

I walk out my front door this morning. It's still pretty dark. An airplane flies over the house. I flash back to the attack on our country 21 years ago. There were no planes in the air for a long time. The skies were empty. We older folks remember exactly where we were when the twin towers went down.

I remember turning onto the tollway ---- on my way to a confirmation camp meeting at Carthage College. I was trying to decide if I should continue on my way or just turn around. I turned around. When I got back to the church the parking lot was empty ... except for one car, and one guy trying to get in the door. It was Gerry Levenda. He says: "I think we need to do something." As we entered the building, the phone was ringing and someone asked if there was anything they could do. I said, "If you can, please come here, sit at my desk and call everyone in the church. Let them know we are having a candlelight service at 7:00." That night, we were in the sanctuary, lighting candles, and praying for the victims of 9/11.

This moment rocked our country ... every one of us – especially those who lost loved ones. It rocked us to the very core. You wonder how things like that can happen. How can this kind of evil exist? Where is God? ... we may wonder. But sometimes the face of evil and the face of courage and goodness come together. We saw so many amazing things happen after that. In many ways, our country came together ... and we cared for each other.

My guess is, on a smaller scale, each one of us has our 9/11 moments ... where our faith is tested, our spirit is punched, our humanity is raw, and sometimes we wonder if there is anything else we can endure.

The other day I am in the front parking lot ... hoping to take a picture of the sunrise. But there were too many clouds. When I turn around to go back toward the church, the sun would peek through just a little bit. Time for a picture? ... oops, more clouds. Back and forth --- clouds and sun!! It made me think about the clouds of 9/11. I thought about the clouds that are over Ukraine everyday, or the clouds that hang over your life when things are not going the way you want them to. As soon as I would give up and walk away, the sun would peek through ... and then my heart turned to a high school senior named Anna.

Brayden Suva, Kathy King's grandson, is Anna's boyfriend. When I was a senior in high school, I was basically one selfish human being. I thought about my sports, my schedule, all the stuff a typical senior wants to do. But Anna? ---- her heart is heavy.

Anna's mom was in Michigan over the weekend. She is a single mom. She was on a four-wheeler with her young son. She hit a ditch she did not see. Her son is fine ... but Anna's mom is not. She is on a ventilator, a feeding tube, and she is in Kalamazoo, Michigan, miles away from her daughter and her family. Anna right now is taking care of her younger brother and sister. A senior in high school, at home, taking care of her family. Anna and Brayden stopped by the church yesterday morning on their way to see her mom. I thought about the clouds in her life right now. I thought of those peeks of sun that sometimes give you hope when things are going tough. I think of Jesus – the son -- a symbol of hope and goodness and the good stuff we talk about every Sunday. I give them a "down payment" on the love bucket. I hope they know --- in the midst of the clouds they are facing --- there is a glimmer of hope. Isn't that what we are called to do... as God's people ... whether it is in our life or someone else's life? We need to embody that "peek of the son" shining through the clouds in our lives.

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I think of Brayden. When he was younger, he would come to church with his grandma – “kicking and screaming.” I’m thinking of all the sermons and stories about “Fred” he endured. The videos in confirmation class about goodness and kindness. And now --- that message comes to fruition as he and his girlfriend face the challenge of a lifetime.

I think about the Gospel lesson for this morning. There are times when you and I are the lost coin. And there are times when you and I are the lost sheep. We wonder, with all the billions of people in the world, how can God see and notice us? What about the mom who lost a daughter 21 years ago in the attacks on our country ... does she wonder if anyone still thinks about her daughter and all the others who lost loved ones that day? How about the Ukrainian farmer who lost his entire farm? He wonders: are people going to get tired hearing about Ukraine? And how about a high school girl named Anna ---- will people still remember and help us, as I try to bring healing to my mom?

Sometimes we are the lost coin or the lost sheep. But we also need to be the shepherd who doesn’t give up looking for the one who is lost. We need to be the lady who wouldn’t give up until she found that lost coin. When we notice and remember somebody else, it is a reminder to them that God notices, too. When we don’t give up on someone else ... it’s a reminder that God never gives up. Yes, there are times when we are or we know someone who is the lost coin. I am just glad we have a God in our life that never gives up on us. Amen.

Don Borling

All Saints Lutheran Church 13350 S. LaGrange Road Orland Park, IL 60462

[www.allsaintsjoy.com](http://www.allsaintsjoy.com) [allsaintsjoy@sbcglobal.net](mailto:allsaintsjoy@sbcglobal.net) 708-448-2939