

A couple weeks ago, a homeless bird moved into the parsonage, and has been sleeping there since. A little bird built a nest on the crook of a rain spout, right next to the driveway.

Maybe it is the same bird that attempted to build the nest at the same place last year. It abandoned it, when the nest fell off and crashed into the ground. Tiny eggs were strewn about nearby, and I felt bad about it. The rain spout is rectangular, and it has the flat and smooth top surface. I suspected that the nest fell off by accident, when the bird flew out.

I do not have any problem with the avian squatter, but she seems to have a problem with me. Each time I pass by, she rockets out of her nest, as if her life depended on it. Even after two weeks of free rental, the bird still bolts out of the nest, each time I pass by. It is too bad, because the bird does not understand that no one means her any harm.

I am hoping that the bird would develop some fortitude, but how do I communicate to the bird that no one is going to hurt her? Each time the bird takes off in panic, I am afraid that she might take the nest down on the way. It will be a shame to see the nest crashed on the ground, again.

The little bird made me think: is our relationship with God similar to this? Are we like the bird that takes a flight, each time we feel threatened or insecure? Can we trust that God walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death, and that the shepherd's rod and staff comfort us? Is God trying to tell us the Word of Wisdom, and we do not understand? Didn't God reach out to us through Jesus, and told us in many ways that God loves us, and wants us to have life and have it abundantly?

Then I was reminded of the story of one of the three original founders of the Apple Computer. I read the article online. Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak, and Ron Wayne began the company on

April Fool's day, 1976. Wayne designed the original company logo, wrote the manual for Apple I computer, and drafted the company's partnership agreement, taking the 10% stake.

Wayne was soon dismayed by what he perceived to be a wild spending by Jobs and Wozniak's recurrent "flights of fancy." He was afraid that the fledgling company would soon fold. Realizing that he was the only one of the three with assets the creditors could seize, he quit the partnership after only 12 days. He sold back his shares for \$800. Those shares would have been worth today \$22B, if he held onto them. Now Wayne lives in Pahrump, NV, on his Social Security checks, biding for his big payday in nearby casinos, struggling with one-armed bandits.

An analyst who covered Apple since 1981 said this of Wayne: "If he'd had the foresight and, more importantly, the fortitude to hang on for another six months,

it would be a completely different situation for him."

Having faith in God requires not only our devotion, but also fortitude to face the unknown. Having faith is nothing like investing in the blue chip stocks. My avian squatter is risking the future of her entire brood, by bolting out of the nest, each time she is scared. The Apple's former founder is now struggling at his ripe age of 76 to make ends meet, because he lacked the foresight and the fortitude.

Having faith in God is not far different. Having faith also involves the foresight and the fortitude. Believing in something means that you see the vision which others do not have, but you have the fortitude to make that something become reality. Believing in something means that you do not sit complacently, knowing that the investment in the blue chip stocks are secure, but taking action, so that your vision becomes reality.

Paul was one who took that action to make his vision become reality. He wrote to the Galatians: "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." For years I wondered. Why did Paul say that he was crucified with Christ? Everyone knows Paul was nowhere near the cross, when Jesus was crucified. Then it occurred to me: Paul was talking about the tribulations and persecutions to which he was subjected, for preaching the gospel that Jesus is the Christ. He was talking about everything he tossed away for the sake of the gospel, as he confessed in Phillipians 3:8:

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as excrement, in order that I may gain Christ.

It was costly for Paul to renounce the accomplishments of his former life and his own upbringing. It was risky for Paul to take up on the crucified stranger whom he never met in person. It was perilous for Paul

to devote his life to the Gentile strangers despite the persecution.

Now this nameless woman in the Gospel of Luke was another one who took action to make her vision become reality. She stood behind Jesus, as he dined at the Pharisee's house. She wept, and her tears fell on Jesus' feet, and she wiped them dry with her hair. She broke the alabaster jar of ointment, and poured on Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair.

A long reputation must have preceded her, since the Pharisee knew who she was on sight. He tested Jesus in his thought: "If this man were a true prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him." He wanted to know if this Jesus were a fake.

It was crucial to the Pharisaic belief that they keep themselves separated from the sinners, so that they may remain ritually pure. In the Pharisee's mind, the woman contaminated Jesus by touching him.

It was risky for a sinner to enter the Pharisee's residence. It was risky to show herself in front of the guests who are supposedly ritually pure. But she risked being thrown out. She risked being shamed in front of the town's people.

If a Pharisee, who takes the astute care to keep himself ritually clean, could identify the woman on sight, then we can assume that the everyone in the town also knew what she did to earn that ill-repute. She was not welcome there. She knew it, and everyone else knew it. But she came anyway, even prepared with the alabaster jar of ointment. She was determined to do what she intended, and she did it.

The woman took the risk, although she knew she could have been driven off the premise. She broke her prized possession of alabaster jar of ointment, and lavished on Jesus' feet. And Jesus responded to her courage. He affirmed her, and gave what she wanted: "Your sins are

forgiven. Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

It was the new life she wanted. Her sins are now forgiven. She is clean. She is made whole. She is healed. She is restored. She is saved. She may go in peace, and have a brand-new life.

Faith is trust. Faith is courage. Faith risks precious things of one's life for the greater things. Faith and courage are not separate things. In order to be faithful, one must also be courageous. One must be willing to take the risk—the real risk that not only could hurt you and cost you your alabaster jar of ointment, but also your pride and reputation. It is our faith that makes us well, indeed.

Let us reflect once: What is my alabaster jar that must be broken? What keeps me from attaining greater things of life? Let us come, lay down our burdens, and pour out our hearts to Jesus. We will hear this, too: "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."