

Easter Vigil 2017  
04/16/17

Well, it happened again. I had a pretty good homily ready for tonight. Actually, I had two I was working on and my dilemma was which one to use. And then I read the Gospel again and noticed that, twice in the Gospel we heard the words "Do not be afraid." Then this morning, in the daily meditation book *Jesus Calling*, author Sarah Young also used that as her reflection for today. So I heard God telling me pretty clearly that I was to focus on those words tonight.

Ms. Young starts by reminding us that Jesus tells us to trust Him; don't be afraid, the same words we just heard. Then she goes on to say that many things feel out of control. Our routines are not running smoothly. We tend to feel more secure when our life is predictable. She tells us we should let Jesus lead us to the rock that is higher than us and our circumstances. We are to take refuge in the shelter of Jesus' wings, where we are absolutely secure.

When we are shaken out of our comfortable routines, we are to grip tightly the hand of Jesus and look for growth opportunities. Instead of bemoaning the loss of our comfort, we are to accept the challenge of something new. Jesus will lead us on from glory to glory, making us fit for His kingdom. We are to say yes to the ways Jesus works in our lives. We are to trust Him and oh, by the way, we are not to be afraid.

Well, with all due respect to Ms. Young, that's easy for her to say. However, when I'm the one in the midst of a crisis or a whole batch of crises, I'm not usually focused on trusting in God and not being afraid. I want things to be fixed and I want them fixed according to my schedule and not according to someone else's, even if it is God's.

But another fact I've come to realize is that a crisis or batch of crises are much easier to handle when God places the right people in my life, to assist me, to comfort me, to challenge me, to walk with me. And that means I have to trust God and His plan for me. So far His plan has worked out pretty good in my life and I guess that involves me not being afraid, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Geoff Wood shares a story about a woman named Jenny who attended a class of his. She was always five minutes late, always. She would parade in, a pageant of one, wearing a beribboned hat and shawls of lavender or purple, pink or rose, as colorful as a rainbow, more like a child than an elderly widow.

As a nurse and spouse of a doctor, she had seen the shadow of death fall on young and old. Woods felt that somewhere along the way, Jenny had decided to confront that shadow with color and thereby hold it at bay while she gracefully went about her business exploring the Garden of Eden all around her. But her pastel spirit was housed within a fragile body.

One day Wood was called to a hospital and was stunned to see Jenny so colorless, her breathing short, her eyes vacant. And he thought, "So this is what happens to Jenny and, someday to me. What's the use of all the color and majesty we contrive to forestall death?" What he didn't reckon was nature's intention to strike up the band, to spoil death's intent to abort Jenny's parade.

As he drove down the highway, a glare in the rearview mirror caught his eye. There and in the side mirrors the whole sky had become an incandescent orange. He muses that the whole sky became ablaze with the colors of Jenny, ablaze with lavender and purple and pink and rose. Wood said this experience revived his faith, for the whole panorama seemed to be a message from Jenny, telling him that she had survived the ravages of death.

Have you ever had a similar message from a deceased loved one? The right kind of bird or a butterfly or whatever, seemingly appearing out of nowhere. Coincidence? Perhaps. More likely, it's our loved one telling us everything is okay. It's also God's way of telling us not to be afraid, that He has everything under control.