

**32963 article by Rev. Drs. Casey and Robert Baggott
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Chirpy the Bird, and Other Songless Lives

Years ago a newspaper in Galveston, Texas ran a story about a woman and her parakeet, Chirpy. Chirpy was the woman's pride and joy, and he responded to her loving attentions by singing all day long. But one day, the woman decided to do a thorough cleaning of Chirpy's cage. She brought out her canister vacuum cleaner and set about vacuuming the debris from the bottom of Chirpy's cage. In the midst of this process, her phone rang. As she reached over to answer the phone, the vacuum tube tilted up a bit, and she heard the unmistakable sound of Chirpy being sucked into the vacuum cleaner.

Immediately, the frightened woman threw down the phone and ripped open the vacuum collection bag, where she found little Chirpy, stunned but still alive. Since the bird was now covered with soot and dirt, the woman grabbed him and ran into the bathroom, held him under the faucet, and washed all the soot and dirt from his feathers. When she finished this, she saw the hair dryer sitting by the sink. She turned it on, held Chirpy up in front of the blast of hot air to dry him off, then placed him back in his cage.

When her friends and family heard about poor Chirpy's mishap, they asked about how he was doing. The woman replied that Chirpy seemed to have weathered it all, unscathed. But sadly, he no longer sang. He simply sat on his perch all day and stared.

Can't we understand Chirpy's response of stunned inertia at experiencing this unprecedented assault? Ever felt like Chirpy? Sucked up, hosed down, and blown dry?

When we hear the national economic news, many of us could very well feel like the unfortunate bird. After all, we've been sucked up into a mess not of our own making. We've been subjected to a hosing-down in an attempt to rectify the problem. And then we have listened to blast after blast of hot air concerning how we got here and how to fix it. Frankly, it leaves us all a little stunned doesn't it, and like Chirpy, caught in a kind of inertia of uncertainty?

We may feel justified in simply sitting on our perches and staring for a time. But ultimately withdrawal, resignation, and inaction are not consistent with the messages of our faith. We are called to be people who look for possibility and engage with others in the world's renewal.

This is possible, despite trying circumstances, when we call upon our deepest spiritual convictions. We like the way theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, phrased his convictions: "Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore, we must be saved by hope. Nothing that is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore, we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we must be saved by love." Faith, hope, and love.

If you've been stunned into silence by events in your life, and become stranded and songless, then we urge you to review your convictions. What does your faith teach you about the mandate to become engaged with others in solving problems? What does it say about the possibility for renewal and the hope for better things? Let's leave our perches and sing out that good news. No matter what life has dealt us, don't we all still have a song to sing?