

The Message for Sunday, May 9, 2010 Mothers' Day

Title: "The Monster Under the Bed"

Scripture: John 14:25-29

I. Underwear, traffic, and strangers... If you were to ask my mother the three things she feared most when I was a child, I believe she would have said: (1) that her children would be involved in a wreck and not have on clean underwear; (2) that her children might try to cross a street without holding her hand; (3) and that her children might take candy from a stranger.

I am convinced these must have been her fears because she was always warning me and my sister: to put on clean underwear in case we were in a wreck; to hold her hand, especially in crowds and when crossing the street; and never, ever take candy from a stranger.

I know she must have had other fears; but she repeated these so much that they eclipse all others. Except for the thing about underwear, I think my mother's fears were all about the safety of me and my sister.

II. The dangers have changed... Today, after doing a little digging around, it is no surprise to find that parents still have the same general concern: The safety of their children. And yet, the dangers seem to be vastly different.

I recently read where a poll indicated that 90% of working mothers fear most for their child's safety after 3:00 PM. That is generally the time when school lets out. (A recent poll conducted by Sun Coast After-School Alliance states that 90% of working mothers fear most for their child's safety after 3pm. <http://www.forgeforfamilies.org/whoWeServe/dangerousHour.shtml>)

When I was growing up, the my biggest danger at 3:00 PM, after a short walk home from school, was that I might eat too many snacks before supper. As for other dangers: My parents were not so concerned about me seeing something inappropriate. They were in total control of every single piece of information that came into our home. Nothing entered the house that might contain information that would harm us. We did not even take *National Geographic*. They used to run photographs of cultures where people had a different sense of modesty.

Today, there is no question that we live in an age of information and communication. All kinds of information are available to anyone, at almost any time. But, just because it is available does not mean it is valuable or helpful information. Some of it is dangerous. And, I am not just talking about pornography. I am talking about things like how to cheat in school; how to make a bomb; and even how to take one's life. All of that—and more—is readily available on the internet.

When I was a little boy, the only drug problem in my house was trying to get me to take a dose of castor oil. I think that single, Saturday afternoon episode scarred me for life.

Today, one of the major issues facing many parents is the fear of finding some kind of drug in a child's room or in a backpack. I was shocked to read last week where illegal drugs are prolific in some elementary schools!

And today, the fear of taking candy from a stranger has been largely replaced with a fear of an inappropriate relationship with a family member or a trusted adult, particular teachers, counselors, and clergy.

Dr. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead is the Director of the John Templeton Center at the Institute for American Values. She has done a lot of research with parents about children and marriage. She often hears parents complain that they are overwhelmed by the culture. In fact, many middle class parents in America feel relatively more helpless than their parents. She says that parents see themselves in a struggle for the minds and hearts of their own children. And, it is not as though they can't say "No." There is just so much more to say no to.

Dr. Whitehead says that Americans once expected to rear their children according to the dominant cultural values and mores. Today, parents are expected to rear their children in opposition to what the public believes and practices. Beyond that, the messengers of cultural values have changed. Fifty years ago, the messengers were clergy, teachers, leaders and neighbors. Dr. Whitehead notes that today the leading messengers in society are entertainers and celebrities whose lifestyles are in direct conflict with what once used to be considered moral. (Ellen Goodman, "Battling Our Culture Is Parents' Task," *Chicago Tribune*, August 18, 1993 and quoted in *Focus on the Family Newsletter*, February, 1994. www.sermonillustrations.com. Also, see more contemporary sources on Dr. Whitehead.)

A mother's fears have always been well-founded. It is just that the dangers today are so much more pervasive throughout society. And, for the average American family, fear for their children is probably at a 65-year high.

III. Do not fear... In his Gospel, John tells us that as soon as Judas left the Upper Room, Jesus began to speak to his Disciples in a deeply spiritual way. At one point, Jesus said, "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But, the Holy Spirit will remind you of all that I have said." And then he said, "Peace I leave with you. I do not give as the world gives. So, do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." (John 14:25ff.)

The Disciples lived with fear of many dangers every day. It was intensified when they went to Jerusalem. They were sleeping with the enemy. However, when Jesus told them this, they had no idea how fearsome it was about to become. The danger became all too real the next afternoon when Jesus was mocked, tried, and crucified. Eventually, all of the Disciples but John were killed because they went out into the world to preach Christ.

However, we know how they faced certain death. It was because Jesus had said, "Do not fear. My peace I leave with you."

And so, in light of the fears most of us face, I want to make these several statements.

IV. Peace... The first is this. Jesus said he was giving us peace. Peace basically means a society that is operating harmoniously and without hostility. In addition, peace

means safety in economic welfare and interpersonal relationships. And finally, peace means inner strength to face discord or stress.

Peace is one of the most sought-after qualities of life all over the earth. And, I might add, it seems to be one of the most difficult to achieve. I do not know of a single person who doesn't want peace in his or her life. And yet, conflict seems to keep sticking its head in the door. Something always seems to be happening to keep us from being at peace.

Consider the average schedule of the average family with children. From my casual observation, it seems as though for the average family there is so much going on that there is no time for peaceful things. There is always one child in a ball game on one side of town, and another in a recital on the other. Or, one child has to be chauffeured from one thing to another without a break—all the way from the time school lets out until bedtime.

