink his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of your faith. You don't need to clutter up your life with things that will ultimately be worthless to you. You have Christ, here, now, today. You don't have to hold on to any other junk, either out of an attachment to the past or a fear for the future. Jesus has redeemed your past,

and secured your future. You have Christ, and when you have him, you have everything. Amen.

