

Manteca Presbyterian Church

275 N. Main St., Manteca, CA 94538

209-239-3159

www.mantecapres.org

The Hall Closet

Larry Thorson

October 20, 2019

Psalm 32:1-7

1 Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

*2 Blessed are those whose sin the LORD does not count against them
and in whose spirit is no deceit.*

3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

*4 For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer.*

*5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I
will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my
sin.*

*6 Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the
rising of the mighty waters will not reach them.*

*7 You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me
with songs of deliverance.*

New International Version

This fall we've been using Robert Munger's book, *My Heart, Christ's Home* as the theme for our sermons. It pictures the human heart as a home with many rooms. One's Christian walk starts by inviting Jesus to make his home in our heart – and then Jesus goes from room to room – with each room representing a different part of our lives – doing His renovating work there.

Today the room we're going to look into is "the hall closet" representing how we deal with our private life. How many of you have a hall closet? Our hall closet is so small that if you took the vacuum out and the coats hanging in it, an adult might be able to get in it. It's not a space we can hide much in and besides it's right off the dining room/living room.

A better hiding place for us is the attic. We have two attics: one over the garage and one over the main part of the house. We have a hip roof meaning we have lots of space up there to hide things that we don't know where to put them but don't want to throw away. For example, my wife recently gave me some files that she didn't have room to put in her cabinets and asked if I would find a place for them. "Sure" I said. I pulled down the hidden ladder to the attic and dropped them at the top of the steps. She never goes up there so they're safely put away.

Now what's wrong with that method? If we do that too many times for too many things that we don't know where to put them, the ceiling is going to cave in. And who wants that? But more than that, it'll just make our lives a big mess. It's better to deal straight up right away with something than to try and hide it. Someday that filing system is going to come back to bite me.

Robert Munger equates the hall closet (or attic) where we're hiding things as that secret place where we put the things we don't want God or others to see. In the olden days, we called those things sin. But the word sin has come to have a very bad connotation, not that it ever had a very good connotation. Sins are those less than constructive things we do when we don't think anyone is watching. And Christians are pretty good at hiding them.

A lot of us were told when we were young that God was always watching us so be careful what you do. We were also told Santa was keeping tabs on us but that's another story. Somehow that warning of God always watching us gets watered down when we remember that Jesus died for all our

sins anyway. And besides we don't see God cameras anywhere. How do we know he's watching or cares?

Recently I read about the owner of a Tesla electric car that got keyed in an Idaho parking lot while the owner was watching his child's ball game. Little did the woman know, but Teslas have cameras with memories. When he got back to his car and saw the damage he downloaded the video coverage and watched the woman vandalizing his car. So he sent the video to the local police who started looking for the woman and then he put the video on Facebook where thousands of people watched her vandalism. There are cameras watching everything we do. George Orwell's 1984 is here.

If only we realized that God is more powerful than a Tesla and actually does see everything we do. So Dr. Munger pictures Jesus talking with him, and saying *"There's a peculiar odor in the house. Something must be dead around here.... I think it is in the hall closet."* Indeed there is something in the closet – something Munger describes as *"dead and rotting, things leftover from the old life."*

Back in our new church development days, we lived in a beautiful hillside house in Chino Hills. One day we got up and smelled something that wasn't right coming from our pantry. So we pulled everything out and couldn't find anything amiss but the smell kept getting stronger. Apparently a mouse or I believe a rat somehow had gotten into the wall in the kitchen and gotten stuck where he died. Now there are two ways to take care of a situation like that. One is to cut into the wall until you find the carcass, put your hand in there and drag it out. For some reason my wife refused to do that. The second option is to go on a vacation until the smell was gone. Guess which option we chose.

Getting back to that peculiar order Jesus brought up. This actually make Dr. Munger mad in the fictional story. He thinks to himself that he's already given Jesus access to all these other rooms in the house – and decides: *"This is too much! I am not going to give him the key."* But Jesus, reading his

thoughts, says, *“if you think I’m going to stay here with this smell, you are mistaken”* – and prepares to move onto the back porch.

Now imagine you have guests who have arrived to spend the night with you and your house smells so bad your guests say they would rather sleep in their car or on your patio than inside your house. How would you feel? I would be terribly embarrassed and in deep, deep trouble with my wife. Of course, what the hall closet pictures are the sins we know we need to get rid of and we know we will...someday but for now we really don’t want to get rid of them. And why not?

When we sin, that is when we do something that’s destructive to ourselves or someone else as well as hurting God, we do it out of anger or pleasure. Ask an alcoholic why they take a drink. It’s not just because it tastes good but it’s the buzz that they think helps them through their miserable existence. Why do we gossip? Because it’s fun and it makes us feel better even though it’s destructive. Why do we overeat? Because we can and if we don’t we might hurt the cook’s feelings and we don’t want to do that.

Most of us don’t set out to be harmful, although there was a guy last week who killed a number of people in multiple who said it was his dream to be a serial killer. That was his aspiration. I’m hoping we don’t have anyone like that. If you’re listening or reading this you probably already see yourself as a good Christian or should I say a “good enough” Christian. “I mean give us a break you say.” You get up on Sunday mornings and go to church, what else does God want?” “So I have a few vices?” “Doesn’t everyone?”

