

Cleaning Out the 'Fridge

Overview	The sorting of the good from the bad
Title	Cleaning Out the 'Fridge
Metaphor/Image	Old leftovers
Treatment	Like doing the chore of cleaning out the fridge, at the final judgment God will sort out the good from the bad. Jesus' teaching tells us that the good will enter the kingdom and the bad will head to Gehenna, the eternal garbage dump. The criterion for this final decision will depend on how we have treated 'the least of these.'
Human Need	We want to do good out of a desire to help others and ourselves.
Experience	That we will recognize ourselves as being implicated in God's judgment as both good and bad, and recognizing with fear the degree to which we're rotten and deserve to be thrown out. This is a story that appropriately leads to social action on behalf of the poor, motivated by the desire for personal salvation.
Word	
Primary Scripture	Matthew 25:31-46
Lectionary Week	Christ the King Sunday, Year A; Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 100; Ephesians 1:15-23
Related Scripture	Exodus 23:10-11 (provide food for the poor), Amos 4:1-3 (bad news for those who oppress the poor), Romans 3:23 (we're all rotten), James 2:14-26 (faith without works is dead)
Topics	
Primary Topics	Justice, judgment, social action, service, mercy, God's will, heaven, hell, eternal life

Movie Clip Suggestions

1. *Sister Act* (1992)

Plot: When worldly singer Delores Van Cartier (Whoopi Goldberg) witnesses a mob crime, the police hide her as a nun in a traditional convent, which she transforms as Sister Mary Clarence.

Clip: Bishop O'Hara comes to congratulate Mother Superior while she is in the midst of criticizing Sister Mary Clarence's choir technique. Sister Mary Clarence uses the opportunity to get the convent out into the streets. (57:49-1:00:05) A music montage sequence follows, which could be great for silent footage during communion, etc. (1:00:05-1:02:51)
Time: (VHS) 57:49-1:02:51, (DVD) Chapter 18, 0:00-5:02, length 5:02

2. *Far and Away* (1989)

Plot: The story of Irish immigrants Joseph Donnelly (Tom Cruise) and Shannon Christie (Nicole Kidman) who seek to build a home in late 19th century America.

Clip: Two back-to-back scenes illustrate the struggle of the homeless. In the first, Joseph asks a man for work and is turned away because the man doesn't "work with Irish," even though they have not eaten for three days. In the second, the two break into an empty, rich home and search for food. Once in, they sit at a beautiful table and pretend that the home is theirs. The fade through between the two scenes occurs at 1:31:36.
Time: (VHS) 1:31:05-1:34:02, (DVD) Chapter 10, 1:20-4:17, length 2:57

Music Suggestions

1. "Living in the Fridge"—"Weird Al" Yankovic. Great parody song, perfect for an opener!
2. "Man in the Mirror"—Michael Jackson. 80s hit, good for a feature
3. "Another Day in Paradise"—Phil Collins. 80s hit, good for a feature
4. "That's Just the Way It Is"—Bruce Hornsby. 80s hit, good for a feature
5. "Give Thanks"—contemporary praise
6. "The Lord Hears the Cry of the Poor"—hymn
7. "Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life"—hymn
8. "All Who Love and Serve Your City"—hymn

Lumiclip Description

A hilarious sequence about an average Joe and his refrigerator. As the clip progresses, it gets more and more in need of a good cleaning, so that by the end we can practically smell it along with him. A funny clip that is good for a call to worship. Comedy. Running Time 1:41 Volume 6 Clip 6

Integration

Call to Worship

Open with a video or personal story of cleaning out the fridge.

"We all have had the nasty chore of having to clean out the refrigerator when it has been neglected for too long. There are good leftovers, and then there are the really, really rancid ones. Those go straight to the garbage dump.

"In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells us what will happen at the Final Judgment, when God will sort those who will have eternal life from those who will have eternal punishment. The question we all have, then: What is the criterion? Jesus tells us. It is dependent on how we have treated 'the least of these.'

"So, are you good food, or rancid food? Will Jesus smell you and smile, or throw you in the garbage dump?"

Closing Words

"This week go home and clean out your fridge. Throw out what's rotten. Keep what's good. Do something for somebody. Share your good food with others. May the blessing of God preserve you for eternal life."

