

Easter Presentation – The Four-Way Test  
Rev. Jerry Bennett, Pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ

Thank you to John Laker for inviting me and thanks to all of you for welcoming me to this, my first ever, Rotary Club meeting.

They say you should know your audience so I took a little time to learn something about Rotary International ... and was glad I did. For years as I've traveled around the country I've noticed on the outskirts of most towns, there would be a sign listing all the churches and fraternal organizations. Most of the abbreviations I could get ... UMC I knew meant the United Methodist Church ... AF&AM I knew meant Ancient Free and Accepted Masons. What puzzled me were the signs that said RI ... why were the people in so many towns confused into thinking they lived in Rhode Island?

I knew Rotary members included business and professional leaders, but I didn't know much beyond that. I didn't know, for instance, that Rotary is a worldwide organization, located in 166 countries. I didn't realize that Rotary's main objective is to serve in the community, in the workplace, and throughout the world. I had never known that Rotarians are united in a global campaign to eradicate polio.

I read that the object of Rotary is to encourage and foster the ideal of service as a basis of worthy enterprise, and, in particular, to encourage and foster the development of acquaintance as an opportunity for service, to encourage and foster high ethical standards in business and professions, the recognition of the worthiness of all useful occupations, and the dignifying of each Rotarian's occupation as an opportunity to serve society, to encourage and foster the application of the ideal of service in each Rotarian's personal, business, and community life, and to encourage and foster the advancement of international understanding, goodwill, and peace.

If we could get a significant number ... at least 25% ... of the world's population and 100% of the world's leaders to ask the questions of your four-way test ... our world could be transformed. Think about it. How might the Middle East be transformed if BEFORE sending suicide bombers or missiles, leaders were to ask: Is it the TRUTH? Is it FAIR to all concerned? Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS? Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned? Maybe your next membership drive should be in the halls of Congress. If we could get those folks signed up and COMMITTED to asking those four simple questions ... maybe the United States would become less polarized and we might return to the quaint ideal of working for the COMMON GOOD.

I am not a Rotarian, but I AM a Christian. I'm aware that some of you may be Jewish or Muslim or non-religious. And I want to be sensitive to that. So I won't be trying to CONVERT anybody today ... I simply want to bear witness to the faith ... the church ... and the God I love because my understanding of Christianity is that it holds much in common with organizations like Rotary. The questions of your four-way test, for example, could well be a working out of the popular question, "What would Jesus do?"

I'm generally an optimistic person ... my faith inspires in me the hope that, as Julian of Norwich is reported to have said, "ALL WILL BE WELL, AND EVERY KIND OF THING WILL BE WELL."

I don't know about you ... but I sometimes find it difficult to remain hopeful. When I paid \$42.00 for gas the other day, I felt something OTHER THAN hope! When I see how politicians on both sides of the aisle FAIL TO APPLY THE FOUR-WAY TEST to matters that

come before them ... how they NEVER SEEM TO FAIL to assess an issue on the basis of its political payoff ... I feel something OTHER THAN hope.

And then I go to the bedside of one of my parishioners and I am humbled by the visage of hope that can transform even the most cancer-ravaged person into a beautiful child of God. I have a parishioner at this very moment who has been struggling ... really struggling ... to overcome breast cancer. She recently experienced a crisis ... the doctors said to gather the family. The woman was frightened ... who wouldn't be with twenty different people rushing at you all at the same time. But even in her fear she clung to hope. So did her family. We prayed together. They prayed together. They encouraged one another. They dreamed about what they would do when their loved one got better. And you know ... she got better. Or she at least came out of crisis. I don't want to make any extravagant claims about how all those prayers saved that woman's life. What I DO want to suggest is that the power to renew our world ... to make it a more beautiful, more peaceful village ... is right here ... within our grasp.

Our world will be renewed when people like you remain faithful to the ideals of your organization ... when people like my parishioners and other parishioners in other churches ... when nuclear families and extended families and neighborhood families STOP STRUGGLING for a while and sit quietly, in hope ... that all things will be well and all kinds of things will be well. Rodney King, whatever his faults, had it right when he asked, "can't we just love one another?" All it would take for the Kingdom of God ... Nirvana ... whatever you call it ... to spring forth in the here and now is for us simply to love one another.

Now I'm not talking about a flower child ... make love nor war kind of love. I'm talking about the hard work kind of love that causes my wife to forgive me when I do something like I did yesterday. My wife is a coupon clipper. She sent me to the grocery store with a list of items to buy ... each one had a coupon in the envelope on which the list was written ... they were IN that envelope in the order in which they appeared on the list.

Now I'm all about checking cash register receipts. I LIVE to find discrepancies, because in some stores ... if they make a mistake in ringing up an item ... you get it free. IF YOU'RE IN RETAIL, ANY OF YOU, I'M YOUR WORST NIGHTMARE!

Yesterday I found a couple of mistakes on my cash register receipt. I went home, so proud, and I showed my wife the money I'd saved by catching those mistakes. And I stood there waiting for her to pat my head, say good boy, and give me a biscuit! But instead, she said "how much did we save on coupons?" And suddenly my ears went down and my tail went between my legs, and my right front thigh began to burn because there in that pocket, WERE THE COUPONS ... I'd forgotten to give them to the cashier.

Now Ann COULD HAVE melted down right there on the spot. She COULD HAVE pointed out the obvious, that I'm a meathead ... an absent-minded meathead at that. But she didn't. Because she loves me ... and because she's had 30 years of experience with me ... she just said, "oh well, they don't expire for a couple of months." It was TRUE. It was FAIR to all concerned. It BUILT GOODWILL AND BETTER FRIENDSHIPS. And it was BENEFICIAL TO ALL CONCERNED.

In this Easter season ... this springtime of new birth and new hope, I encourage you ... I urge you ... to keep doing the four-way test ... keep asking the four questions ... and keep making our world a better, more hopeful place.