Bill Hybels, when he was pastor of the 20,000 member Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago, was once approached by a man we’ll call Harry after a sermon on sin who said, *“You know Bill, I don’t like these kinds of messages... I don’t consider myself a sinner.”* And Bill went along with this and said, *“Well maybe not. Let me ask you a few questions. You’ve been married 25 years. Have you been absolutely, 100% faithful to your wife that whole time?”*

Harry said, *“Well you know, I’m in sales, I travel a lot ...”* and Bill and he both knew what he meant. *“When you fill out an expense account, do you ever add anything that wasn’t strictly business?”* *“Everyone does that!”* *“When you are out selling, do you ever promise to ship something out tomorrow when you know it’s not going to go out until next week?”* *“That’s the industry standard.”* Hybels then did something I don’t think I’d have the guts to do. He looked him straight in the eye and said, *“Harry, you have just told me you are an adulterer, a cheater, and a liar so repeat these words after me. I’m an adulterer, a cheater, and a liar.”*

While our sins are probably different than Harry’s, we’re just as capable of deceiving ourselves and missing the blessing of forgiveness. One way we do this is by trying to “legitimize” our sin. That is, we take it upon ourselves to decide that certain actions are not really that bad. In this scheme, what is right or wrong is not what God says is right or wrong in the Bible, but what is right or wrong for me – we redefine them to fit our desires. Like a pastor I knew who left his wife for another woman because he said God was leading him to do it. We convince ourselves that sin is not sin. We do this all the time.

Or we try and minimize our sin. We pretend like it’s not a big deal. *“It’s not really hurting anyone – it’s not that big a deal,”* we say. Or we compare ourselves to others: *“Its not like I’m a murderer or something - there are lot of people with worse things in their hall closets!”*

A third way we deceive ourselves and miss the blessing of forgiveness is when we try and rationalize our sin – make excuses. *“I just can’t help from getting angry – I’m an emotional person.”* Or *“The government has enough money – this little fudge on my taxes won’t really hurt anyone.”* Or we rationalize our sin by blaming others – like Adam did when God asked him why he had eaten of the forbidden fruit. Do you remember who he blamed? The woman! – and we men have been blaming women ever since! And not just any woman – but *“the woman you put here with me, she gave me some of the fruit!”* It’s not my fault – it is your fault, God, or someone or something

else's fault – my family history, my genes, my financial situation, the pressure I'm under – we rationalize our sin.

A final way we deceive ourselves and miss the blessing of forgiveness is when we try and hide our sin. That is, we try and pretend it's not there – hide it away so that no one can see it. We fool ourselves into thinking that if we can keep people from seeing our sin – if we look good to others – have the right image – then we're OK. All of this is nothing less than self-deception – it doesn't deal with the reality of what we have in our hall closet! Thank God for closet doors.

That's why whenever the Scripture gives a summary of the good news of Jesus' forgiveness and new life – the gospel – that there is always one word used to describe the response desired – do you know the word? John the Baptist used it in Matthew 3, as did Peter at Pentecost, and of course Jesus over and over. Here it is: ***“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”*** (Matthew 4:17).

We receive forgiveness through repentance – in the Scripture it's the fundamental response to the good news. This doesn't mean we earn our forgiveness by repenting – for forgiveness can't be earned – there is nothing we can do to deserve it. God doesn't force us to repent either. That's why the call is to “repent.” You see, “repent” means simply “to turn around.” To stop heading in one direction and to start going in the other – to stop heading away from God, and to start heading toward Him – to stop moving away from His forgiveness, and to turn and embrace it. When we do this ... when we repent – turn around – what we find is that God has been pursuing us all along, that He's already provided for our forgiveness, and ready to embrace us and begin His healing work in us.

In *My Heart, Christ's Home*, Munger finally does come to the point where he realizes that trying to keep Jesus out of the hall closet doesn't make any sense, and so he comes to Jesus and says, *“I'll give you the key, but you'll have*

to open the closet and clean it out. I haven't the strength to do it." And Jesus says, *"I know you haven't. Just give me the key. Just authorize me to handle that closet and I will."* And that's just what Jesus does – and what Munger discovers is that joy that comes when we allow Jesus to do that work: What release and victory to have that dead thing out of my life. No matter what sin or what pain there might be in my past, Jesus is ready to forgive, to heal and to make whole.

I really like My Heart, Christ's Home, obviously but in this section I call what he wrote putting a pretty little bow on a messy package. In other words, it sounds nice but getting sins out of our life doesn't normally happen like that. I've seen enough alcoholics in my life who accept Jesus in their life who weren't able to break the addiction. They supposedly give Jesus the key to their closet but it stays just as messy.

The act of giving the key to the closet to Jesus, is that moment when we acknowledge we have a problem. It's then in the open where it can be dealt with. My wife tells me all the time that unless the counselee admits they have a problem, they can't get fixed. That moment needs to come everyday.

I think the hardest people to clean up their closets are religious people because we think we're somehow letting Jesus down if we admit we have a problem. None and I mean none of us, myself included ever have it altogether. We're all messed up. But those who will admit their mess and be willing for Jesus to deal with it are the ones who will overcome. So here's my recommendation, don't just give Jesus the key to the closet, pull the whole door off! Admit everyday that you have a problem and then see what He does!

IF YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW HOW TO GET STARTED IN FAITH

1. Recognize that everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's ideal

Romans 3:23-24

2. Know that the wages or payment for sinning is death

Romans 6:23

3. But God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us

Romans 5:8

**4. It is our responsibility to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and allow
Him to become the master of our life**

Romans 10:13

Invite Jesus into your heart by praying something like the prayer below...

"Dear Lord Jesus, in many ways I have sinned against you. I am sorry and want to turn from my sinful ways. I invite you to come into my heart and begin to make me like yourself. I commit my life wholeheartedly to you now. Thank you for saving me."