Along the track

The Angels in Our Lives

Sometimes the stories in Scripture speak to us loudly, if that's the right word. Sometimes they remind us of the unusual, the unfamiliar, and things that we don't ever think will happen in our own lives. Take Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist.

…Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name, John. "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. Lk 1 12-14…

It was no wonder that fear and confusion gripped him. Can you even begin to imagine Zacharias' turmoil? An angel doesn't appear to us every day and the message was even more confusing. His wife was well past child-bearing age. Was she sick? Was she insane? What could he do? So, the angel explains. Was Zacharias put at rest, his doubts and concerns overcome? Maybe, but that would take great faith.

Some of us are very lucky. We have a close family, close friends, confidants, people who will listen to us, especially when we want to talk through things we feel deeply about or when we need advice. We have people with whom we can share our joys and our sorrows, the good times and the bad times. There is someone there when we need help, someone to give us courage, to challenge us when we need it, someone to be a supportive presence.

We are lucky because others have to carry their burdens alone, a deep hurt perhaps, a troubling problem, an illness, an ancient wound. For them, quite often there is no one to listen, no one to hear or share. Those who need such heartfelt companionship can live in a kind of silent daily exile. Some feel hopeless, forgotten and unwanted, that no-one cares. And that can be worse than the problem itself. Sometimes they can be quite near to us.

On the night before his Crucifixion, Jesus gathered with his apostles in the Garden of Gethsemane. He went off to pray alone, and we are told that he was 'in anguish'. Jesus prays, he pleads, he questions, even at one stage he sweated blood. Jesus comes back to his apostles three times for support, but they are asleep. In the end, an angel comes to him and, as Luke tells us, strengthens him for what lies ahead. Lk 22:43

Today our 'angels' take human form. They are the ones who 'stay awake' with us, the ones who listen, the ones who encourage and support, the ones who go the extra mile. They sow the seeds of hope and comfort we all need. They sow the seeds of encouragement and confidence within. They go the distance with us when things get tough and even when we get grumpy. Some of them come for a short time, others for longer. Sometimes they are just there when we need them.

It is worth reflecting on 'the angels' in my life today, the ones who hear my unspoken words and feelings, the ones who listened when I needed to talk. Who are the ones who help me to accept myself as I am, not always trying to change me but encouraging me to be who I am? Who have been the angels in the past, who came to me when I was in need, or just when I needed encouragement and support?

I suppose some of us may remember the joke about the man stuck on his roof in a flood.

He was praying to God for help. Soon a man in a rowboat came by and shouted to the man on the roof, "Jump in."
"No, it's OK, I'm praying to God, and he is going to save me."

Then a motorboat came by. "Jump in."
"No thanks, I'm praying to God, and he is going to save me. I have faith."

Then a helicopter came by and the pilot shouted down, "Grab this rope and I will lift you to safety."
"No thanks, I'm praying to God, and he is going to save me. I have faith."
So, the helicopter reluctantly flew away.

Soon the water rose above the rooftop and the man drowned. He went to heaven. He finally got his chance to discuss this whole situation with God, at which point he exclaimed, "I had faith in you, but you didn't save me, you let me drown. I don't understand why!"

To this God replied, "I sent you a rowboat, a motorboat and a helicopter, what more did you expect?"

Sometimes 'angels' come in human form. Sometimes God's comfort and encouragement, God's peace and wisdom, God's listening ear, God's help in so many forms comes when we least expect it and in ways that may surprise us and even through the people we know and love.

Who are the unknown angels, the nameless,
faceless ones, who come to us unsought,
These angels travel not with silver wings
but with compassionate, human hearts,
moved by a guided nudge from far inside,
to speak a word, leave a smile, send a message. *Joyce Rupp*

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