

## God, Life, and Everything "The Shrivings"

One night last week I got a call from someone saying there were strange noises coming from our Parish Hall. When my son and I got there to investigate, we heard a loud screeching noise before we ever opened the door.

Once we opened it, my son said, "Dad, this is the kind of noise you hear in horror movies." It was like nothing I had ever heard before, and when we went from room to room to investigate, it almost felt like a movie audience ought to be shouting, "Don't go in the basement!"

So, we went in to basement.

And there, we found a broken circulator motor. I know this because the expert who came said, "You have a broken circulator motor." But when opened the door to the boiler room where the noise came from, all we knew was that it was so loud, we could barely hear ourselves. I made a recording of the noise on my iPod just in case anyone needed to hear.

The next night, we had a youth group overnight, and my son said, "Play the recording, Dad." I did, and the kids' reaction ranged from "Cool!" to "Great, now I'm not going to be able to sleep!"

Next, we got down to some religious talk, in particular talking about Lent and the pancake supper we had just had on Tuesday. In Anglican tradition, we celebrate "Shrove Tuesday" - the day before Ash Wednesday - with a pancake supper. (I know, the French have that wild festival known as Mardi Gras, and the Germans have a wild festival called Karnival. The English ... they eat pancakes).

Someone asked how we got the name "Shrove Tuesday," so I went into the story of how people were supposed to go to confession - to "shrive" in the Middle English - on the Tuesday before Lent so they could start with a clean slate. So Shrove Tuesday means Confessing Tuesday. Confessing was Shrivings, and the person who heard those confessions was called a Shriver.

"Oh my gosh!" yelled one of the kids. "That would be such an awesome horror movie! We could call it The Shrivings!" We batted the idea around just for fun. Some psycho would decide he was responsible for making sure that sinners paid for their crimes. He'd call himself "The Shriver" and hunt down people, make them confess their crimes, and then off them.

This is what we do at youth group. Send your kids! Seriously, it was fun - and the conversation did eventually wrap back around to confessing and acknowledging our own sinfulness.

You see, it is important to confess. Not because the Church needs to control who gets into heaven and who gets dumped. We don't have any power to determine eternal life - that's all God. BUT, we do have a role in being the place where people can look seriously, honestly, painfully at their own sinfulness.

Nobody is sin-free, especially if you define sin as allowing your human weakness to get between you and God. It's our belief that when we steadily have our eye focussed on God rather than the fears and temptations of the world, we will see most clearly. We'll see suffering and be moved to act. We'll see injustice and discrimination, and be moved to overthrow it. We'll see those who are poor or sick or otherwise marginalized, and we will be moved to serve them as God's children.

Only problem is, most of us don't do that. We take our focus off God and put it squarely on our needs. Granted, you have to have basic needs met before you can even think about others, let alone God. But once those are met, the list of what we think we need just keeps growing. And then we begin thinking we earned it. That's sin.

And sin has long roots that intermingle with so many others that it's hard to know where your sin starts and someone else's begins. Or where your sin is distinct from society's sin. What's my part in gender bias that still keeps so many women from the halls of power? What's my part in the racism that sends an inordinate number of young black men to prison when young white men convicted of the same crimes go home? What is my part in keeping so many hard-working people in poverty because of unconscionably low wages (especially in mega-corporations)? This could go on all day.

That's why we have Lent. Lent is all about looking deeply, incisively at ourselves and recognizing that we are indeed pretty messed up. It's all about some good old fashioned shricing. Because when we look deep into our own lives, we find out a little bit more who we are. And when we know better who we are, we can love ourselves more - warts and all - as God loves us. We can know that our sinfulness doesn't get in the way of God loving us - ever. We can know that we have the power to make changes. We'll mess up, but we know it'll still be okay.

Many years ago, I had a friend who confessed what she felt was a serious sin, not as a priest but as a friend. I certainly didn't ask her to confess, but she needed to articulate it. Even more importantly, once she had given it voice, she needed to hear that God still loves her. She said, "Maybe nobody else will, when they find out what I did, but it's so good to know God does."

This is one of the reasons I like Lent. It's not a burden of ashes and sackcloth that we put on so we can be miserable for Christ. It's our chance see clearly who we really are - and to know God still loves us.

So think about doing a little shricing this Lent. It's good for your soul!

And seriously, it's won't turn into a horror story with some psycho "Shriver" to make you pay.

Probably.