

## Where would I go?



Where would I go? To whom do I go? It was in 2005 when I stood on the sidewalk looking at our church asking these questions and wondering what I should do. As a clergy abuse victim years ago in another diocese, I was dealing with pain and complex emotions about “The Church.”

Sadly, I wondered why I am giving of my time and serving in the Church, the very organization that did this to me. At the same time, my parish provided spiritual nourishment I desperately needed. I was torn. If I walk away, where would I go? Am I walking away from God too? Doing nothing seemed to be the safest thing for now. Hurting made decisions difficult. My thinking was clouded by conflicting emotions. Yet in my heart, I knew it was ultimately Christ and the people of God I was serving.

Each week I was gripped with anguish as I met with my therapist digging up the wounds of my abuse. Did I really want to remember? What good was this doing? It seemed I was going in reverse with more anger and bitterness emerging. But God was a constant thread during this time so I wondered “What did He want?” What good could God possibly bring out of this? As when surgery is needed, it can become more painful before it gets better. And it did! I had yet to turn that corner toward healing or how I felt about the Church.

Weeks of therapy became months. Pain and confusion over what happened to me were ever present. Every day I questioned God. The past became who I was in the present. Maybe it would have been better to not remember. But I did and there was no turning back.

In the meantime, I continued within the Church. My faith was in God who was there in the midst of this. Then it dawned on me one day that this is HIS Church – it does not belong to my abuser. I knew and experienced a loving God.

Of course, I didn’t understand as a child of seven and I still don’t understand as an adult. How could this happen to me? There was now a huge smudge on my life. No matter how hard I scrubbed, it remained. But in time, I learned that God’s glory and goodness outshines any smudge, no matter how huge it seems.

The seasons changed and therapy ended. It began in early spring and now it was mid-winter. I wasn’t completely healed, but like post-surgery was sent home to continue my recovery. Lingering pain remained but God was there to dress the wounds.

As I continued this healing process and tried to recover, I realized I never made a final decision about “The Church.” Maybe I needed to stay in this place for now, as it was what I knew. Oddly there was some security here. But if I chose to leave, where would I go and would God go with me? There was no place. Who has the answers? Who knows my hurts and can see every oozing wound? No one but God.

While I was busy remembering it all in therapy, God was working without my realizing it. I was experiencing psychological healing and God was healing my soul. Complete healing can only come about with God.

Yet there was the constant question of “Why me?” If I ask “Why me” concerning something I did not deserve as a child, then all the more I must ask “Why me” about the abundance of God’s grace and blessings I was receiving, which I did not deserve. God owned me nothing.

So now it’s 2018 and I experience deep sadness as I see sinfulness around me, and I grieve. Scars of the past are raw once more, but my faith sustains me, as does the Church. I cannot answer how. In this moment all I can do is share my experience of God’s love in my life. He was and still is there for me and will be for all His children. His love never fails. God is all He says He is. This much I can say:

“I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall.  
I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.  
Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:  
Because of the LORD’s great Love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail.  
They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.”  
– Lamentations 3: 19 – 23

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