

I was in college when I saw this happen. I had gone to a Jazz concert with a friend. It had been a terrific night. The music was lively. The crowd was into it. So was I.

The Jazz band that was performing for us was filled with talented musicians. One of the peculiar happenings of the evening is that they had invited retired Jazz musicians from the area to come up throughout the evening and play a couple of songs and jam with them.

It had been working out great. Until . . .

Until towards the end of the evening, when a name (that I have long since forgotten was called out). Many in the crowd cheered. They must have known him because it was more than just the polite cheers that came from those of us who didn't know him.

I turned and watched an elderly man, move down the center aisle . . . painfully slow.

It was such a shock for me to watch him walk down the aisle, with the aid of a much younger person, who helped him up . . . the . . . stairs . . . and . . . over to the large bass he was going to play. The aide helped him position himself on the stool. The aide helped him position the instrument so he could play it, as tired, hunched over and worn as he looked. And I found myself thinking, "O Lord how is this going to go? This person can barely move. What are we in for now?"

In the midst of the joy and life and energy of the concert, I found myself filling with a sense of anxiety over what was in store for us.

I thought of that incident recently as I was watching the news. I thought of those feelings, recently as I was watching the news, those feelings of anxiety wondering what is going to happen to

our economy and our world. That all led me to thinking about our faith, and our scripture.

Our scripture comes from the Gospel of Mark. It is the beginning of Mark's story of the good news of Jesus Christ. Ironically, this story begins in the midst of a time of anxiety. Israel is occupied by the Roman army. It was a time of uncertainty. It was a time of unrest. It was a time when people were looking for some good news, because they were filled with frustrations.

And from the wilderness comes a message from John the Baptist, a message from God. "There is hope. God is coming. A Messiah will appear."

The important thing about this message for me is that this message of hope and life, and promise, comes from a messenger of God, in the wilderness. The wilderness in the bible is often seen as a place of uncertainty, fear and anxiety. This passage is reminding us that when we walk through our places of wilderness, that we are not alone. It reminds us that God has not forgotten us. It reminds us that God sees the struggles we may be facing. The anxiety that we may be feeling.

This is a passage that reminds me that even when life appears at its darkest and we feel stuck in the wilderness, that as people of faith, our hope is in the one who comes to us. Who does not forget us. ***And the challenge for us as people of faith is, are we going to let our faith and trust in this God who comes, win out. Or will we give in to our fears?***

There is a beautiful song that some of you may have heard that I want to play a part of for you in just a moment. It is called *Prayer of the Children*. This song is written by Sam Cardon. He had visited Sarajevo during the time of conflict in the 90's. It was a

desperate time. The nation was locked in a civil war. Children were dying. Young teens were being engaged in the conflict.

Yet, he was struck, by some of the children that he had met through a religious organization and the hope they had for a future. And he wrote, in song, how hope that can arise from faith and trust.

Play the song, beginning at (.57)

This song reminds us, that our hope, our life comes from loving and trusting God more than feeding the anxiety of the moment.

So long ago, when I was at the Jazz concert and my anxiety was rising, wondering what was going to happen with this elderly musician that had been helped to the stage. I saw an amazing thing. As the music started, and the band started playing, a transformation occurred. As he played he seemed to come alive. As he played more and more notes, strength seemed to return to his body. He stood up from the stool he was on. He plucked at the strings of that big bass with a remarkable rhythm.

The song finished with him doing an improve solo. The band stopped playing and turned and watched him. I was mesmerized.

When he plucked the last string, he grabbed the bass and twirled it around in his hand. He stopped it and it gave a rich, hollow sound. He stood up tall and grinned from ear to ear. The music of his life brought him life. He walked off the stage and back to his seat, without help - one who seemed twenty years younger.

Are fear and anxiety weighing on you? Do you feel as if you are walking slowly, with aid from another? Are you feeling lost in the wilderness? Then hear this message of hope from John the Baptist, "The time has come. God is drawing near. It is happening even now."

May we learn to let the song of faith, sing through our souls and bring us life in these challenging times, so that we may trust God more, than feed the anxiety of the moment.

Amen