

Finding Renewal in the Love of God

Unit 5: Claiming Life in Renewal through Sacrifices of Love

Experience 5: Looking for Pineapples

In the past few years one word has earned its place as Come before Winter shorthand for surrender. It's a verbal code, really, a telling symbol that instantly communicates to others on the team. It has been offered as a confession, an explanation or a warning. Once it became a symbol of recognition for one who continually places herself last among us. The word is "pineapple." So meaningful is the message this word communicates that some of us even wear silver pineapples on our bracelets to remind ourselves of our commitment to surrender—first to God, then to one another and the women we serve.

The symbol comes from a book requested by one of the missionaries we served in Mexico. It is called "The Pineapple Story,"¹ and it centers around an African missionary who had grown hungry for pineapples. He ordered bushes, and since he ran a store and a medical clinic, he "hired" a native to plant them. Pineapples require three years to ripen, so the man waited longingly for his first pineapple. However, when the first pineapples ripened, they were stolen—all of them. He did not get one. The story goes to lengths to explain that this event occurred over and over; the pineapples would ripen, but they would be stolen. Though the missionary saw the growing, he never ate even one. Of course, the natives were stealing them; he knew this. He was angry, frustrated and not a small amount hurt by the seeming lack of appreciation for all he did—not to mention the stealing! He tried talking to them, lecturing to them, moralizing, and even went so far as to shut down the store, then the clinic itself as a way of getting their attention. The pineapples continued to disappear. When there was nothing left for him to "take away," he had to face the truth: nothing he did was going to change their hearts on the issue. He had two choices, give up the pineapples or go home; he was doing no one any good by living in Africa. Reluctantly, he surrendered his pineapples. He gave them to God, and reopened the store and the clinic with a good attitude to boot. The natives immediately noticed the change. They asked him, "Why are you no longer angry, Too-wan (which means 'foreigner')?" He told them he had given the pineapples to God; they could have them. This got their attention. They were stealing God's pineapples—not Too-wan's. Should one steal God's pineapples? They did not think so! "Look", they said to one another, "Too-wan has become a Christian; he is doing what he always taught. He is being good to us, though we are not being good to him." The story has many more facets, but the result is most significant. The natives began sharing God's pineapples with Too-wan and he with them. The "moral" of the story is this: Everyone has pineapples, those tasty fruits that we love and work hard to maintain so that we can enjoy eating them. We will do almost anything to protect our pineapples. The writer points out that any time we get our feelings hurt or become angry we are protecting a pineapple. Our behavior at these times affects our witness to others. He challenges us to identify the pineapples in our lives. Every time we get angry, indignant or hurt, we should ask ourselves: "What is the pineapple here?" Is it my pride? Is it my selfishness, my hungers, my passions? My, my, my, my? Once we identify the pineapple, we need to pray for the strength to give those pineapples to God. Who knows? When we gift them to Him, we may very likely find what it was we were looking for all along.

This week, look for your pineapples. Here is your clue: Every time you find yourself disturbed, worried, angry, hurt, or indignant, ask yourself why? Can you find the pineapple? Begin praying that God will help you give that pineapple to him. In the meantime, you may find that just knowing you are protecting a pineapple that really isn't yours to begin with (they're God's pineapple), may be humbling enough to help you change the way you react.

Have a good week. Happy hunting!

1. "The Pineapple Story" is published by The Institute in Basic Life Principles, Inc., Oakbrook, IL.