

November 16, 2014: Unholy Hoarders

'I was afraid and I went and hid my talent.' (Matt. 25:25)

The Gospel and in particular today's reading on the Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25: 14-30) makes it clear: freedom is only found in giving our lives away for others. Fear is the enemy of such freedom. If we doubt the gifts that we are, we lose and so does everyone else. Scripture takes it further. Keeping ourselves wrapped up in fear and self-doubt makes us stingy and miserable, deserving of the loneliness such unholy hoarding incurs.

St. John Paul II paraphrases Jesus when he wrote his now oft-quoted line: 'Man can only find himself through the sincere gift of himself.' (GS 24) Our quest for clarity in any sphere—spiritually, sexually, emotionally—must involve self-giving. Pity the fearful one who stays inside, waiting to be summoned by an intrepid prince or princess. The Prince has come; He has crowned you a gift by virtue of your humanity. Discover that humanity by offering yourself to others!

That call is relevant for persons with damaged relational backgrounds. The only way we change the old set of fearful memories is by offering ourselves. We heed Prince Jesus at every turn. Eventually, we get it. Even if another does not value the gift that we are, the gift cannot be diminished. He who made us and is redeeming us reminds us moment by moment: 'You are my beloved.' Our mirror becomes the Creator, not the created, which frees us to risk again.

Happiness results from generous self-giving. 'Come and share your master's happiness' (vs. 21, 23) says Jesus to those persons who offer themselves, over and over for others' good. Taking our talents and investing them is especially relevant for building up Jesus' body. I frankly have little tolerance for persons who remain stuck in 'church-wounds' and are quick to mutter outside her gates with the bitter throng who detest 'religion.'

I'd rather be fruitful and happy. Instead of a betrayer, I see a beautiful, broken 'bride' who has been struck down but not destroyed. I shall not kick her when she's down but seek to honor and serve her with all I can give. Jesus helps us here. He always gives us His heart for His bride! I forgive



my offenders quickly. And at times I change where I worship in order to be faithful to Jesus by discerning where I can best love and serve her. She is a diverse bride who gives us many points of entry. The Church needs generous givers who will not dwell on her failures but on how she welcomes her Bridegroom beautifully.

To be sure, we must be honest about our fears. Many of us have been pierced by church-related sins that make us flinch to this day. Annette and I suffered seasons of such cruel and arbitrary rejection from churchmen that we have been tempted to bury our talents in fear. We bear the mark of such rejection and must struggle to overcome it. We shall. We want to be both happy and fruitful in our service of the bride who is making herself radiant, without spot or wrinkle. (Eph. 5:27)

'For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.'
(Matt. 25:29)

Please join us as we pray for:

1. **Northeast Region**, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Garry & Melissa Ingraham - Coordinators: For strength and vision for Garry & Melissa, for existing groups and to see new groups established.
2. **Aguas Vivas**: Leon, Mexico, Emma - Coordinator: Grace and strength to finish their first Aguas Vivas pilot group.
3. **Restored Hope Network**: *Reconciliation Ministries*, Dan Hitz, Roseville, MI: For new office space and start of Living Waters group. *Pure Heart Ministries*, Jim Venice, St. Peters, MO: personal and ministry health.

"Courage for Pastor Phil Strout (National Director Vineyard USA), that he would ensure that the Church becomes a clear fountain of transformation for persons with same-sex attraction!"

November 17, 2014: Glorious Sinners

'Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.' St. Paul VI

My young friend Kelsie recently said: 'If I worship Jesus above all, and He is the Lord of my desires, then of course He can change them!' She referred to her own commitment to overcome same-sex attraction and relationships, and the progressive freedom she has discovered thus far. She is a witness of Jesus, and one voice among many that must be heard.

Nothing conveys Jesus' tender and powerful love better than persons with SSA who are being transformed by Him. Shameful and painful histories become glorious. When my colleague and young father Andrew shares about his surrender to Jesus after multiple 'gay' unions, hope eclipses humiliation and one begins to think: 'Maybe 'gay' isn't the only way for persons with SSA...'

Such a witness opens a new door on what has become the close-ended 'born this way' view of homosexuality. Most have bought into that fatalistic mindset, even to the degree that they might actively discourage a person wanting to be free from homosexuality. Strange paradox: persons who champion 'choice' are often the most fascist. For them, the 'gay' way is one-way, with no exit.

