

Do Not Be Afraid

8-13-17

Do not be afraid. That's what Jesus told Peter and what He is telling us. Do not be afraid. That might be an easy concept to grasp if your job is secure and your family is secure and your health is secure. That's because God seems very present in your life. But what if your job is anything but secure, if you even have a job? What if your family is one of those that puts the "dys" in dysfunctional? And what if you got the diagnosis you feared, that the little ache, the minor irritation is anything but minor? What then? Is it okay to be afraid then?

Perhaps we can take a lesson from an unknown prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. It seems he wrote on a wall there: I believe in the sun, when it isn't shining. I believe in love, even when there is on one there. And I believe in God, even when He is silent. If anyone had a reason to doubt the presence of God or be afraid of what was coming, the people in those camps certainly did. Yet here was a man who not only still believed in God but also believed in love.

You've heard me speak often about one of my favorite authors, Frederick Buechner and his daily reflection book called *Listening To Your Life*. In one of the entries, he says this.

My wife and I were buying groceries one day, and I was on one side of the store and she was on the other, and over a shelf of breakfast cereal and cake mix I said, "Don't forget the cream," and she said, "All right, but don't you forget you're trying to lose weight," and I said, "Oh well, you only live once." And then it happened, this thing that broke for a moment through my deafness. The store was nearly empty so that the woman at the checkout counter had no trouble hearing us. It was a hot, muggy afternoon, and she had been working hard all day and looked flushed and hectic there behind her cash register and the racks of Life Savers and chewing gum and such, and when I said, "Oh well, you only live once," she broke into the conversation, and what she said was, "Don't you think once is enough?" That was it.

It was a mild jest and I laughed mildly, but it was also very much not a jest because I had a feeling that what by some rare chance I had happened to hear was a human being saying something like: "I'll live my life out to the last, and I expect to have good days as well as bad. But when the end comes, I won't complain. One life will do me very nicely."

There are so many things to say, of course. One thing is that whether one life is enough or not, one life is all we get, at least only one life here, one life in this gorgeous and hair-raising world, only one life with the range of possibilities for doing and being that are open to us now. Intellectually we all know that we will die, but we do not really know it in the sense that the knowledge becomes part of us. We do not really know it in the sense of living as though it were true. On the contrary, we tend to live as though our lives would go on forever. We spend our lives as drunken sailors.

Jesus tells Peter not to be afraid and I would suggest that is exactly what Buechner is getting at. If we live our lives as the Christians we are called to be, we have no reason to be afraid. If we don't act like drunken sailors, to use Buechner's term, we will be prepared and have no reason to be afraid.

Author Richard Rohr talks about faith being that place between first base and second base, the in-between space where we're not sure we'll make it to second. We've let go of the security of first but haven't yet latched onto second. As Christians, we should always be on the lookout for those chances to get to second, those chances to put our faith into action.

Next weekend is the Back to School Bash and I have to tell you, I'm a bit concerned. Mind you, I'm not afraid just a bit concerned. You see, we are considerably short of what we need in the way of supplies and cash. Many of you have already contributed both and for that, I am extremely grateful. For those who have not, please consider becoming a part of this wonderful community event. We will be taking up a second collection this weekend and I ask you to be as generous as you can. We have also left the bins in the Gathering Space; if you have a chance today to go out and shop for items on the list that would also be appreciated;; bring the supplies to the office Monday if you can. We especially need folders and notebooks.

Mary McGlone suggests that our world is in desperate need of witnesses to the possibility of living Gospel values. We can help with a little piece of that need this coming weekend. And we don't have to walk on water to accomplish it.