

God's Lavish Protective Love

John 14:15-21

1John 3:1-3

Sunday, April 19, 2020

2nd Sunday of Easter

I collect stories and this morning I have a story I'd like to share with you that happened 25 years ago, during the Bosnian war in the Baltic region.

Capt. Scott O'Grady's plane was shot down over Bosnia while he was on a NATO mission on June 2, 1995. His plane was shot down by a Serbian missile. He spent 6 days hiding from the Serbian troops. This is his story.

"I'm not Rambo. I was a scared little bunny rabbit trying to hide and survive."

O'Grady attributes his rescue to God's protection and his training.

O'Grady's plane was shot down by an SA-6 missile over Bosnia's "no-fly zone" where he was patrolling as part of a NATO force trying to keep the Serbs from getting involved in the battle.

News story from the St. Louis Post Dispatch, Sunday, June 11, 1995. P. 1 and 3A..

This is an exciting story for us to hear about. Worthy of our hearing today because Scott O'Grady gave God credit and glory about what happened to him.

We can hear in this story a different kind of "lavish love" that God gives:

A lavish love that protected him from being seen by the enemy—even as he was floating down in his parachute.

A lavish love that gave him life sustaining water with raindrops, morning dew and a sponge.

A lavish love that provided ants, leaves, and grass for him to eat to keep his strength up.

A lavish love that kept his Air Force comrades looking for him after so many days.

A lavish love that led Capt. Thomas Hanford to fly over his spot, and O'Grady to cry out for help.

A lavish love that protected O'Grady when he forgot his training and ran towards the helicopter with his gun flailing around—that helped the commander to keep his wits about himself and see a comrade and not an enemy.

Folks when we give ourselves over to the Lord, we can see God's hand in our life, just as Scott O'Grady did. He attributed his protection and rescue as coming from God.

In the Gospel Lesson, Jesus tells his disciples that “The world cannot accept him (the Spirit of Truth) because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans.”

In these times of the coronavirus, we who believe in Christ and his resurrection, can trust God is watching and guiding us. Even those who may end up sick or even die from the disease can put their trust in God. We all have lessons to learn. Often times the most important lesson for us to learn is how precious life is, how precious our family and friends, and our community is.

For this life is not the end. There are better things ahead for anyone who believes.

Close with poem “The Father's Hand” by Ida L. Cornett

St. Louis Post Dispatch
Sunday June 11, 1995
“Survival by Faith, Ants and Wet Socks”

AVIANO AIR BASE, Italy – He hunted ants, squeezed drops of moisture from his socks and hid like a “scared little bunny” in the bushes as Serb soldiers fired their rifles yards away.

Capt. Scott F. O’Grady had only one explanation Saturday for why the Serbs didn’t find him: “God. He protected me,” he told a news conference the day after returning to this NATO base.

The pilot whose plane was downed by a Serb missile June 2 during a NATO mission over Bosnia attributed much of his survival for six days to his faith.

He also credited common sense and his training at Air Force survival school in Spokane, Wash., where the 29-year-old pilot spent much of this youth.

O’Grady told a riveting story of close calls, perseverance and escape at an emotional news conference Saturday. Moved by the outpouring of good will and praise from President Bill Clinton on down to his Air Force colleagues, the pilot summed up his ordeal with modesty.

“I am not a Rambo,” he said. “This is really amazing to me, all this attention I’m getting – everyone saying you’re a hero. Nah, I’m not a hero. All I was was a scared little bunny rabbit trying to hide – trying to survive.”

By O’Grady’s account, he hid for six tense days and survived on a diet of grass, leaves and ants. His plane was hit by an SA-6 missile over western Bosnia, where he was patrolling a NATO “no-fly zone” set up to deter Serb combat planes from taking part in the Bosnian war.

(The Washington Post reported Sunday that U.S. intelligence was aware of Serb anti-aircraft missiles in the area where O’Grady was shot down but failed to warn combat commanders.)

(Quoting an unidentified Pentagon source, the Post said that the National Security Agency, the intelligence arm of the Defense Department, had detected tracking radar for a SA-6 missile, “but it wasn’t something that got to everyone.”)

When the missile struck his jet, O’Grady ejected from the crippled plane and parachuted to earth – something he likened to a miracle. “As soon as the missile hit, I knew what had happened. The first thing I saw was the cockpit disintegrating in front of me. I saw this beautiful, golden handle ... the ejection handle. It was the most gorgeous sight I ever saw. God let me see it,” he said.

