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CHRIST IN MY CLOSET Michael B. Beagh
Psalm 51:6; Matthew 23:25-28 May 31, 2009
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Christ knocked on my door recently. I opened it and invited him inside. He said he wanted to visit each room in my heart and my home. I had shown him most of the rooms when he said he wanted to see my closet.

Well, I wanted to do everything I could to keep him out of my closet. You know what I mean. You know what closets look like. I suggest other rooms, like the kitchen or even my bedroom. It didn't do any good. Christ headed straight for my closet door. I walked just a little faster and positioned myself in front of the door, blocking his way. I held up my hands and said, "Stop, Lord, I can explain what's in my closet." He did stop and just stared, not at me, but at the closet door behind me. He wrinkled his nose and said, **"Your closet has a really bad smell coming from it."**

I didn't smell anything, nothing too bad. I kind of laughed and suggested the smell might be the wet towels I left on the floor in the bathroom nearby or one of my grandson's dirty diapers somewhere in the house.

Christ scoffed. That's the only way to put it. Actually, he said, "Yeah, right." He kept peering at the closet door. I decided to use distraction like you do to get a child to quit doing something you don't him or her to do. "Lord," I said, "it is certainly beautiful weather today." I put my hands together and looked as pious as possible. "I just want to thank you for that."

Christ didn't even acknowledge me. He just kept staring at that door.

"Hey, that was a great worship service we had last Sunday. I hope you liked it."

Still no response. Not even the batting of an eyelid.

So I tried mano a mano, guy talk. "How about those Texas Rangers? Can you believe they are actually in first place?"

Christ finally looked at me. He had a funny look on his face. Looked like he was getting sick. You know that look when someone looks like they are about to throw up. His shoulders were hunched forward. He was sucking air in through his nostrils like you do when you are about to lose it. His mouth was salivating and I could tell he was trying to keep from drooling on his toes. He had on sandals, you know. He had a hand on his chest like he was trying to keep it down. He said, "I've got to get out of here." Then he said something that sent a chill down my spine. "I can't stay in a home that smells this badly."

He turned to leave. I called out to him, "Lord, there's really nothing much in my closet except the usual things - my clothes and shoes, luggage, you know, the usual."

Christ stopped and spun around. The look he gave me weakened my knees. I had never imagined Christ looking at me like he did at that moment. It was the look I imagine he had when he swung into action driving the money changers out of the temple in Jerusalem. Not a pleasant sight. It was anger mixed with pity. I gasped from the shock of it and started humming "Jesus loves me, this I know." I hummed the whole song, and then broke out into "Kum ba yah, my Lord, Kum ba yah."

When he didn't say anything, I said, "Lord, whatever it is you smell, I will get rid of it." I walked into the closet and grabbed a can of deodorizer. I came back out and sprayed all around the door. I filled the room with a voluminous cloud of scented molecules. Whatever he had smelled, I was sure he couldn't smell it any more.

When I looked at Christ again, his eyes had narrowed into slits. I saw tears forming in the corners. I thought I had burned his eyes with the spray. He said, "You really don't smell anything, do you?"

I said, "No, sir."

"You don't have any idea what is rotting in your closet, do you?"

I said, "Rotting? Like something dead?" Then I remembered. "We do have problems with squirrels in our attic. Maybe that's what you smell."

Christ said, "You will have to let me in so I can clean your closet, or else you can have no part in me."

Now here is where I have to be honest with all of you who are listening to my story. I was lying to Christ. I am not proud of it, but I can admit that now. At the moment, I simply did not want him to see inside my closet. I knew there were things there I had hidden away in secret. They were the things you don't want anyone to see. You tuck them away behind the clothes or up on a high shelf. You just can't let go of them. Mostly they just sit there and rot. They turn putrid colors. And, yes, they start stinking up the place. The only problem is you start getting used to the smell. Eventually you stop noticing how disgusting these things are, until someone with no tact at all pays you a visit and says, "Ooo, what's that smell?"

You might say, "Oh, it's the broccoli we ate last night," or "It's chicken in the garbage," or like I did with Christ, "I don't smell anything." But, of course, your visitor smells it and knows there is something rotten even if you never admit it.

I am not sure why I thought I could fool Christ. He has always been able to see right through me, or in this case, smell right through me. I think it is just hard

to admit that our closet needs cleaning, that we are not the person we pretend to be.

I had to make a decision. Either I let Christ into my closet or I might never see him again. I reluctantly opened the door. He stepped inside.

I don't know if you have ever let Christ into your closet where you hide secret things, but I can tell you it was totally unnerving. I watched from the door as he began rummaging through my clothes, like he was looking for something. He held up my high school letter jacket. "You don't really wear this, do you?" he asked in a mocking tone.

I could tell he was having fun. He pulled out my wife's wedding dress. I noticed it had changed colors over the years. "Oh, my, you still have this after 42 years," he exclaimed. "I often attended weddings in Galilee. I was at yours. Your wife was beautiful. And you, well, you were there, too."

