

Giving Up the Ghosts

A reflection offered by Jennifer A. Hudson at the Celtic Service for Transformation, St. Paul's on the Green Episcopal Church, Thursday, January 30, 2020

Psalm 84 and Mark 4: 21-25

I've always had a fascination with haunted houses. Give me Gothic tales like *The Haunting of Hill House* and I'm enthralled.

Yet there was a period when haunted houses were the setting for many disturbing dreams. The narratives were always similar: a specter would follow me down a flight of stairs or lie in wait for me in a secret room. Sometimes the apparitions would have distinct, often horrifying features and other times they would be dark, faceless figures. The lighting was always dim and no matter what corner I turned or room I entered, there was no escape. I couldn't get rid of the ghost. It would either still be on my tail or it would face me head on. And always—always—just as things were about to take a turn for the worse, I'd wake up in a cold sweat.

Dreams of haunted houses often signify the ongoing presence of something we'd rather keep buried in our unconscious minds. The ghosts represent emotions we need to work through—disappointment, fear, guilt, shame—while the house itself represents unresolved issues that may have contributed to those repressed emotions. Underneath it all, dreams of haunted houses alert us to our subconscious desire for reconciliation and healing.

Indeed, I was in need of great healing when I was having those dreams. For me, the ghosts represented unresolved feelings of shame about my body and sexuality. I needed a safe space where I could give up those ghosts, reconcile with my past, and move with confidence and grace into my present and future as the person God created me to be. That's when I found 60 East Avenue, Norwalk, thanks to Father Nicholas.

I suspect many of us came to St. Paul's because we needed a refuge from whatever personal afflictions haunted us. Whenever I read the Psalmist's description of God's dwelling as a happy one, full of light, like a nest, a sanctuary, it's hard not to think of St. Paul's. And I don't think there's many of

us who haven't found God here. Yes, we see God's beauty in our buildings and grounds, but where we find the *living* God at work is in each other, in every person we radically welcome through our doors.

This faith community is a far cry from a haunted house. It's a place where shame, guilt, fear, and other negative emotions have no home. It's where I've seen many of us rescued from the ghosts of our past and find new life. That's because the lamp of God's loving and healing light shines brightly here, unhidden, in every single one of us. The only spirit within this place is The Holy One. And, thanks be to God, She transforms what haunts us, even when we're not fully aware of it.

As we begin a new chapter at St. Paul's with Father Daniel, may we continue to be a beacon to those who seek refuge and healing and help them, too, give up their ghosts. Amen.