And then, the child finally gets old enough to drive. Logic might suggest that this would relieve some of the pressure. But, there is nothing peaceful about seeing your teenager drive off for the first time—or the hundredth for that matter, because we all know of the dangers waiting for them.

Where's this peace Jesus gave us?

V. His peace... That leads me to the second thing I want to say. When Jesus said that he was going to give us peace, we have to realize that it is not just any peace. It is His peace.

Do you remember in the Gospels when Jesus said there would be wars and rumors of war; and that nations will continue to rise against nation? (E.g., Matthew 24:6; Mark 13:7, Luke 21:9) Things that disrupt peace will always be with us. There will not only be war; there will also be disruptions in our homes and in our personal lives. And that is because this is just the way the world gives, to put it in a biblical perspective.

Even in the best of homes, someone is going to do something that will create division or anger. Even with the best of parenting skills, a child will be led to make a choice that he or she has been taught is wrong.

There is not a one of us in here this morning who was a perfect child. When I was a teenager, I think parents feared we might sneak a cigarette or somehow find a way to drink alcohol while still underage. I never touched a cigarette, but I can say that when I was in a high school play, one of my fellow students sneaked some whiskey into the dressing room and served us all a nip at intermission. I thought I was bad—and was proud of it!

There were also a couple of times when I tested the reputation of my father's Oldsmobile. I discovered, much to my delight, that a "rocket 88" really was.

Every friend I had tested his or her parents' admonitions in some way or another. Sometimes, we got away with it; sometimes we got caught. When we got caught, it disrupted the peace in our home. But, peace was always found, at least in my home, because of the strong presence of Christ.

I can predict, with some assurance, that the peace is going to be disrupted in your home. But, I can also predict with complete assurance, that if you have received the gift

of peace that Jesus gives, then any discord can be met and mended. And that is because the peace of Jesus is always accompanied with grace and assurance.

VI. Everyone has fears... And, that leads me to the third thing I want to say. Did you know that President and Mrs. Benjamin Harrison were so intimidated by the electricity that was newly installed in the White House that they did not dare touch the switches? If they did not have any staff around to turn off the lights when they went to bed, they slept with the lights on all night. (Jane Goodsell, *Not a Good Word About Anybody*, Ballantine; found at www.sermonillustrations.com)

During World War II, a military governor met with General George Patton in Sicily. When the governor praised General Patton for his courage and bravery, the general replied, "Sir, I am not a brave man.... The truth is... I have never been within the sound of gunshot or in the sight of battle in my whole life that I wasn't so scared that I had sweat it the palms of my hands." (www.sermonillustrations.com)

Just this past week, the cat of one of Amy's friends caught a live snake just as it was coming in the back door of that friend's apartment. She and her husband have an apartment that is like Amy's and has a terrace on ground level in the back. Amy said that she did not think there were any snakes in Manhattan. She does not like snakes. I know where she got that. I do not like snakes either.

We all, at some time, not only have disrupted somebody's peace. There have been many times every one of us was afraid of something. It is normal to have fears. It is normal to be afraid that your child is going to wake up in the middle of the night because he or she thinks the dark shadow was something scary. It is normal to fear that your child is going to be approached by a drug dealer. It is normal to fear that your child is going to be among others who encourage them to have intimate encounters. The list just goes on and on.

Someone once said that sometimes Jesus calms the storm; and sometimes Jesus calms us in the midst of the storm. There is nothing secret about it. Here's what I suggest.

First, you need to remember that there is nothing wrong with having fears. It is normal. It is the way we were built. If you are fearing something right now especially in your child's life, it is important to remember that you are afraid for them not only because you tried stupid stuff when you were that age; you also need to remember that your fear comes chiefly because you love your child. That is a good place to start.

Second, it is important to remember that there is no fear too big for Jesus to calm. Never, ever be afraid or ashamed to call on Jesus to give you strength.

Third, remember that Jesus is proactive. He walks on the troubled waters of our lives looking for those who need peace. Jesus knows our every need and is ready to come to our aid. In fact, there have been times in my life when I have discovered that I was so paralyzed with fear that I did not think to ask Jesus to calm me, and He did anyway. It was only later that I realized Jesus was there, long before I knew it, to bring relief.

And fourth: You do not have to face your fears alone. The late Adrian Rogers (1931-2005) used to tell a story about a man who was carrying a heavy load of grain down

a country road. A man, driving by in his wagon, stopped and asked if he needed a ride. The man accepted the ride and got in the back of the wagon. When the driver looked back, however, he saw that the man was still carrying the sack of grain. He told his passenger to put down the sack of grain and relax. The man said that it was too much to ask since he was already giving him a ride. (http://www.lwf.org/site/News2?abbr=for_&page=NewsArticle&id=6025)

Jesus not only enters our hearts to bring peace. Jesus also partners with other Christians to work His wonders. There are countless Christians who have walked that lonesome valley themselves; and because they did not have to walk it by themselves, they also want to walk it with you.

Jesus has given us the gift of peace. But, it is not just any peace. It is His peace. And, he wants us to know that our fears are real; but we do not have to live with them. Jesus eases the burden when we receive the great gift of His peace. Amen.