He picked up a toy truck that was to be a future gift for one of our grandchildren. "We made our own toys back in the day," he said. "What we wouldn't have given for something like this!" Jesus actually started making truck noises. I quickly took it from him and put it back on the shelf.

As Christ continued looking through my things, I was thinking, "This is not so bad. I don't know why I was afraid to let him in my closet." I remembered he went in there to help me get rid of the odor he said he smelled. "Lord," I said, "I think I know the source of the odor."

With the look of a born skeptic, he said, "Oh, yeah? What's that?"

I reached down and held up some dirty clothes.

"Those can be pretty disgusting," he agreed, "especially when you throw your sweaty workout clothes in here. Your wife has warned you about that."

Finally, I couldn't take it anymore. "Lord, what exactly are you doing in my closet? Can I help you find something? Do you want me to hang a deodorizer in here? I'll do my best to listen to my wife from now on."

He said, "You do a good job of keeping your house in order. It is clean and neat. Your yard always looks so nice."

"My wife does that," I said.

"I know. You put in a lot of time trying to keep your house looking nice. You even had the outside of your house painted. I can see that what things look like on the outside is important to you."

With some pride, I said, "It is important."

"The reason you do is you want people to have a good opinion of you."

"Lord," I said, "I hope you are not suggesting that I am insincere."

"No," he said, "what I am suggesting is that there is something rotten in your secret closet that you try to keep hidden from others. Like an offensive odor that fills a house, it affects everything you do. It affects your relationship with your wife and children. It often surfaces as anger like hot lava spewing up from the depths of the earth. It causes you sleepless nights. It depresses you on the one hand and then leads to outrageous behavior on the other. It makes you feel worthless and then it makes you feel invincible, as somehow deserving or cheated."

I felt like I was standing at the edge of a cliff about to be pushed off. "Lord, I am not sure what you are talking about."

He said, "Like I told the religious leaders, the Pharisees, back in the day, they spent a lot of time keeping the cup clean on the outside while the inside was filthy. They made me angry because they claimed to love God, but their hearts were far from him. I felt sorry for them because they were completely blind to the greed and self-indulgence that made them act the way they did. I told them once they looked like whitewashed tombs, beautiful on the outside but full of bones and filth on the inside."

"That was a good one, Lord."

"I know," he said, as he reached over and took hold of my vacuum cleaner. I noticed it wasn't plugged in, but he started sweeping the carpet in my closet. I could hear things being sucked up. I couldn't believe it. Here was the Lord of the Universe doing house work. I tried to convince him to let me do the vacuuming, but to no avail. I could see his jaw was set. I saw sweat begin to drip from his brow. He went into all the corners. He went up high on the shelves. He got behind all the clothes. I didn't realize my closet was that dirty. I thought he would never stop. I didn't know what to do. He just kept going until I thought maybe he was just trying to make a point.

"Lord, that's enough. Please stop."

But he didn't stop. He vacuumed like there was no tomorrow. I heard things being sucked up, things I couldn't even see. But I knew their names – resentments, self-pity, doubts, secret sins, lust, jealousy, and more. Finally, Christ yelled, "Can you smell it yet?"

I didn't know what he was talking about. I said, "I'm not sure." Obviously not happy with my answer, he kept going. He went back into the corners, up on the shelves, behind the clothes, under the shoes. I heard more things getting sucked up – a critical spirit, blaming attitude. I was about to scream, "Stop!" when suddenly I smelled something.

I smelled it. It was the smell of freshness. Sort of like clean clothes just out of the washer and dryer. Sort of like the smell of a baby's skin after a bath, sweet and innocent. It was more like the smell of crystalline mountain air slightly scented with the sweetness of spring flowers blooming in the meadows. My head grew dizzy, but not with a sickening dizziness. It was more like a lightness of being like when you first fall in love. I drew the air deep into my lungs. I felt as if I were floating, levitated by grace. I checked to make sure my feet were still on the floor.

Christ looked at me as if he knew. A smile broke across his lips. He finally stopped vacuuming. "Lord," I blurted out, "I can smell it!"

"I know," he said.

Then I confessed. "Lord, when you came to my door and I invited you into my home and heart, I thought you would find everything in order. I was honored that you stopped by. I thought, 'wait until I tell my friends' and all that. Now I see that of all the times I have invited you inside, I have never given you total access to all my rooms."

"That's because you have always treated me as a guest," he said. "**I did not die on the cross simply to become an occasional guest, an inspector general who shows up every once in a while to see if you are in compliance.** I died and rose again to gain the right to take possession of your heart and home." Christ held out his hand. I noticed tears in the corners of his eyes. "If you give me the keys to every room, what I did for you today, I can do for you every day."

I reached into my pocket and pulled out the keys. I looked at them with a momentary hesitation. I knew what this meant. I would no longer be the owner of my heart and home. This was the moment of truth for the rest of my life.