

The gospel reading is from the book of John, Chapter 8: Verses 25-29:

Jesus is explaining to his followers that he is going away, and they cannot go with him:

“Who are you?” they asked Jesus. He answered. “I am exactly who I told you at the beginning. There is a lot more I could say to condemn you. But the one who sent me is truthful, and I tell the people of this world only what I have heard from him. No one understood that Jesus was talking to them about his Father. Jesus went on to say, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, you will know who I am. You will also know that I don’t do anything on my own. I say only what my Father taught me. The one who sent me is with me. I always do what pleases him, and he will never leave me.”

Let us pray

Oh, God, as we worship together, we pray that your word and our words will have meaning for us when we are in times of trouble, as we surely all will experience trouble and pain at one time or another.

Amen

Where Do You Turn in Times of Trouble?

As we heard Carol read, “God IS our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Be still and know that I am God.” We know that, we say it, we believe it, and yet.....

1. There are those who think they can handle their troubles all by themselves. Some might say they handle troubles, or

problems, or stress, in the way of the seven dwarfs. Bear with me, for there is a point here.

Happy – this is the person who denies the trouble or problem and decides to project happiness, thinking that it will go away.

Dopey – this is the person who escapes through drugs or alcohol so it will be out of sight and mind.

Grumpy – this is the person who gripes and grumbles about everything. It is somebody else's fault.

Doc – is the one who diagnoses everyone else's problem, projecting his own difficulties on others.

Sleepy – well, this is the one who chooses to go to bed and cover up his head and sleeps all the time, so he can escape the misery.

Sneezy – this one's stress shuts down his immune system so that he catches every little germ and becomes a hypochondriac. If he's talking about his health, he doesn't have to talk about his problems.

Bashful – he is the one who doesn't say anything. He hides his problems, doesn't say anything so that people will not guess his troubles.

The point is that none of these work. They do not solve the problem or the stress or the trouble. The trouble does not go away. In some cases, it is even made worse.

2. There are also those who don't recognize when God is trying to help us.

I have experienced this more than once. I remember one time in particular. It was not serious trouble for me, but nevertheless it was stressful.

One of our good friends in Missouri, Dale, died suddenly while I was working out of town. I came home for the funeral and arrived at the church just as his wife, Ruth, was entering the building. I prayed for God to give me the right words to say to comfort her. I hugged her, but not a single word would come out of my mouth. I felt terrible. But ...no words! I was disappointed that God had given me nothing to say. I visited Ruth a few days later, and she told me that the most comfort she felt from anyone that day was my hug. She said, "You didn't need to say anything. I felt your love and God's love." I was astounded! It was then that I realized that it was inappropriate for me to speak words, and I believe God was speaking to me, but I didn't even recognize it.

I'm sure you have heard about the man on the roof of his house during a flood. He cried out to God, "Oh, God, please save me!" Along came two men in a boat, but he waved them away. "God is going to save me." The water rose even higher, almost to the roof. Soon a helicopter approached, and one of the rescuers threw down a rope so they could pull him out of the water. Again, he declined. "Thank you, but God is going to save me." As the water was covered the roof, he knew he was going to die. He looked to the sky and yelled, "God, where are you? I've been praying for you to save me." And just as he was sinking into the water, he heard a voice say, "Well, I sent you a boat and a helicopter. Didn't you get it?"

Some people just don't get it! They (we) need a whack on the side of the head, sometimes.

3. And there are those who trust God, ask for help. Lean on God, and know that God is with them. And want to share this with other people. There are so many examples. Here are **four** that come to my mind:

First. The psalmist David wrote in the 23rd Psalm, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." The little phrase, "the valley of the shadow of death" is explained by Chip Ingram, author of a book called "I Am with You Always." He writes that "this was a frequent event in the physical life of the sheep. During part of the year, the shepherd keeps his flock in the lowlands, where the grazing is good. When the weather changes, and all the lush is up in the mountains, the shepherd leads his sheep through ravines and valleys to get them to green pastures. So, in the course of changing seasons, the flock must journey through the mountains, in and out of darkness in the "valley of shadows." Those shadowy valleys are where the predators lie in wait to capture their prey. As sheep go through the darkness, they can't see the predators. A lion or wolf could come out, snatch a sheep and kill it before a shepherd would know anything about it. When the sheep go through those valleys, they sense the danger. They know the fear. That's the scene David described.

Chip Ingram writes, "Literally, the "valley of the shadow of death refers to the flock's travels through unfamiliar and dangerous territory; figuratively, of course, it relates to those dark times when you cannot make sense of what is going on around you. The promise here isn't simply that God will take us through the shadow of the fear of death, but that God will take us through whatever crisis we face, no matter how

fearful or dangerous. David assures us that we don't have to be afraid because God is with us, even when we go through such valleys.”

Next, Meredith Andrew, a worship leader at Chicago's Harvest Bible Chapel, wrote this song to express her feelings.

From the last verse:

You're not alone,
For I am here,
Let me wipe away your every fear.
My love I've never left your side,
I have seen you through the darkest
night, Your darkest night,
And I'm the one who's loved you all
your life,
All of your life.

The third example is Christian Wiman, who wrote a book called, “My Bright Abyss” after he learned that he had an incurable and unpredictable cancer. He reveals what it can mean to experience St. Benedict's admonition to keep death daily before your eyes. In one passage he writes, “God is with us, not beyond us, in suffering.”

Last, I'm sure you're familiar with the poem “Footprints in the Sand.” There is a disagreement about who the author really is, and it has been attributed to several different people. This popular poem describes a dream, in which the person is walking on a beach with God. They leave two sets of footprints in the sand behind them. Looking back, the tracks dwindle to one, especially at the lowest and most hopeless moments of the person's life. When

questioning God, believing that God must have abandoned his follower during those times, God gives the explanation, “During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it is then, my child, that I carried you.”

In my own life, I have experienced the darkness and depression, the loneliness, the fear, and the abandonment by God. It was horrible! After I stopped asking stupid questions like, ”Where are you, God?” and “Why?” “Why me?” “Why don’t you do something?” it still took me a long while to look at the situation honestly. I began to pray to God to give me the strength I needed to get me through this valley – not take it away, but give me strength. And I did become stronger when I remembered these things:

“You are not alone,”

“God is with us, not beyond us, in suffering”

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble,”

and the “one set of footprints in the sand” when God was carrying me.

And Jesus’ words, “I don’t do anything on my own. I always do what pleases my Father, and he will never leave me.”

It made a huge difference in my life.

I believe it.

Amen