Prayer

A prayer of confession (from the United Methodist hymnal):

"Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart. We have failed to be an obedient church. We have not done your will, we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy. Forgive us, we pray. Free us for joyful obedience, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Drama

DRAMATIC: A man is cleaning up clutter in the house and throws all the garbage out in the dumpster. When his wife arrives, she discovers that he accidentally threw out an important paper of hers.

COMEDIC: An older couple cleans out their refrigerator and pulls out all sorts of interesting items that they had no idea were in there: their original wedding cake, a frozen caveman, etc.

Display

A stack of Tupperware, a mini fridge with the door propped open, a trash can

Scripture Commentary

This climactic parable is an experience of the last judgment and the criteria that the Son of Man will use in his sorting. The criterion is whether a person has shown mercy to the oppressed. This also answers the question of the earlier parables about how to be ready for the coming of the Kingdom of God, namely, by showing mercy and caring for the oppressed. The contemporary metaphor of this sorting is cleaning out the refrigerator, throwing out the food that is rotten and keeping the food that is good.

The dominant metaphor of the parable is an agricultural image of the Near East, the sorting of the sheep and the goats. Mixed herds of sheep and goats were and still are typical in Palestine. Such herds have to be sorted in the evening because goats need to be kept warm at night. Sheep are placed on the right hand because they were more valuable than goats. They were better meat and their wool could be sold for cash.

The Son of Man is clearly identified with Jesus in this parable although the parable doesn't say so explicitly. The Son of Man was a representative of all humanity, a child of the human race (e.g., Daniel 7.13-14). The logic of the blessing of the sheep and the cursing of the goats for their response to "the least of these" is based on this representative role of the Son of Man. By caring for the children of humanity, therefore, we are caring for the communal representative of humanity, the Son of Man.

The parable leads the listeners into the experience of those who are blessed and those who are cursed. But, once again, climactic emphasis is given to those who are cursed, the goats. The metaphor of losers as goats may well have its origins in this parable. There is a major dimension of surprise in this decision. The expectation of the Kingdom of God was that the righteous people of Israel who had suffered for generations at the hands of the Gentiles would be rewarded and that the Gentiles would be punished for their persecution and violence toward Jews. In this parable, however, the implication is that both Jews and Gentiles will be part of those who are blessed and those who are cursed. This is then a major reversal of expectations in relation to the coming of the Kingdom of God.

The blessing of the sheep is longer and more detailed but the fourfold repetition of the sequence of those in need—hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, in prison—makes it easy to remember for the storyteller and for the listeners. You hear this parable once or twice and you don't forget those in need of mercy.

Both groups respond with surprise to their sentence and are not aware of when they were good or evil; thus, "when did we see you...?" The pleasant surprise of the sheep provides the contrast that heightens the impact of the shock and despair of the goats. This response of both groups was conveyed by the tone of the storyteller in presenting their words. The experience of the goats is an experience of terror, of a surprising condemnation to Hell. The function of the parable is to give the listeners a warning about what is coming and an opportunity to repent. In this sense the parable is an extension of the basic logic of the prophets to the last judgment of all the earth. The parable affirms that in the end all people will be judged by the Lord, Jesus, according to this criterion.

The parable requires each listener to ask the question: who am I, sheep or goat? The criterion is: "have I ever given food or drink, welcomed a stranger, clothed someone or visited someone who was sick or in prison?" And most people can answer, "Yes" to this question. But the answer to the question, "Have I ever **not** fed the hungry et al is also "Yes" for everyone. is "Yes". Everyone has at some point not cared for someone in need.

The cleaning of the fridge is an experience made possible by the fact that many in the U.S. have more than enough food. Tons and tons of food is thrown out or is flushed down the garbage disposal every day in grocery stores, restaurants and homes. This fact adds poignancy to the metaphor. The metaphor is directed to the experience of sorting the good from the bad. The video focuses in a humorous way on the primary criterion: how does it smell? A connection with the parable is then: how do you smell to God? Does your life create a pleasing and fragrant ambience for God or is it putrid and spoiled?

Keywords

Justice, judgment, social action, service, mercy, God's will, heaven, hell, eternal life, *Sister Act*, *Far and Away*, refrigerator, fridge