
Thank You for Homecoming Sunday!

You arrived energetically! Thank you so much for getting to church this past Sunday! It was Homecoming Sunday at the Cathedral of St. Philip, and the place was electric. Old friends greeted each other. Newcomers met oldtimers. Ministry tables circled the parish hall twice. Children and adults were baptized everywhere. And visitors were awed at the energy of this great parish. Thank you!

In my Homecoming sermon, I recounted a story from one of my former parishes about how the Christian church is a recycling facility. Here are some excerpts, but I must tease you to read the actual sermon (available [here](#)). I ended the sermon with a story about a little girl, a story you shouldn't miss!

One of the most controversial things we started [at my former church] was a recycling facility. It wasn't controversial with the neighborhood; it was controversial with our own parishioners. Because, I have to admit, it was dirty. The facility used a couple of long, wire-meshed trailers, where people just threw in their used aluminum cans and glass bottles.

Right there in the back yard of the church! It got dirty. It got messy. And people complained. "How can we have the church looking so messy?" they asked. "It looks like a junkyard. All sorts of people are just bringing their trash over here. They're bringing their rubbish."

And those complainers were right. That's exactly what people were bringing to church. When we had our conversations, when people complained about bringing trash to church, I quoted the words of Jesus, "it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles. ... Or, "it's not what goes into a church that matters, it's what comes out."

... It was that year that I learned a new metaphor, a new definition for the Christian Church. The Church is the ultimate recycling enterprise. In fact, recycling is itself the ultimate Christian activity. We take what is old and turn it into something new. We take what looks like trash, and we turn it into something new. I am not talking about bottles and cans, obviously. I am talking about us. I am talking about human lives.

Is "church" just that place where we are supposed to look pretty and well-kept? ... Sometimes when we concentrate too hard on looking pretty, we repress other parts of ourselves that are worth emptying out. Churches should be the places where we accept the dirty and the messy, even the sinful. But sometimes we are afraid to admit our uncleanness here. We are afraid that we will be defiled if we don't wash our hands properly.

Jesus said, "It's not what goes into us that defiles us. It's what comes out of us."

How strange that some people are afraid of being honest in church. What is it that made us think we were supposed to be so polished and refined and white-washed in church? So many of us come to church trying to hide our weaknesses, trying to look too proper, and undefiled.

And when we are afraid to acknowledge our own shortcomings, we churches also become too afraid to take in the shortcomings of others. Recycling is what we are supposed to be doing! We are supposed to be accepting the dirty, and even the sinful, admitting it all before the grace of God.

As we at the Cathedral of St. Philip begin our new academic year, as we observe Homecoming here, I have a special plea for all of us: Please do share your vulnerabilities here! Please do share your weaknesses and pain. Please even share those parts of

yourself that you might be embarrassed about. That is exactly what the Church is about. We are a place that accepts you, no matter who you are, or how you dress, or even how dirty and defiled you might feel. The Christian Church is a recycling facility. We believe in Resurrection!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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