

## Jesus as Janitor: Keep your Temple Clean

Part 1 of 3: Spiritual Discovery Series

Hymn: "Shine Jesus, Shine"

(1 Corinthians 6: 12-20)

"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body"

The Reverend Dr. Catharine Randall Christ Church, Middle Haddam January 15, 2012

Sin is not a word we like. Sin is not something we want to think about. Sin is a word that the culture wants to deny, to strip of its power to judge or indict us. But sin is very real. And sin has the potential to rule, and then to destroy, each one of us, each of our lives.

You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body." Who wants to hear these words? What can they possibly mean? We are citizens of the USA and we are "not our own"? We were "bought"? With what "price"? Surely Scripture must be mistaken.

But no. I began to emerge from darkness, to walk back into the light, after I read these words many years ago. The HOPE is that we have, indeed, been bought, that we are NOT our own. In fact, what greater burden could there be than to be our own, alone, sunk in our sorrow and smallness, no one to claim us, no one to free us. That is *despair* and it is a sticky, gluey, horrible mess. Self-loathing—especially unacknowledged—is one of the most toxic forces in our lives. No way to go forward. No way to fix our mistakes. No way to make up for harm done. No one to forgive us. How many of us, if we are really honest, have AT LEAST one secret in our hearts that we harbor with shame and pain, one

unspeakable like this? How could we have done this? How COULD we? Who WERE we? How can I be set free from knowing I was CAPABLE of something like that? We rehearse those sins like gerbils on a treadmill, over and over, ever running but no way to run away.

But Scripture says, we are NOT our own; we were bought with a price. There is hope in this!

But for that claim to be made, a body must be broken. Think of the one you love best in this life. Take a moment. Visualize this person. For me, it's my husband. What if, for me to be lifted out of my sinfulness, which I know to have been, --and, potentially, still to be-- very real, Randy had to die for me? What if his best-beloved body had to be bruised and battered and broken before my eyes, then laid here, crumpled and lifeless, on this altar, so that I might live? That is an unbearable thought. And yet, that is what we celebrate every Sunday when we take the pieces of a broken body that are Jesus's.

When I come to the Table as priest, my custom is to gently smooth the fair linen. In this way, I remind myself that the altar cloth is Jesus' winding-shroud. This is his burial place. The white linen off of which we eat crumbs of bread holds his bleeding body.

And we CELEBRATE this. What a strange word. But it is true. We celebrate because he gave the sacrifice for us, he set us free. Because of his brokenness, we are made whole. Because of Jesus, our body can become the temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells.

Here's what Scripture is focusing on today: what we do with our bodies, what actions we take, what goes out from our bodies, our choices, our way of being in the world.

In order for this passage to make sense, you HAVE to acknowledge your ability, your propensity, to sin. In our private piety—not our performance of it publically at church—we need to confront that darkness deep within us. If we don't, we will never be whole. We will never fully embrace our faith. This is how to grow into the Light:

See that sin. What is it? Don't tell me. You don't need to tell anyone but God. But you DO need to see it, to name it, to look at it fully. In my case, there are many. What little deaths have we caused in our relationships with others? What failure to love have we allowed ourselves? What anger or even hatred have we stoked? What pride have we nurtured? What one thing have we done that we would give anything—anything—if only it could be UNDONE? You know what I mean. You know what I'm talking about.

This is no way to keep our temple clean. Before the Holy Spirit can come and fill it utterly, we've got to clean that space out. Here's how: BE A FORGIVEN SINNER. Claim that identity. With God's help, you have that choice. Jesus, custodian of our souls, Jesus is the janitor who sweeps all that dust and dirt away. You do NOT have to remain a slave to what you have done wrong. You do NOT have to work so hard to deflect the blame to someone else, to play the victim, to feel sorry for yourself, to indulge in all the little games human nature suggests to us. With Jesus' help, we can both go into the depths, AND rise out of them.

I met Mike on Thanksgiving Day this year on a connecting flight from Atlanta to Santa Fe. As he lurched down the aisle, the last passenger to board the plane, I smelled the death in and on him. And I KNEW he would sit next to me. And he did. As he sank into the seat, the plane began to taxi, and Mike began to talk, and I began to pray. Mike talked pretty much non-stop through the three hour flight. And this is what he said: I have liver cancer. I have three months to live. I have hurt many people in my life. I'm an alcoholic. I have been abusive. I am afraid. I am going to see my ex-wife for the first time in twenty years, because that's the only way I can get together with all four of my adult children before I die. Once I get through that, I am going to check into a hotel room and wait to die, alone.

That's what Mike said. But THIS is what he REALLY said: I hate myself. I have no worth. I am alone, abandoned by all. I have no hope. There is no God. I am nothing.

And I listened, and I did what Randy calls my aerobic knitting—just to relieve the tension!—and I prayed for silence and then for a Word to drop into that silence, like a teardrop poised on a leaf.

Just outside of Albuquerque, Mike said, see those mountains down below? Those are the Sandia Mountains. I've been to the top of them. When I stood at the top, I saw an eagle flying.

The Word came, a shimmer, a sound of sky drifting slowly to earth. And this is the Word I was given to say: Mike, at the moment of your passing, *be that eagle*. Be that eagle soaring off the mountain in your

dying. Launch yourself into this new life that is waiting for you. And before you fly, ask God to hold you up.

Mike turned and looked at me and he said, I will not forget you. You have given me hope. You have been a listening ear. I'm a lapsed Catholic, and now I will go find a priest, so that I will not be alone when I die.

At baggage claim, I saw Mike. He was walking slowly and painfully through the airport toward the rest of his life, the end of his life.

Now, perhaps, he thought this could be a beginning.

We are NOT our own. And, BECAUSE of this, we are NOT alone. We were bought with a price and, therefore, we are PRECIOUS. Mike is precious. He is known and loved and held in God's arms. So am I. boy, do I not deserve it. But I AM.

And so are you.

