

Prayer

God, Let us listen with open ears, watch with compassionate eyes, and respond by loving one another. Amen.

There was a lot of activity and hard work this week for the rummage sale. Lots of items needed to be examined, explored, and sorted. A few years back I had to do something similar with my own life. I think everyone in this community knows that my husband Fred Rimmele, who was a member of this parish, died on United Flight 175 in September 2001.

As I stared glassy-eyed at the television, emotionless and in shock as I watched his plane crash into the World Trade Center. My hopes and dreams--gone. That life that I thought I was going to have--gone. I had to build a bridge to cross the chasm between my old life and what would become my new life.

After three or four weeks of severe depression, I came to hear God calling me to use this tragedy to build bridges toward peace and understanding. For the first time in my life I understood what Jesus was saying this morning about loving one another. However, in order to do so I would need to feel comfortable with my new identify as a

9/11 widow. The vulnerability of this identify and the loss of anonymity that came with it made me very uncomfortable.

I'm a closet 'seeker.' My family has never been comfortable with the G** word. My mother would duck down below the windows when the Jehovah's witnesses would call. So even mentioning God was taboo. Three of the four women in my family were widows under age forty, so perhaps that caused us to doubt the presence of God in our lives. But for me, the signs were clearly there telling me I was on the right path, where I was supposed to be. Against my wishes God had called me there.

There were moments of doubt. Ted Jeremenko is a contemporary American folk artist whose paintings of maritimes scenes have gained a national audience. My late husband wanted one of Ted's prints to grace the walls of our home. Whenever we passed the local gallery selling Ted's work, he would tug on my shirt sleeve asking if we could buy one. I was reluctant to accept an invitation from the American Red Cross for a support group for mid-30 widows with no kids whose husbands died on 9/11. The first meeting was 1+ hours from my house during rush-hour traffic. I doubted it would be worth it, but something told me to check it out. After meeting four strangers who to this day remain among my closest friends, I remember thinking to myself, "this was worthwhile, I'm glad I did it." I then opened the door to leave the therapists office to find a Ted Jeremenko print hanging on the wall right in front of me. I knew that I was in the right place.

My husband and I were married in 1997. Our fifth anniversary would have been in 2002. That was also the first anniversary of 9/11. The crescendo was starting to build early in the summer, so I knew it was time to get out of Dodge. I decided to go to Ghana, W. Africa to do some volunteer work. It would be a way for me to escape the 9/11 media blitz and also a way to explore the possibility of changing careers to public service. As I was preparing for my trip I decided to combine my camera bag and my husband's camera bag, taking the best of each for my trip.

As I was going through my husband's camera bag, I noticed his camera had exposed film in it. I brought it to the photo shop. When I picked up the photos an hour later there were pictures of friends I hadn't seen for a while. As I thumbed through them, I realized the photos were taken by him at our wedding. This was even more remarkable to me since the date was June 29th, our fifth anniversary. It was yet another sign that God's presence was in my life.

There are times when this presence has made me uncomfortable, and I have had to be dragged by the ankles, kicking and screaming along the way. Or have slammed the door. As I said, I like my privacy and anonymity. After 9/11 I took solace in exercise, and cycled the Cabot Trail. It was 5 days of cycling 50+ miles/day starting at day break at the ocean, climbing 1500' mountains, and returning back to sea level. After the last day of cycling I enjoyed a celebratory ice cream cone. A little boy came toddling over to me as I was sitting on the deck enjoying the ice cream. We exchanged smiles, then waves. We started playing peek-a-boo. I began talking to his mom, a woman slightly younger

than myself. I mentioned that I was from Boston, and only visiting Nova Scotia to cycle the Cabot Trail. She mentioned that she was on vacation. She was just staying for a few nights...her first vacation since her husband had passed away last year. *silence* I bid my good bye, got on my bike, and cycled away from there as quickly as my tired legs would carry me. I have come to see that grace occurs when preparation meets opportunity, and I was neither willing nor prepared.

These 'little signs' along the way took me to unexpected places. In the Spring of 2002, the group of close friends that held me during this difficult time invited me away for the weekend. All that week I had been cleaning out my husband's office. My thoughts were heavy just reflecting about all his stuff, especially the many boxes of books. An article in the NY Times sitting on the coffee table caught my eye. It was an interview with a librarian in Afghanistan. He said to the reporter, if you take only one message back with you, please let it be that we need books. The Taliban has destroyed everything.

This was another one of those 'a-ha moments.' My husband was not only a physician, but he was faculty in a residency program for doctors in training. I hoped it might be possible for a physician or medical student in Afghanistan to make use of his books.

The idea seemed kinda crazy, but unlikely things have been known to happen. I chatted up the idea with friends. One of them mentioned that she had recently heard an interview on National Public Radio with a guy that was building schools in Pakistan.

Pakistan is not far from Afghanistan. I wondered....would this guy building schools be willing to help me get the books to medical students in Afghanistan? Since I was the first person in my family to go to college, I understood the power of education to open doors to opportunity. Education had revealed to me the the big, wide world that existed outside of my little corner of it. There was something about this guy's work that resonated with me.

When I got home, I listened to the interview on Terry Gross' Fresh Air and researched his organization, Central Asia Institute. I emailed its founder, Greg Mortenson, asking if he might know of anyone willing to help me. Greg immediately responded to my email expressing his willingness to help. I flew to where he was based on Bozeman, MT. to meet him and try to figure out if this idea was at all feasible. If you came to St. Andrew's spring lecture two year's ago or heard me speak last night when Greg was awarded the The Salem Award for Human Rights and Social Justice last night you know that the books did indeed make it to Afghanistan.

What you might NOT know is that sending those books challenged me and challenged those around me. I did, after all, send the books to the very people who fostered the terrorists that killed thousands of innocent Americans, including my own husband. People have asked me how I was ever able to do such a thing.

My answer is simple, I sent those books with the hope that my late husband's love of medicine would live on by providing valuable resources to under-served medical

students in one of the most impoverished parts of the world. It is my sincere hope that his love of healing might come off the pages of his books into the heart of a young Afghani physician.

After meeting with Greg Mortenson, I admired the work he was doing and began to question the meaningfulness of the work I was doing in high tech making rich venture capitalists richer. I went to West Africa to do volunteer work and explore the possibility of transitioning from private industry to public service. When I arrived in Ghana, the sights, sounds, and smells were completely foreign to me. I noticed a topless woman walking down the street with a basket of whole fish on her head. She was as equally surprised by my bare legs as I was of her topless attire. I realized that the frame of reference by which I established my identity had been stripped away. After removing all the familiar things I used to define myself, what was left?

I tell you these stories because I had expectations about how my life would unfold. I tell you these stories because they are true and I tell you because I have walked thru the deepest, darkest valley that a wife can ever walk thru. And it was in that darkness where I heard God's call the clearest. In deciding what to do when life takes unexpected turns and twists, I have learned to listen for God's call. God is talking. God is talking to me and you. God is calling to me and to you to build bridges. The tools that God has called me to use are peace, love, justice, compassion, and understanding. God is talking and I am listening.