

If you've seen national weather forecasts, there is a chance you may have seen Nick Walker, the self-proclaimed "weather dude." His career has spanned more than 35 years. It went from small markets in Texas to the Weather Channel, NBC and CBS Nightly News, MSNBC, CNBC and also for voice over work on commercials and program narrations on radio and the Internet, narrating documentaries on the Weather Channel. He was on Late Nite with David Letterman as well, and put out sing-along CDs for kids along with a book for children on severe weather preparedness.

While his career has been a great one when you read his resume, it didn't start that way. In fact, at one point he was beginning to think he might not make it at all and had very little hope.

His low point was on a bus one day in November. On a cold morning which was 10 degrees below average for the day, he remembers thinking about that stat which was in his mind as a TV weatherman, but at the moment he was also trying to forecast his own personal future. A week earlier, his boss had called him into his office to give him the standard line: "We're going in a different direction." Simply put, Nick was told he was being replaced, just like that. There was no public announcement, but he had month to figure out his next move, and he had no idea where he was headed.

It was a short bus ride back to the TV station from downtown. During a break between the morning and midday newscasts, Nick had visited the office of a former co-worker, waning to pick his brain about his life since leaving television. Nick had often thought about changing careers, and through the conversation with him had been informative, Nick wasn't sure the time was right for him to enter a new line of work. Even more confused than ever about his prospects, he stared out the drizzle-soaked window of the bus (thinking at least he got the forecast right that day) and he remembered that old saying, "When God closes a door, He opens a window." The only problem was it was pretty hard to see God at that moment, Nick thought to himself there certainly were no windows opening for him. He half-prayed in his mind - God, help me!

Arriving back at the TV station, Nick grabbed the latest computer printouts from the National Weather Service and sat down at his desk to update his weather maps. The red message light on his phone was blinking. Looking up from the papers, Nick punched in his voicemail code. "You have one message" the electronic voice told him, "sent today at 10:14 a.m."

Nick listened as a female voice he had never heard before timidly spoke over traffic noise in the background. She sounded like she was at a payphone. "You don't know me," the voice said. "We've never met."

Nick sighed, thinking it was another weather fan. But he listened as there woman cleared her throat and continued. "I was on the bus a little while ago and saw you."

“Get to the point” Nick thought. And she did. “I don’t know if you’ll understand this or not.” She hesitated. Then, apparently gathering courage, she blurted out, “God told me to tell you that He holds your future.”

The caller suddenly had Nick’s undivided attention.

She went on. “He says everything’s going to be okay. So, that’s it I guess. I just wanted you to know. Bye.” And then she hung up.

Nick stared at the phone for a few seconds, dumbfounded. Impossible. How could this woman know. Did God speak to her really? Was this some kind of sick joke?

Even as he asked the questions, Nick sensed that already he knew the answers. It certainly did not seem like a joke. And why, he thought, couldn’t God speak through others? After all, Nick had in fact asked for God’s help. It may have been a half-hearted prayer, but it was a whole-hearted answer. Besides, he knew what this mystery woman said was true. For most of his life, he had believed in a God who knows us intimately, loves us unconditionally and cares about us individually. He was ashamed to admit that over the past few days, fear and worry had caused him to forget just how much God cares. He needed a reminder.

And what a reminder it was, Nick thought to himself. As the woman’s words sank in, shock began to give way to peace. Over the next few days, a mountain of fear began to melt away and an ocean of thankfulness took its place. Yes, it was going to be okay. God had told her, and she had told Nick.

That woman never called him again. He would never learn her identity. But now, many years later, reporting the weather on TV, Nick writes that he thinks often of the woman’s astounding voicemail message. And he reminds himself to never stop trusting the voice of the One Who spoke through her that day.

Trust though can be hard to do, can’t it? All of us go through moments like Nick did. And as we go through life, it’s important to both trust in God, recognizing there are no detours to suffering but also to listen to His voice and remember we are never alone in the journey.

That’s a theme through our readings this week.

In the first reading, we hear the story of Abraham being tested by God as a way to see how trusting Abraham is of God. Abraham responds by completely trusting in God’s plan, and God’s messenger stops him from harming his son, noting Abraham has proven his loyalty. Jesus, the Father’s Son, will trust in the Father’s plan too, laying down His life which is likely the conversation that takes place between Moses, Elijah and our Lord atop the mountain. Through it all, God’s plan can be hard to see in the midst of difficult situations in life. But also through it all, as Nick Walker found out, God is listening, and He will see us through.

