



Campus Ministry Letter: Do not let your Hearts be Troubled

“Do not let your hearts be troubled; have faith in God and faith in me.” John 14:1

It was a cool Friday evening in October, late 1980's, and I was helping in the concession stand at the old football field. We were just getting ready to close for the evening when a young man appeared at the window. I recognized him right away as a good friend of some of our earlier alums. I could sense immediately that something was just not right. He had come, not for the game, but to talk with me.

I closed down the concession stand, and the two of us walked toward the school. I said that we could talk in my office, but he was adamant about not wanting to go into the school. Instead, we sat in the bleachers at what is now the softball field.

As soon as we sat down, Jim (not his real name, of course) began to cry. He said he didn't know where else to go, who else to turn to, and he remembered the many times that he and his friends had stopped by to talk with me. I said that I was thankful that he came to see me, and I would try to help in any way I could. “What's happening, Jim? You know you can trust me.” At that he began listing failures and losses. It seemed as though his life had completely fallen apart. “I've got nothing left. I had all these plans, J, and now everything is gone. I'm tired of even trying; it's pointless, just pointless.” I put my hand on his shoulder, trying to be of whatever comfort I could. “I came to say good-bye, J. . . . I'm done . . . I just can't handle it anymore.”

We sat there in the darkness of that night, talking about the darkness that had crept into his life. We talked for hours; and at one point, he got up and started to walk away. To this day, I can't remember what I said to him as he was walking away, but he stopped, turned around and broke into tears. I got up and hugged him, assuring him that it would be OK. I took him to his parents' house, and together we made arrangements for him to get the help he needed.

I haven't been in touch with Jim for years now, but I think of him often and pray that life has been kind to him, that God has kept him in His reach over all these years. Was he serious about saying goodbye, about not being able to handle life any longer? I think he was so lost in his losses, so deep in his despair, that he could see no hope or future. I think his goodbye was actually a cry for help. I don't think it was a coincidence that Jim's path had crossed mine; I don't think it was a coincidence that I was working in the concession stand that night when he came by the game. For me, a coincidence

is when God decides to remain anonymous. I'm forever thankful for the times when He has called me to be His instrument in the lives of the people around me. I pray that we might all be watchful of those opportunities when we are called upon to do God's work.

This story of Jim has been on my mind a lot over these months of the pandemic as I've witnessed and experienced and been touched by the losses of those near and far. It has been such a hard and long year for so many.

I pray that we're able to recognize, to talk about, and to share with those close to us what we've experienced, what life has been like for us; that if necessary, we're able to ask for help in dealing with all that has happened in our lives.

I also hope that we do not get so lost in our losses, so deep in our despair, that we fail to see the promise and the goodness and the future that lies ahead for us. We have experienced many Good Fridays during this past year; may we never forget the Easter Sundays that lie ahead of us. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life."
(John 3:16)

Love and Prayers,
Mike J