Sadly many Christians have adopted such fatalism. When they do, they leech His light by denying others a vital option. All the more glorious are those who expose their desires-in-conflict to Him and begin the splendid task of true reconciliation—to God, themselves, others. Jesus shines through them, as He does radiantly through my friend Christie. Now a wife and mother, she freely reveals her deep gender conflicts (and many lovers) and how Jesus and His friends helped her to resolve them. Glorious. In her clear womanhood, she offers more than the hope of change. She offers Jesus.

We now witness the first generation who has been weaned on 'gay everything.' In the media, their schools, their social networking, they are good with 'gay'--until they are not. Increasingly, we are receiving inquiries from young men and women who for a variety of reasons are beginning to regret the ease with which they adopted 'gay' labels and lives; they wonder if Jesus is a door for life beyond homosexuality.

Will the Church be an open door for these seekers? Or will she ascribe to the homosexual fatalism of our day and obscure that door? Maybe these witnesses of transformation can help. No orthodox 'teaching' speaks more clearly into the questions surrounding homosexuality than persons who have been humbled by it. Jesus is raising them up, and amplifying their voices, for such a time as this.

'I do not hide Your righteousness in my heart; I speak of Your faithfulness and Your salvation. I do not conceal Your love and truth from the great assembly.'
(Ps. 40:10)

Please join us as we pray for:

1. **Mid-Atlantic Region**, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Tom Wright - Coordinator: For strength and vision for Tom, for existing groups and to see new groups established.
Aguas Vivas: Veracruz, Mexico, Analuisa - Coordinator: For them to find good church covering and for all they need to complete ContraCorriente (CrossCurrent) pilot.
2. **Restored Hope Network**: *Portland Fellowship*, Jason Thompson, Portland, OR: God's wisdom and direction as he leads Portland Fellowship through transition. *Mid-Valley Fellowship*, Duan Walker, Albany, OR: God's leading in ministry and to balance ministry and rest.

"Courage for Pope Francis, that he would ensure that the Church becomes a clear fountain of transformation for persons with same-sex attraction!"

November 18, 2014: Summoning the Saints

'Leaving her water jar, the woman went back to town and said to the people, "Come see a man who told me everything I ever did..."



A young Christian and university student, I was also fresh out of the 'gay' scene and grateful to Jesus and His friends for giving me an alternative. My pastors knew many young people like me. 'Please help others,' they implored Annette and me, while mentoring us in how to best share our stories and gather seekers for mutual support. My pastors took a risk by releasing us to serve the church. We in turn had to leave our 'water jars' and give ourselves away so that others might discover the riches of Jesus in His body.

That was the DNA of my young church: rousing one another to build the Bride. And who better to do so than young ones so grateful to Jesus that they want to offer themselves to His members? He honors these efforts; Jesus certainly magnified our little offering! As men and women received healing in our small groups, we invested in them and they became healers in their own right. God increased their healing as they offered themselves to others.

Because we did everything as a group, no one person had to bear the weight of another's brokenness. Jesus did, through His Spirit, by releasing a variety of gifts. As wounded healer, we actually created a healing community; we encouraged one another through ongoing training and cyclical opportunities to lead healing groups together. In so doing, we increased our involvement in the life of the greater church. We fulfilled an aspect of St. Paul's exhortation 'to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up...' (Eph. 4:12)

We continue to train lay persons to run these groups. 'Living Waters' now flow throughout the world, in nearly every denomination. The local churches need such service for her sexually broken. And just as much, persons whose shame has been turned to glory need the dignity of becoming useful in the restoration of other lives. Without Jesus and His friends, these wounded healers would have been left eternally homeless. Now they help create a home for others in Christ's body.

My new church home, the Roman Catholic Church, is a deep well of wisdom, authority and abiding love. She is also seriously challenged in releasing the saints to do the work of the ministry. Her strength--providing continuity of leadership—is also her weakness. It tends to create 'religious professionals' to which the laity remains childishly deferential. In order to



meet the needs of broken people over the long haul, we need bishops and pastors who are open to new models of pastoral care and equipping/overseeing the saints to do such care. May the Church forsake a dead formalism in order to raise her wounded healers.

'It is through you, the laity, that the Church's mission is fulfilled by the power of the Holy Spirit.' St. John Paul II

Please join us as we pray for:

1. **North & South Carolina**, Dean Greer – Coordinator: For new regional leadership to be identified and raised-up, for existing groups and to see new groups established.
Aguas Vivas: Evanston, Illinois, Kerrie - Spanish Coordinator: Grace, protection and anointing as Kerri attends the *CrossCurrent* group at the Vineyard and runs a small group for Spanish speakers.
2. **Restored Hope Network**: CCR, Michael Newman, Houston, TX: Culture clashes and more connection with other ministries. *Shadow of His Wings Ministry*, Lee Preston, Garden Ridge, TX: Discernment for he and his wife to determine God's path.

