

Worriers Or Warriors?

John 14: 15-31

A commercial airline pilot on one occasion made a particularly bad landing. The wheels of the big jet hit the runway with a jarring thud. Afterward, the airline had a policy, which required that the pilot stand at the door while the passengers exited. He was to give each of them a smile and say, **"Thanks for flying with us today"**. In light of his bad landing, he had a hard time looking the passengers in the eye, thinking that someone would have a smart comment, but no one seemed annoyed.

Finally, everyone had gotten off except for one little old lady walking with a cane. She approached the pilot and asked, **"Sonny, mind if I ask you a question?"**

"Why no Ma'am, what is it?" said the pilot bravely.

"Did we land", she asked, **"or were we shot down?"** (Pause)

Maybe you've had days like that--days when it felt like you were shot down. Even worse, maybe things are going quite well for you, really. Your friends and your family tell you how fortunate you are. However, you don't feel fortunate. In fact, your life is somewhat tortured by a nagging fear that you can't even define.

A few years back, Dr. David Wilhelm treated an elderly patient named Jake. Jake was a farmer, and he worked himself too hard. He came to Dr. Wilhelm complaining of stomach cramps, and then back pains. But medical tests failed to find anything physically wrong with Jake. It seemed his problems might be emotional. Jake was a prisoner to his anxiety. He had grown up during the Great Depression, and had been haunted all his life by a fear of poverty. Finally, when the stress became too much for him, Jake committed suicide. Ironically, Jake was very successful financially. He wasn't in danger of going hungry. But, as one of Jake's sons commented sadly, **"I think what Dad really needed was the assurance from someone that things were going to be okay. I think if he'd had that . . . he'd still be with us today."**

Jesus was about to leave his disciples. Already they were meeting behind closed doors for fear of

their lives. He knew what lay ahead: persecution, imprisonment, even martyrdom. He also knew what they needed most--the assurance from him that things were going to be okay. So he says to them, **"I am leaving you with a gift--peace of mind and heart! And the peace I give isn't fragile like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid."** (John 14:27 LB).

Yeah, right. They would be torn apart by lions in the gladiator pits, they would be burned as human torches in Nero's gardens, they would be crucified upside down, but they weren't supposed to worry? He told them not to be troubled or afraid.

1) NOTICE - CHRIST DID NOT PROMISE HIS DISCIPLES A LIFE FREE FROM PROBLEMS.

Problems are part of life. Roofs leak, cars don't start, people get mad, feelings get hurt, we get rejected, overlooked, unappreciated. We get sick, tired, and sometimes victimized. All this goes with being human. As someone has wisely said, **"Sometimes we get the gold mine--sometimes the shaft."** Some of the problems we face are life shattering; others are just a painful nuisance.

Have you ever bought a used car that was a lemon? Someone has made a list of ways to tell that your new car may not be all you dreamed it would be:

- You notice that the car phone they threw in **"for free"** has a speed dial to Moe's Towing Company.
- The booster cables are not in the trunk but are permanently welded to the battery posts.
- The **"Purchased From"** sticker at the bottom of the rear license plate bracket has been removed.
- You get a **"Good Luck"** card from the previous owner.
- As you drive up to a service station for gas, the mechanic opens the bay door and waves you in.
- The little **"Service Engine"** warning signal in the dashboard comes on and reads, **"Me Again"**.

Anybody here ever have a car like that? It's all part of life. Nobody's exempt. If you were as virtuous as St. Paul **and** as charitable as Mother Teresa, you would still have problems. That's what it means to be human.

2) THE SECRET OF SUCCESSFUL LIVING IS TO HAVE SUCH AN INNER SENSE OF PEACE THAT YOU CAN MANAGE YOUR LIFE NO MATTER HOW SEVERE THE PROBLEMS.

Maybe you know the story of Olympic speed skating champion, Dan Jansen. Dan was the favorite in

the 1988 Calgary Olympics. Just before he was to race, news reached him that his sister Jane's long battle against leukemia had ended in death. **"When I finally got on the ice for the 500-meter race,"** writes Dan in his autobiography, Full Circle, **"I felt wobbly, as if I hadn't been on skates in six months."** He thought of Jane. **"Jane is dead. Should I be here? How can my parents cheer for me while facing the burial of their child? Jane is dead."**

Unable to concentrate, Jansen had a terrible Olympics. His poor performance was compounded by his guilt. **"You jerk,"** he thought, **"your sister just died."** His lack of success at skating should not matter to him under such circumstances, he thought, but it did.

