



Leftovers

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When my husband and I married in the late 1980's, we didn't own much. We used cardboard boxes and particle board to create furniture, and I remember using a can of soup to pound a nail into the wall because we didn't own a hammer. So, we were thoughtful about the essentials that we put onto our wedding registry. Towels, for example. Towels are very useful.

The morning after our wedding, we sat together with family to open our gifts. One beautifully wrapped package after another was excitedly opened. We were stunned by the gift choices our guests made when they instead decided to deviate from the practical items on the registry. I kid you not, we received more crystal ware than a Swarovski stakeholder, including at least seven crystal bowls and three crystal platters. I'm sure the givers believed that we should enjoy something more beautiful than towels, and for that goodwill, I remain grateful.



Each time we moved, I carefully packed the crystal bowls and platters – wrapping them in the towels we had to buy on our own. Finally, in one of the moves in these last couple years, I decided to pare it down to one bowl and one platter. They are enough.

This past Sunday, I stopped into an estate sale in the neighborhood. It's a favorite pastime, and I've scored some good deals over the years. For some reason, however, this estate filled me with a bit of sadness and anger. Around the kitchen and dining table were crystal goblets, bowls, and platters; fine china; candlestick holders; and more. Perhaps the owner had treasured them as wedding gifts received from dear friends who deviated from her registry. Perhaps they "sparked joy" in Marie Kondo fashion. Still, I had this lingering question, "What good does it do to die and leave all this stuff behind? Is this the legacy you wanted to leave?"

I'm not sure why it bothered me this time. I enjoy beautiful and unnecessary things as much as the next person, even if I find seven crystal bowls and three crystal platters to be on the excessive side.

Perhaps it was the sharp contrast from Sunday morning worship. I had the privilege of worshipping with Grace (Milwaukee) and had the opportunity to thank them for their extraordinary generosity in denominational giving, due in part to their stewardship of a significant bequest. I learned of their Session's decision to increase their giving to the Presbytery even more this year, so that we can continue to offer ecclesiastical and programming support for our congregations and leaders. I was humbled by the legacy that they are choosing to create.

Maybe in that context, I felt uncomfortable with the display of crystal leftovers at the estate sale. For all I know, the owner spent most of her fortune on charitable and spiritual endeavors that will endure. I don't think I was questioning the owner's choices, as much as I questioned my own. When my time here is done, what will my leftovers be? Will anyone care about the pieces I wrapped in towels and wouldn't use except for holidays?

We can ask the same of our churches: when – if – the time comes to close, what are our leftovers? When the community picks through what we've left behind, what will they see? Are we prepared they might walk away empty-handed, not finding anything worth taking home? Or, will they be humbled by our generosity and investment in what matters and endures?