O’Grady descended through an unlucky break in the clouds, near a major city and road in full view of anyone below. “I was in the parachute for an extremely long period of time ... They

were standing there watching me the whole time. There was a military truck there waiting for me ... So they definitely knew I was there," he said.

Once he landed, in a grassy area, he dashed into a cluster of bushes.

"I got into the heart of it, lay down, I was hoping they wouldn't see the metal clips of the harness, put my face in the dirt, put green gloves over my ears."

The searchers were around him for hours, but they never saw him. O'Grady offered a simple explanation: "God. He protected me."

For the next six days, he continued to do everything he could to hide. "Most of the time, my face was in the dirt, just praying that no one would see me," he recalled.

After quickly drinking his eight four-ounce packets of emergency water, O'Grady collected the liquid in any way he could: from rainfall; from moisture that gathered on the covering of his survival kit, using a sponge to soak it up; and, at one point, from his soaked wool socks. His mouth became so dry that when he ate after a few days, it was painful

During the final two days of his ordeal, O'Grady munched on leaves and stuck his finger in an anthill to nab a few of the insects. He was encouraged to eat grass by the sight of cows that wandered by. "If they could live off it, so could I," he reckoned.

But besides menu ideas, the cows – he nicknamed them Alfred and Leroy – brought a hazard: a herder who summoned them with a little bell. O'Grady called the herder Tinkerbelle. But Tinkerbelle, like his cows, apparently never saw the pilot.

O'Grady never wandered more than 1 ½ miles from where he had landed, moving only at night, gingerly, because sound carried well in the quiet hills.

Use of his radio to signal planes for help was inhibited by fear that Serbs units would intercept the signals. Nonetheless, O'Grady became impatient and contemplated a plan to "light the world" with a broadcast in hopes of attracting a rescue.

But, in the dead of night after the sixth day, he heard a jet. It was Capt. Thomas O. Hanford, who was searching for O'Grady at the end of a patrol in his F-16.

The recording of their radio conversation was played at the news conference, and it brought tears to the eyes of both O'Grady and Hanford, who sat next to him:

"Say your call sign," said Hanford.

"Basher 52," O'Grady answered.

“Understand you are Basher 52,” Hanford responded.

“Basher 52. I’m alive,” O’Grady said.

Later Hanford broadcast, “You’re loud and clear.”

“I’m alive, I’m alive” was O’Grady’s response.

Hanford then asked him a question designed to prove he was really talking to O’Grady, not to an impostor: “What was your squadron in Korea?”

The answer came back, “Juvat, Juvat” – identifying the 80th fighter Squadron at Kunsan Air Base.

That confirmation set in motion a rescue effort by Marines aboard a ship off Italy.

At dawn, O’Grady excitedly guided Marine helicopters toward him, sometimes leading them slightly astray with overeager compass work.

As one helicopter landed, O’Grady put on an orange cap, pulled out and loaded his 9 mm pistol, and ran out of the mist toward it.

He described his own image lightheartedly: a six-day beard, a silly orange hat on his head, flight vest open, with gear and compass dangling and a pistol in his hand. “In school, one thing we are told is never run to a helicopter waving a gun,” he noted.

Once aboard the helicopter, he was covered with a blanket. A colonel on board yelled out to someone, “Get that pistol out of his hand.”

Today, O’Grady said he would like to return to flying. As for flying over Bosnia, he concluded, “We’ll talk about that later.”

Base officials said O’Grady would leave Sunday morning for Washington. He is to meet privately with Clinton on Monday, then have lunch with his family and Clinton at the White House before attending a Pentagon ceremony in his honor.

After that, O’Grady will spend time with his family and “take one day at a time.”

The Father's Hand by Ida L. Cornett

While through this changing world below
I would not choose my path to go;
'Tis Father's hand that leadeth me,
Then O how safe His child must be.

Sometimes we walk in sunshine bright,
Sometimes in darkness of the night;
Sometimes the way I cannot see
But Father's hand still leadeth me.

Sometimes there seems no way to take,
But Father's hand a way doth make
Sometimes I hear Him gently say,
"Come, follow Me, this is the way."

Why should I mind the way I go?
His way is best for me, I know.
He is my strength, my truth my way,
He is my comfort, rod, and stay.

So on we travel hand in hand,
Bound for the heavenly promised land.
Always through all Eternity,
I'll praise His name for leading me.