

Greetings to all the beautiful saints at Manatee Life,

**SCRIPTURE:**

Psalm 51:10 (CEB) – Larger reading: Psalm 51:1-19

*“Create a clean heart for me, God; put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me!”*

**STORY:**

Walter Marshall Horton shares the following story: “There is an old story of a pious deacon who, goaded apparently beyond endurance by the persistent malice of an enemy, publicly vowed to ‘kill him.’ It came to the ears of his enemy, who waited sardonically to see what the good harmless old fool would do. Actually the deacon sought out every opportunity to do his enemy good. This was first a source of merriment and some slight annoyance; but when at last the deacon rendered costly and sacrificial service to his adversary, risking his life to save the man’s wife from drowning, the deadlock between the two was broken and a new relationship set up. ‘All right,’ said the man, ‘you’ve done what you said you’d do, and I admit. You’ve killed me – or at least you’ve killed the man I was. Now, what can I do for you?’”

**REFLECTION:**

The “season” of returning certain Christmas gifts has begun. And, like normal people, we join in the yearly after-Christmas tradition of taking back or exchanging some gifts. One year there were only 3 to be returned and one to exchange ... not bad. It helped that we had all the receipts ... no hassle ... no “reason for returning” questions ... just a simple, quick and painless process ... a quick in-and-out.

I do have to admit that I am amazed at the variety of return policies. Some are limited as to when you can return an item, usually 90 days and only if you have a receipt. One store in particular, which we no longer shop at, charges a 15% restocking fee. OUCH!

Remember, I’m a part of an older generation who remembers an old department store by the name of Montgomery Wards. They would take back any item period ... and I mean any item, it didn’t matter if they sold a particular item or not. Maybe that is why they are not around any longer, but I doubt it. It was an era where the customer was king. The customer was more important than the store policy.

It was during this era that while Sears wouldn’t take back just any item, their service department would help you locate which department store sold the item that you were seeking to return. People went out of their way to assist you. They wanted your business. They cared about what you thought of them and the company they worked for. Times have changed.

I’m glad that God has a “no limit return policy”, aren’t you. It doesn’t matter how damaged the “merchandise” (you and me) is God will always take us back ... fixes the damage and then return us to active service. There isn’t a restocking fee except a desire to be forgiven. There isn’t a 90-day time period and we do not need to have a receipt.

God is always open 24/7 ready to receive us. He never asks us why, although it probably would be helpful for us to do some personal reflection as to why we wandered away from God in the process of our living and God does care, but he already knows the reason.

Within the Kingdom of God we are always important. God wants to know what we think, how we feel, what we are doing, In God's Kingdom the "customer" is most important. And, while we cannot be king so to speak, since his Kingdom can only have one King and we got into trouble when we tried to usurp his authority in the first place, nevertheless we are important ... most important. The entire event that we just celebrated along with the Calvary and resurrection events, to be celebrated in the next few months, are totally for our benefit. We are that important to the Creator of the Universe.

The King's policy is to take us back, fix us up and love us into becoming what we were created to become ... that is worth celebrating ... that is reason enough to string up a few lights, bake a few cookies, act a little crazy, hug (safely – at a distance) as many people as you can, sing a few carols, drive through a snow storm, spend a little money ... it is a celebration worth having!

**QUOTE:**

*"Author Leo Buscaglia tells this story about his mother and their "misery dinner." It was the night after his father came home and said it looked as if he would have to go into bankruptcy because his partner had absconded with their firm's funds. His mother went out and sold some jewelry to buy food for a sumptuous feast. Other members of the family scolded her for it. But she told them that "the time for joy is now, when we need it most, not next week." Her courageous act rallied the family."* ~ Christopher News Notes

**PRAYER:**

When I'm down, lift me up; when I'm sad, cheer me up; when I'm lonely, come sit with me; when I'm lost, find me; when I'm scared, comfort me; when I'm confused, teach me; when I've wandered away, bring me back; when I'm bad, forgive me; when I hate, teach me to love ... "create in me a clean heart" ... Thank you for caring. Amen

And the faith journey continues, Pastor Jim

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