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Dec. 2018

A pool of sewage

A sewer line broke under my house recently. I don't know when it happened but by the time I found it there was a small pond of sewage in my crawl space. It was disgusting.

I wanted to fix the pipe but in order to get to it I either had to swim through a small pool of sewer water or find a way to remove it. I managed to pump out most of it but there was a thick pasty sludge left that felt impossible to remove.

It was so gross.

This thick, stinky, black sludge full of food and excrement was not supposed to be under my house. We have a system for dealing with sludge like this a system that failed me. I guess I should be grateful that I have a system at all since there are many in the world that never has access to a proper sewage system.

But there I lay under my house contemplating dragging my body through a smelly, bug infested, sludge of sewer.

I called my cousin, a plumber by trade, to ask him what he would do. He said "put on old clothes and get in there, it's only poop."

IT'S ONLY POOP?!?!

That was horrible advice...

I was determined to find a better way. After a few hours I finally got an idea...

Right next to the pile of sludge was a pile of dirt. It was fresh dirt...or at least as fresh as dirt can be. It was dry and sandy. I began to shovel loads of this clean dirt onto the grimy black sewage. I shoveled, mixed, shoveled, mixed, for about 20 minutes.

To my surprise the dirt was fixing my problem.

The dirt didn't cover up the sludge it absorbed it. The sludge dried out more and more with every scoop of dirt until finally all that could be seen was dirt.

The smell was gone. The bugs were gone. The black was gone.

Tentatively I dragged myself over what used to be a pool of sewage half expecting to sink into it like quicksand. But my solution worked. The dirt held, the sludge was gone, and I was able to position myself to make right what had gone wrong.

Does it sometimes feel like something is broken in the world? Violence has led to refugees. Political systems are abusing entire groups of people. Racism is rampant. Mass shootings are a monthly occurrence.

SLUDGE

Does it sometime feel like there is something broken in people around you? A loved one deals with addiction or a neighbor struggles to keep their family together?

SLUDGE

Does it sometimes feel like there is something broken inside of you? Plaguing thoughts of inadequacy? Paralyzing fear that you are not attractive, rich, or successful enough? Thoughts like these lead us to lash out at others, hide ourselves from intimate relationships and become dependent on shopping, drinking, sex.

SLUDGE

And when things in our lives break, especially when things in our relationships break, it leaves its own kind of sludge. A thick, smelly, infested pile of pain, suffering, and brokenness.

So what do we do with it? How do we deal with our suffering? How do we deal with our brokenness?

In an average day we encounter a hundred different “ways” to find healing. Buy the right clothes, own the right electronics, follow the right political leader, get beautiful, be successful, be smart...

These ways do not actually heal. They are lies from false deities promising salvation but delivering death.

Jesus offers another way.

There is a great quote that says “for the consequences of sin are death but the gift of God is eternal life...”

The consequences of our broken pipes are a pool of sewage. Things in our lives break, things in our world break, and things in our relationships break and the result is we die a little. We suffer. We hurt.

And Jesus came to absorb all of that pain, death, and suffering. He came to take away our sins by dying on a cross and rising from the dead.

He took on our sludge. He took on our suffering. He took on our death and He overcame it.

He is the clean dirt that we pile on our sewage. He is pure. He is whole. He embraces, loves, and affirms us. He doesn't require more...He doesn't demand perfection...He doesn't hold our brokenness against us...he doesn't allow our brokenness to define us at all...

He covers and absorbs all of our sewer sludge so that all that is left...all that you can see...all that God can see...all that eventually everyone will see...is something pure, whole, valuable, and worthy of love.

I invite you today to accept His gift by simply praying something like ...

I confess that at times I participate in the brokenness in our world, in my relationships, and in myself.

God I ask for your forgiveness. I accept your grace. I admit the truth that you do not hold my sludge against me. You do not demand my perfection. You do not allow my sludge to define me at all. I admit that I am clean because of who you are and how you love me.

I choose to turn away from trusting in anything other than you for my source of identity and salvation. I choose to turn away from the actions that continue cycles of brokenness...

And may I have the power to understand how wide, how long, how high your love really is. May I experience this love and by doing so be made complete with all the fullness and power that comes from You.

Amen.