Things did not improve much for Dan in the 1992 Olympics. In spite of a history of winning championships in other venues, he was becoming regarded as an athlete who **"chokes"** when his biggest test of all comes. He retained the services of a sports psychologist, but still slips and falls marked his performance.

Then came the 1,000-meter race at those same '92 Olympics. He had never won this event before, but he knew this was probably his last chance ever to win a gold medal. Approaching the starting line, he touched a ring around his neck containing the birthstone of his eight-month-old daughter, Jane. She was named after his late sister.

Once more, in a major race, Dan slipped. But this time he did not falter as he had before and when he crossed the finish line the noise was deafening. After years of intense training, four trips to the Olympics, and five humiliating falls, Dan Jansen finally won his Olympic gold medal. Dan will be the first to tell you that the victory was won on the ice only after it was won in his own heart and mind.

That's where most contests are won--not only in sports, but also in life. They are won first in our hearts and minds. Jesus wasn't worried about the obstacles his disciples would face, but the inner strength and discipline with which they would face them. Would they be **worriers** or would they be **warriors**? And so he promised them that even though he must leave them physically, he would not leave them spiritually.

3) CHRIST PROMISED THEM THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO GIVE THEM COURAGE AND

COMFORT IN THE DIFFICULT DAYS THAT LAY AHEAD.

Courage and comfort. Are these not the prerequisites for being Christian warriors? Think of the courage that followers of Christ needed to endure after he left them. Most were murdered because they would not renounce their faith. Still they persevered. How could they do it without God's spirit within? People of courage are a rare breed, but what would the world do without such people?

James W. Moore, in his book **Standing on the Promises or Sitting on the Premises**, tells about an American citizen some years ago who was visiting the city of Damascus. He went to the famous marketplace on the street called ***Straight***. The marketplace was busy, crowded, teeming with merchants and shoppers and tourists. Into that bustling place came a man riding slowly through the crowd on a bicycle, precariously balancing a basket of oranges on the handlebars. A porter who was so bent over, carrying a heavy burden, that he had not seen him, bumped him accidentally. The burden dropped, the oranges were scattered, and a bitter altercation broke out between the cyclist and the porter.

Angry words, threats, hostilities were shouted. A crowd gathered to watch what was certain to become a bloody fight. The enraged cyclist moved toward the porter with a clenched fist. Just then, a tattered little man stepped out of the crowd and positioned himself between the adversaries. Then the little man did an amazing thing. He reached out, tenderly took the cyclist's clenched fist in his hands, and gently kissed it! He kissed his fist! A murmur of approval swept over the crowd. They laughed, and then they applauded. The antagonists relaxed and hugged each other. And all the people began happily picking up the oranges.

When the little man began to drift away, the American followed him and spoke to him: **"What a brave and beautiful thing you did!"** he said. **"That was wonderful, but why did you do it? Why did you risk it?"**

The little man smiled and answered, **"Because I am a Christian! The Spirit of Christ was in me, and he gave me the courage to be a peacemaker. He gave me the courage to do the right thing."**

Courage is a rare commodity in today's world. The early followers of Jesus gained their courage from the presence of Christ's Spirit within them. And that's good news for us. There are times when you and I need to be courageous--to stand up for those things that are right and good and lasting. They received courage and they received comfort.

The year was 1887, and a humble music professor named A.J. Showalter received some sad news. Two of his former students had just lost their wives. Both of these men were in despair, and looked to their old music professor for comfort.

Showalter had always been deeply devoted to his students. He had no comforting words of his own, so he turned to Scripture, where he found this verse from Deuteronomy 33: 27, "**The eternal God is your refuge, And underneath are the everlasting arms . . .**" Out of this verse, professor Showalter wrote a chorus to send to his students. You might recognize it:

"Leaning, leaning, Safe and secure from all alarms;

Leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms."

Jesus did not tell his disciples that they would not have problems. In fact, their problems would dwarf most of our problems. What he did promise them was peace of mind. He would send upon them the gift of the Holy Spirit to give them courage and comfort. They would be warriors and not worriers. And that is the same promise Christ offers us today. Perhaps you have come to this house of worship today like Jake seeking "the assurance from someone that things are going to be okay". I can give you that assurance. God's Holy Spirit is here to give both courage and comfort. Let go of your worry and lean on the everlasting arms of God.

Would you please stand – now reach out take the hands of the people next to you – move toward the center aisle – reach out across that aisle to take the that persons hand. Now let's sing the first verse of the hymn "**Leaning on the Everlasting Arms**". If you don't know the words just hum along. You may return to you seat but remain standing and join with me in the Apostles creed.

Pastor Larry Smith

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