"Courage for Reverend Justin Welby (Archbishop of Canterbury), that he would ensure that the Church becomes a clear fountain of transformation for persons with same-sex attraction!"

November 19, 2014: A Chaste Messy Bride

'Instead of a Church which clings to its own securities, I want one that is bruised and hurting because it has been out on the streets...' Pope Francis (EG 49)

How do we as the Church fulfill Jesus' call to love sin-broken people in a way that frees them to let go of that sin? The Gospel witness is evident: in the face of Pharisaic scrutiny, His passion for the unclean makes them pure. His Presence delivers the Magdalene of her demons, draws the prostitute who weeps in remorse at His feet, and commands the adulterer to 'sin no more' after her accusers have dropped their stones.

Jesus plows a furrow line straight down the radical middle. Between bad religion and sins of the flesh, His Almighty mercy liberates repentance—the sinner's obedience to the demands of the Kingdom.

Moral Conservatives tend to err on the side of self-preservation: we are saving our good traditions for a generation-to-come. Or maybe for ourselves. We fear the Church's conversion to a gender-scary culture. And frightening it is: justice is now defined as redefining marriage and recreating ourselves in the gender that today feels right to us.

Amid such idolatry of 'self', we wax fearful and alert the faithful to the doom-and-gloom at hand. Unwittingly, we hide our Gospel from the perishing. The very generation that needs a life-preserver finds the ark closed. All they hear is the demonically-amplified: 'Christians hate LGBTUVWXYZ...'

Arguably, the liberal arm of the Church has already been converted. For them, love means 'never having to say you are sorry' for leaving one's spouse of decades for a 'gay' lover, for cutting off one's breasts or penis in search of the 'true' self, or for a host of heterosexual misdemeanors (cohabitation, porn, fornicating, affairs.) Justice is about inclusion, not the Cross that cost Him everything and that demands we pick up ours and follow Him, a trek made possible only with empty hands.

Liberals become unclean to welcome the unclean. Conservatives strive for purity and alienate the impure. How about becoming like Jesus, utterly pure through His mercy and utterly broken for the broken, so much so that we make a place in our hearts and in our churches for them?

That will require two things: first, a fearless belief in the power of Jesus to convert the morally lost through His Spirit and love. That means we trust

that their misdirected spirits will not overpower the Church but in time will surrender to Holy Love.

Secondly, that surrender will require of us trust and time and more mercy than we have. It will require our surrender to Jesus and His Love. It will require that we the chaste get dirty. It takes more love to bear with an impure person in the truth of chastity than it does to relent to their futile self-definitions and relationships.

We need contexts in the Church where the sexually broken can work out their questions and challenges with persons who get their struggles and who have power in the Spirit through their own clear spirits to bring clarity. Courage groups, Living Waters, and other thoughtful small groups are now essential to the church or diocese wanting to help sexual sinners.

Bishop, pastor, and laity must labor together with and for real sinners. We must become a chaste and messy Bride in order to please the Bridegroom.

'Jesus took sexual sin very seriously. He regarded sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage as capable of jeopardizing one's entrance into the Kingdom of God...What distinguished Jesus was His incredibly generous spirit toward those who had lived in gross disobedience for years. He expended enormous efforts and exhibited great compassion in His search for the lost. Jesus' ministry proves that the Church can practice radical love without sacrificing God's demand for righteous conduct...When either love or righteousness is sacrificed, the Church proclaims a truncated Gospel.'
Dr. Robert Gagnon

Please join us as we pray for:

1. **Georgia**, Bev Gammalo - Coordinator: For strength and vision for Bev, for existing groups and to see new groups established.
2. **Aguas Vivas**: Bayamon, Puerto Rico, Miguel & Elisabeth - Coordinators: Direction for timing and team for future groups as they finish second ContraCorriente pilot with church leaders.



3. **Restored Hope Network:** For Anne Paulk, as Executive Director, protection and provision for her and her three sons and extended family.

"Courage for Pastor Phil Strout (National Director Vineyard USA), that he would ensure that the Church becomes a clear fountain of transformation for persons with same-sex attraction!"