

The House that Love Cleans

1 Timothy 6:12-19 By Patty Friesen (Nov. 20/16)

In this tender letter of scripture to his mentee, Timothy, Apostle Paul encourages Timothy to fight the good fight, to hold onto the faith he grew up in with his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois and to pursue gentleness, love, and endurance, the fruits of the Spirit as opposed to the world of gain and greed represented around him in Greek culture. Paul tells Timothy to trust in Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords and not to trust in riches but in God who richly provides everything for our enjoyment and to be rich in good works and generosity towards others.

This is the sermon that I wanted to preach at Sarah Hiebert's funeral. I know she wanted us to focus on Jesus and not on her at her funeral but she can't stop me now. I miss Sarah. I have her slippers that she left in the janitor's closet so I've been wearing them around my house and thinking about her.

I think about her when I walk around the church praying for us and our meetings and events. She really cared about this place and was meticulous in cleaning it. While I appreciated her organizational skills, I never quite understood her love of cleaning. I think she's the only person I knew besides my mother who actually loved to clean. I have the church-cleaning list that she wrote out from her hospital bed with a shaky hand for whomever would come after her.

The list is titled Clean Church, which is more of a command than a title. Then it says, "Vacuum church and repair vacuum brush – ask Garry Boldt to do that. Wipe benches once a month with Swiffer. Clean glass doors with Windex. Clean silver handles and plates with Windex. Wipe handles with sanitizer wipes. Do all the silver in

the bathroom with Windex. Mope gym and clean black marks – wear slippers while in gym. Vacuum entry and Sunday School rooms and tidy up. Mop bathroom floors with water only and mop kitchen and eating area with water only. Vacuum and straighten gathering room. Check fridge and give extra to people in need. Straighten Sunday School Rooms, Dust as needed with Swiffer duster. Clean outside area with Windex. Clean windows with Windex. Garbage goes out on Thursdays. Set temperature for Sundays and open piano Saturday night and water piano as needed 2 caps in 1 container. Clean spots on chairs with brush and upholstery cleaner on the complete seat or it will have a spot on it. Finally wash rugs.” Plus there is a map of the church with 32 areas listed for cleaning with deep cleaning in the summer months. And the last piece of instructions I have from her is \$12.50 in cash in an envelope sent from the hospital to buy Helen Peters lunch from the Osler Café, one perogy with onions and a slice of ham and salad.

1 Timothy talks about generosity and thinking of others and Sarah was a model for that and I’ll try to walk in her slippers doing that as well. 1 Timothy talks about God providing everything for our enjoyment and Sarah enjoyed life. What I appreciated most about Sarah – besides her drive to clean and organize was her ability to just sit and visit as well and she’d sit in the office and talk with Adeline and I and laugh and we couldn’t get our work done but it made us love her. She enjoyed good food that she would bring to the church office. She enjoyed going out with friends to the café. Here are following reflections by her friends.

Tena: Our kids grew up in the same neighborhood in Osler. Sunday mornings Sarah regularly came for breakfast. At a point of my life I was going through difficult times. One evening about 9p.m. there was a knock at the door. It was Sarah. Is coffee on? A caring friend and encourager.

Laurie: When I was part of the Warman RCMP detachment, I was hired ¼ time by the town of Osler to patrol the town. One evening I saw the midnight oil burning in the old town office, which was then across from the church. I knocked at the door. Sarah peeked out of the window and opened the door. Coffee was on. Well I better go do my job. Sarah replied if you need help just call me. Oh yes, you are asked to the annual town of Osler Christmas banquet. Well I don't think so. Sarah replied – this is not an option.

Kathy Boldt: We can give Sarah many titles and attributes. Recycler, cleaner, investigator, instigator, big on insistence, such as yes you can and will. A mind like a memory stick especially concerning the town of Osler. But mostly a caring good friend. Friends do not always agree but remain friends none the less..

Sarah fought the good fight with cancer. She fought it with carrot juice until her skin turned orange. She fought it with unwavering hope and confidence that she'd beat it and she did beat it for three tough years. We all thought she'd come out of this summer's battle as well but when she finally accepted that she was done fighting, she turned toward taking charge of death and planning her funeral and turning her house and car title over to her boys. From her hospital bed she orchestrated church janitorial services and the Osler parade for the last time. She took hold of her faith and we'd pray the Lord's Prayer together and sing Be Still and Know that I am God as we sang it at her funeral. She reflected on the deaths of her mother and sisters and knew what lay ahead of her but wasn't afraid and actually held out some hope for more weeks in long term care but that wasn't meant to be and I wasn't sure how she'd deal with all that anyhow.

From Sarah I learned about death, about that final step by step letting go of everything we hold as important and precious, our homes, our cars, our jobs, our bank accounts, our families and finally life itself. Henri Nouwen had a brush with death in 1989 when he was walking along a country road and got hit by a mirror from a passing vehicle. He wrote,

In the emergency room, I let myself enter into a place I had never been before: the portal of death. It was the first time in my life that I consciously walked into this seemingly fearful place, the first time I looked forward to what might be a new way of being. I tried to let go of my familiar world, my history, my friends, my plans. I tried not to look back, but ahead. I kept looking at that door that might open to me and show me something beyond anything I had ever seen.

What I experienced then was something I had never experienced before: pure and unconditional love. Better still, what I experienced was an intensely personal presence, a presence that pushed all my fears aside and said, 'Come, don't be afraid. I love you.' It was not a warm light, a rainbow or an open door that I saw, but a human yet divine presence that I felt, inviting me to come closer and to let go of all fears. My whole life had been an arduous attempt to follow Jesus as I had come to know him through my parents, friends and teachers. I had spent countless hours studying the scriptures, listening to lectures and sermon, and reading spiritual books. Jesus had been very close to me, but also very distant; a friend, but also a stranger; a source of hope, but also of fear, guilt and shame. But now when I walked near the portal of death, all ambiguity and all uncertainty were gone. He was there, the Lord of my life, saying, 'Come to me, come.'

This experience was the realization of my oldest and deepest desires. Since the first moment of consciousness, I have had the desire to be with Jesus. Now I felt his presence in a most tangible way, as if my whole life had come together and I was being enfolded in love. (p. 19 Befriending Death)

Sarah had this trust in being received by Jesus and wanted the rest of us to have this trust and confidence as well. I hope I'll walk in Sarah's slippers when it is my turn to die. Let us remember our loved ones in their deaths and light candles in their memory. During this time, Terri Lynn will read the names of our members and our loved ones that we are aware of who passed away this year as they are printed in the bulletin.