The readings really give us a blueprint for our life long journey, especially when the going gets tough. And the blueprint we follow is to trust in God, to listen to His guidance, and to remember that the answers may not always be clear or what we want, sometimes entailing suffering, but they will always lead us to glory.

That first part about trust to remember is that despite the extreme circumstances of the story of Abraham and Isaac, we are assured that God has a plan that we can often understand only after the fact. And let's face it, we all have had suffering in our lives, and see suffering in the world that seems senseless. God's will for us is not obvious. And I certainly cannot give the answers to the "why" we all ask; why is there so much evil; why do people get cancer; why do people seemingly suffer through no fault of their own. But what I can answer is the "who" - who is God? As Paul says, God is He who did not spare his own Son but handed Him over for us all. God did not stay on the sidelines; He came to be with us, to live with us, to die for us, and is with us always. God is in people like Fr. Vincent Capodanno, the chaplain who died in Vietnam with his troops he served and shielded one from enemy fire; in Aaron Feis, the football coach who died in the Florida shooting trying to save students; or Oskar Schindler, the man who saved thousands of Jewish people from death during the Holocaust.

The second is to listen to what God is telling us. Peter sometimes gets a bad rap in this Gospel for seemingly not "getting it." But Peter is on the right path. This is a mystical experience atop the mountain where he is literally encountering God. It's helping his faith and spirituality, but it will take time for him to put all the pieces together. A booth or tent isn't like a tent we'd pitch if you were going camping. If you think back to before the Temple, when the Israelites were in the desert, the tent was where Moses would encounter God and a place of worship. For us it might be a place like Lourdes or Guadalupe where long after the apparitions of Mary many powerful spiritual encounters have happened for people. Peter is caught up in the moment, and we hear the voice that says "listen to Him." For Nick on that bus, God was listening, and he spoke through a stranger who felt compelled to call him. Just because God does not speak to us directly does not mean He is not listening. But sometimes we can stop listening because we are too busy, or give up on God. But He does care. And He does have a plan for us. That's why it's important to listen to God. To encounter Him. To do so, get into that habit of prayer, and experiment with different types of prayer, and listen for the voice of God. As I've said before, sometimes we discern that, like when I was praying before a dinner with the archbishop that was for perspective seminary students and felt an overwhelming sense of peace, or sometimes it's through other people who give us counsel. God is speaking to us in many ways, but we need to listen and climb the mountain.

And the last part is to remember that in life there is suffering, but that does not mean God is absent. Remember, Jesus saves us through taking on the sufferings of the world and not separating himself from them. The glory comes but first Jesus shows us divine love in sacrifice. Peter will listen to Jesus, but he will also follow the path of suffering which brings life out of death. And as soon as they come down from the mountain, Jesus enters into the sufferings of others by healing a boy who is dumb and epileptic.

So part of listening to God's voice means realizing suffering may be part of the equation. After Pentecost when Peter receives the Holy Spirit he leads the Church. And while the Church grows, Peter finds that thriving includes suffering. The Holy Spirit drove Paul and Peter to new missions, but also to prison, and gradually death. But because of what they did, not only are they in heaven, but the Church grew. As Paul says "the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us." In life, there is the kind of suffering we can't plan for, but also the kind we need to embrace - the hard work of loving others in a family; of patience; of sacrificing time to help others in need; of doing the right thing and saying something that is right but not popular. These things are costly, but through them, will ultimately lead others to glory too.

Nick Walker may have found a great career after his time ended as a small-market meteorologist, but God has something even better planned for him, and for us all. But for us to realize that plan, we have to do what God tells us to do, to listen to Him. As life goes on, hopefully you too have many an experience atop the mountain that helps you on your journey. But don't forget, we aren't on the mountain yet. We've got a job to do and need to go back down that mountain into the world, and into the days and years of our lives that are ahead. And as we do, may we keep our eyes fixed on the goal of not our own glory, but on glorifying God and remember that through it all, God is guiding us and speaking to us. So let's make sure we check our voicemail and listen to His plans, and never stop trusting the One who will guide us home from this life into the next.