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# The parables of my father

Jocelyn A. Sideco | Jun. 15, 2012 Young Voices

My sisters and I shared many funny times listening to the combination of words and phrases our dad would manage to put together. In fact, we thought we easily could combine all his sayings into a book that would, at least for us, be pretty hysterical. He is an eager learner, active do-er and impatient wait-er. This combined with his matter-of-fact certainty genuinely cultivated a fondness for his company and for his insights.

My father is both happy-go-lucky and *masipag*, a Tagalog word meaning joyfully hard-working, generous and diligent. His most common phrase when asked about whether or not he would do something or try something is, "What da heck."

This courage to try new things and to generously do everything to make things work guides my own ethic and continues to shape how I discern.

"Wow, girl, that person must be the best in their field. You get to work with the crop of the cream!"

"If you just put it in your mind, you can overcome your sickness. Just tell your body it's not sick."

When circling in a parking garage for some time, my dad stopped behind a car whose back lights were on. After a couple seconds of waiting, he drives close enough to the driver's window and shouts, "Excuse me, sir, are you removing?"

Our family grew up praying the rosary for a week each summer in our home when the statue of our patron saint would visit and grace our home. After a number of already so-funny-that-I-can-barely-control-my-shoulders-from-bobbing-up-and-down moments, my dad recites, "and the world was made fresh" instead of "and the Word was made flesh." Needless to say, all bobbing ceased, and roars of laughter led to convulsions on the floor for young girls whose maturity cracked under the ridiculousness of a serious family moment when one person's overzealousness gets overshadowed by humor.

I grew up thinking my dad could do anything. And, in many ways, I still believe his 5-foot-4 frame is bigger than life.

I suppose that's why the readings for this particular Sunday in light of Father's Day speak to me and how we need to continue to be family or continue to be church:

> Jesus said to the crowds:
> "This is how it is with the kingdom of God;
> it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land
> and would sleep and rise night and day
> and through it all the seed would sprout and grow,

he knows not how.
Of its own accord the land yields fruit,
first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.
And when the grain is ripe, he wields the sickle at once,
for the harvest has come."

He said,
"To what shall we compare the kingdom of God,
or what parable can we use for it?
It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground,
is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth.
But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants
and puts forth large branches,
so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade."
With many such parables
he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it.
Without parables he did not speak to them,
but to his own disciples he explained everything in private.
(Mark 4:26-34)

My father trusts in human capacity, believes in a God of tremendous compassion and goodwill, and is curious about what is going on.

Not only does he see his little girl working with the best of the best, but if there was any more distinction possible, perhaps that 1 percent, that's who we surround ourselves with. It makes me wonder about all the change that needs to happen in the church. Change is happening with every word, every relationship, every courageous truth. I am so grateful for my colleagues all over the globe that serve as beacons of light amidst dark realities.

My dad's "mind-over-matter" approach continues to evoke ambivalent feelings as I explore the complicated nature of that position. He is essentially trying to say: If you cannot change a situation, change yourself within the situation. This approach to attitude inspires me to trust my instincts and continue to believe in something's possibility rather than its improbability. The possibility of the Kin-dom of God to be a mustard bush speaks to God's tender care and offers me a hopeful envisioning of the Kin-dom, whether or not that is the most probable or exact truth.

Besides being utterly embarrassed in the car as my father's loud voice echoed off of the concrete columns in an awkward reverberation of innuendo, his directness and impatience encourage me to stand up when I need to and exercise my pastoral voice with as much awkwardness and grace that would get my point across. I just need to know, bishops, who is removing themselves from the care of their flock when the care is no longer suitable for the least of these?

And truly, my father's optimism and everyday-ness is contagious. His being opens up different ways of thinking and being in the world and in the church. Instead of hearing the same old cobwebbed phrase that speaks to the wisdom of God, I continue to hear the intention for the renewal of life. To think, the world is made fresh with each soul professing the Word that was made flesh.

So, how do we breathe new life into this old sack of church and church politics that continues to prove dangerous to women, children and anyone else on the margins?

My father's wisdom would welcome the lightness and vulnerability of being human and appreciating each person, each moment, each chance you get to know even yourself better. Really, guys, the Girl Scouts? It's time to put the masks down and claim how we feel defensive and threatened by others. Perhaps when we stop holding so tightly to what we for certain know, we can begin to put in our mind and in our heart a different possibility that may require the presence of all in this Body of Christ.

What da heck! We might as well try this. If this means not hurting others, why not?

[Jocelyn A. Sideco is a founding member of Contemplatives in Action, an urban ministry and retreat experience that began as a response to the needs in post-Katrina New Orleans and now continues as an online ministry offering spirituality resources for those working for justice throughout the world. Visit www.contemplativesinaction.org for more information.]

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