

Life After Sin - OCT 5, '03

Deacon Collean Spaeth

Good Morning! Preaching is not an easy job for me, and I am envious when I see preachers like Fr. Pat get up and seemingly effortlessly deliver a homily.

I have a habit of how I prepare a sermon. I like to read and pray with the scriptures for a week or two, sort of an opportunity to breathe in the scriptures, get quiet with the readings for the Sunday, and I take very seriously what it is the Lord would want me to share with you about these Bible passages.

I was not a happy camper when I read the scriptures. divorce, that's the topic of the scripture readings. I would much rather preach on Matthew, "Come to me all you who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest", or Corinthians, "God is ...", all those wonderful, warm fuzzies.

And even though it might be true that divorce may be more widely accepted than twenty years ago, it is still an uncomfortable issue. It is certainly not an issue that a deacon wants to tackle in front of her congregation.

I thought about that – why do these scriptures bother me so? Of course, it's because I am divorced, and no matter what the causes of divorce, right, wrong, unknowing, divorce still carries a stigma with it, underneath all the rhetoric about it, in the place in our hearts where our emotions are safely stored, when no one is around, we still acknowledge the feelings of shame, and guilt that can be overwhelming.

Why do these readings bother me so? Because they remind me that I am a sinner, that I have failed in something very important. And knowing that, feeling that, isn't wonderful, isn't good.

If we were to stop here, I'm a dead duck in the water. And sometimes people who judge sinners can stop there, it wouldn't be hard to categorize me and those like me, and be done with it, and with some legitimacy about it.

There are many directions in the road of one's life that can be taken when heartbreaking sin happens. One could feel like throwing a pity party, hide away from living, stagnate, give up, acknowledge unworthiness, and uselessness – sort of a walking dead person, the type who have some length of time between death and burial.

One can just start a sin chest, sort of like the old hope chests, like when I was a little girl you had a hope chest, instead of good things, store all our sins in one place, building our life sin upon sin. There's just no-hope-for-me type of thinking again.

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But God always has plans for us, even when we don't see them. If one is lucky enough to look up and around, and experience the spirit of God's grace, when we are down in the pit, that grace may, just may pull us up, and help us look up instead of around.

I once read that Bishop Tutu, a wonderful Anglican Bishop said, that if you had heard his sermons once, you needn't hear any more, that all his sermons carried one theme, and that is "Jesus Loves You".

I wonder how many of us have experienced a pit so deep, a darkness so thick that the only one we see still standing FOR us, reaching his hand out TO US is Jesus?

Our friends don't understand what's going on with us, our family even has it's doubts – forget co-workers, sometimes the people in the pews look away when we look at them.

It is uncomfortable to be around a sinner. Then we may have to look at ourselves. It is much better to surround ourselves with people who LOOK like things are working out in their lives – then at least the pretension feeds our need to be in our comfort zones.

But that's the wonderful thing about Jesus, and the strong faith that doesn't waver when we fail – like the father who greets his late teenager who's been out doing who knows what, Jesus is so glad to see us back, yes, he knows who we are and it is okay! Today is a new day – and another opportunity to turn our feet in a different direction.

Sometimes the road just isn't easy in life – and stuff happens. No one gets married, I don't think, ever thinking it won't work out well, but stuff happens.

No one puts time into a relationship thinking this too shall fail. We want it to work out.

And of course divorce isn't the only sin out there – holy cow, there's lots of opportunities for sin – lying, cheating, stealing, pretending – there's all sorts of ways to screw our lives up.

Our prayer book on page 848 says sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God.

There are two places I seem to hang out in a lot, and that's churches and hospitals. I think it's because both are places for people in pain. Hospitals are more identifiable that way, aren't they? Even the new babies, their moms first had to experience pain, before they could experience joy.

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And Churches should also be places for people in pain, safe havens for people to come and be safe, and accepted by other sinners maybe.

The Episcopal Church is a place where all are welcome. Sinners and others too! We are a church struggling with issues, and hanging out our laundry for all to see, even when it is painful, even when it may divide us, we are willing to come to the table together, and remember the main message more important than all others, JESUS LOVES ME! Is it an easy time? No, no way. But will God carry us through it? That's the lesson that is open to us sinners.

Today we will join in the baptism of Ryleigh Daisy, and as part of that event we will renew our own baptismal covenant, reminding ourselves that we believe in God the Holy Spirit, and the forgiveness of sins. We agree that we will persevere in resisting evil, and WHENEVER we fall into sin, say we're sorry, and return to the Lord. Do we really mean those words? Or are they just rote?

When we make mistakes, wrong choices, we can then decide to go down another road, the same road maybe, except this time, if we're wise, if we know who is truly in charge, we ask God to come along with us., after all, he probably knows the way better than us, after all – he's GOD isn't he?

Amen.