

Levántate y No Tengas Miedo
[Get Up and Do Not Be Afraid]

Que las palabras de mi boca y la meditación de nuestro corazón sean aceptables ante tus ojos, oh Señor, mi roca y mi salvación. Amén. [Salmos 19:14]

When I read today's Gospel lesson, the first thought that came to my mind was the sermon I preached to you last February about the time I summoned assistance for a Korean immigrant who was in medical distress at a bus stop; being ignored by those who passed by or who were waiting for a bus. I described this experience as a time when I encountered Jesus.

The text for my sermon last February was from St. Luke's [Luke 9:28-36, [37-43a]] account of the Transfiguration of Christ. Today's Gospel lesson is St. Matthew's account of the Transfiguration of Christ. Just as with Luke's account, Matthew's account of the Transfiguration describes the voice of God descending from the clouds saying: "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; Listen to him!"

Listen to him! It was that part of the text that spoke to me, because I believe that what Jesus would most want us to listen about is his Summary of the Law:

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. [Matthew 22:37-40]

And by listening to Jesus and by doing his will, we care for our neighbors in the same way that we would want to be cared for ourselves.

This is why I believed that my encounter with the Korean immigrant was relevant to St. Luke's text. However, St. Matthew's text goes a step further. In addition to describing God's admonition to "*Listen to Him!*," St. Matthew describes how Peter, James, and John were overcome with fear at hearing God's voice, and how Jesus came to them, touched them and said: "*Get up and do not be afraid.*"

So I say to us all: *Get up and do not be afraid!*

While there are many things today about which one might be afraid – walls that would divide rather than unite; bans on people entering the United States simply because of their religious beliefs; immigration policies that would separate families; a lack of access to affordable health care; an inadequate stock of affordable housing in our communities and neighborhoods; and an atmosphere of open tolerance of prejudice, discrimination, sexism, hostility, and violence against people simply because of their race, religion,

gender, or sexual orientation, to name but just a few – Jesus says: “*Get up and do not be afraid.*”

In my lifetime, the Civil Rights Movement was one of the most significant examples of people following Jesus’ admonition to get up and not be afraid. Led by the likes of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Height, Bayard Rustin, John Williams, Hosea Williams, Gloria Richardson, James Farmer, Jr., A. Philip Randolph, Roy Williams, Whitney M. Young, and many others, African-Americans and people of all colors and stripes stood up, and at great risks to themselves, organized and participated in peaceful, non-violent protests and demonstrations to oppose racism, bigotry, segregation, and to bring life and meaning to the words: *all people are created equal and are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights.* And, they were not afraid.

In that same spirit and with equal vigor, women got up and were not afraid to protest and demonstrate for gender equity, equal pay for equal work, and to be accorded with the same dignity and respect as a man.

Earlier this month, my wife and I saw the movie, Hidden Figures. This movie told the true life story of a talented group of African-American female mathematicians, dubbed “human computers;” who served as the brains behind the United States’ race against Russia to be the first to put a man into space.

Despite having to carry the burden of discrimination, segregation, racism, and sexism, these women quickly ascended the ranks of NASA alongside many of history's greatest minds specifically tasked with calculating the momentous launch of astronaut John Glenn into orbit, and guaranteeing his safe return. Dorothy Vaughan, Mary Jackson, and Katherine Johnson got up and were not afraid to cross all gender, race, and professional lines. Their brilliance and desire to dream big, beyond anything ever accomplished before by the human race, firmly cemented them in U.S. history as true American heroes and an inspiration to many. If you have not done so already, I urge you to see this movie. It is truly moving and inspiring.

However, one does not need to be an icon to make a difference. What is required is the courage of your convictions, concern for the welfare of your brothers and sisters, and faith in our Lord, Jesus Christ. There are many opportunity locally to make a difference.

For example, Grace Church is very involved in V.O.I.C.E. – Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement. V.O.I.C.E is a non-partisan coalition of almost 50 faith communities and civic organizations in Northern Virginia working together to build power in middle and low-income communities. V.O.I.C.E organizes in Prince William, Fairfax, and Arlington counties as well as the City of Alexandria uniting people across lines of race, class, religion, political party and geography to take action on key issues in our community including but not limited to affordable housing, access to health and dental care, and immigrant rights.

There are many opportunities to stand up and be counted; even today. Right after today's service at 10:00 AM, Grace Church and La Gracia members will gather in front of the wooden doors outside the main sanctuary for *Andar en Amor* – a walk in love and solidarity to meet and/or reconnect with our neighbors for a joyful demonstration of strength and community. I urge you to participate if you are able.

So, as Jesus said, *Get up and do not be afraid!*

En el nombre del Padre, del Hijo, y del Espíritu Santo, Amén.