Columns
Spirituality



A view from Michigan of a sunset on Lake Superior (Unsplash/Alan Labisch)



by Jane Marie Bradish

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

February 13, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

I have lived my entire life in the Upper Midwest region of the United States. The region has miles of lakefront from the Great Lakes. Besides shipping, those lakes are great for fishing and swimming and boating. They offer cooling breezes in the heat of summer and can enhance snowstorms in winter to the point of closing the cities for a day or two.

When a good storm kicks up, the waves are massive, beautiful, but also dangerous. In late fall, before the shipping channels close, those same massive waves can be deadly. Our lake bottoms hold many shipwrecks and maritime graveyards.

In the mid-1970s a folk song popularized one of the Great Lakes shipwrecks, the Edmund Fitzgerald. The wreck and crew rest at the bottom of Lake Superior; only the ship's bell was raised, and that was some 20 years after the ship sank. What happened on that stormy night nearly 50 years ago remains shrouded in mystery; the cause has never been determined.

Every year on the early November anniversary of the shipwreck, local radio stations play the song. This past year, part of the song lyrics stopped me cold, and I can't shake them.

Partway through the song, the songwriter asks the very pointed question, "Does anyone know where the love of God goes?"

I was not raised with the once-popular "God has a plan" or "It's God's will" mentality. Rather, I was raised to assist when I could, taught that we are God's "workers" during our time on earth.

I think we could all agree there are times when our world seems to be falling apart at the seams. All the good being done seems to do nothing. And so, the haunting song question becomes my question, too. I have no answer.

This November, the latest war in the Middle East was just beginning. I understand very little about the history and dynamics of the Middle East. I do understand that thousands of innocent people are being displaced or worse, have lost their lives. News coverage of a neonatal intensive care unit in a hospital with babies dying brought tears and anger and the songwriter's question.

I suppose the love of God was the medical personnel who did what they could to save those babies; it doesn't seem like enough, though.

Advertisement

The war in Ukraine was approaching two years. In my lifetime, Russia has always been the aggressor, taking what doesn't belong to them and banishing challengers to the unforgiving land of Siberia. The breakup of the Soviet Union and granting countries sovereignty in the early 1990s again brought hope.

But seeing Russia invade Ukraine, attack civilians, and bomb cities makes it hard not to classify any and all things Russian as bad. It is hard for me to find the love of God in oppression and war.

There continues to be great religious persecution in India. My community has two provinces in India and I'm very aware of the challenges they face. Christians and Catholics specifically are a very small minority of the population. Our ministries in India have often had the "blessing" of the government, as we cared for outcast groups. In recent years, there has been more and more persecution, and our sisters and those they minister to are sometimes in danger.

A similar situation is happening in Nicaragua, where we also have sisters. President Daniel Ortega is again arresting and expelling religious individuals and has taken their property.

When people are doing good work for those whom the greater society has no use or time for and are being persecuted or killed, where is the love of God?

> It's hard not to get caught in all the 'bad things' happening. The challenge is to keep looking for and believing in the love of God.
>
> Tweet this

Closer to home, neo-Nazis were holding rallies nearby. Protesting any and everything that does not fit their definition of a master race (Nordic white). And not to be left out, United States politics was getting nasty a full year ahead of the next presidential election.

The list goes on. Hate is not found in the love of God.

I'm not headed to the Middle East or Ukraine or India or Nicaragua. I won't be counterprotesting the neo-Nazis or participating in any of the nasty political campaigning happening.

Instead, I will sit with the song's question, one I find myself asking on a regular basis. I ask where the love of God has gone for a young parishioner on his second cancer surgery in a year. I ask where the love of God is for the young children six blocks away from my residence who were tortured by their parents.

It's hard not to get caught in all the "bad things" happening. It's hard to believe that the good things any one person does can make a positive impact when so much seems so bad, when the love of God seems absent. The challenge is to keep looking for and believing in the love of God, and not in an "it's God's will" kind of way.

My lived experience has taught me that questions are good, even when they are hard or don't have answers. Maybe in some simple way I can be the love of God for one person. What about you?