

How often does life not meet our expectations? I don't know anyone who can say that everything that has happened in their life went exactly as they expected or wanted it to happen. God gives us opportunities to develop and grow. In some cases we might find happy surprises; but the times that we focus on are more often times that make us uncomfortable.

Recently I started working at a Halloween store. It has been an interesting journey to say the least. Every day something happens that ends up surprising either a guest or one of the employees. One story that the employees love talking about is me being a minister. It surprises the employees and especially the guests.

Last week we had an older couple come in and ask me to help them find angel wings. I smiled and walked them over to where the eight different angel wings were and asked if they needed help with anything else. The wife said no and started to tell me that they were going to use the wings for a church Christmas pageant and not a Halloween costume. I told her that it was a great idea because making wings would be a pain, and I didn't think God would be upset that they were utilizing your resources.

I was working on a couple of projects near the cash registers when they were checking out. I overheard the couple telling the cashier how they were going to use the wings for church and not a Halloween costume. The cashier told them that they should tell me that story because I am a minister.

The lady got upset because I didn't tell her that I am a minister. I asked her why it mattered? Eventually she said that she was embarrassed because of her behavior. I told her that she had nothing to be embarrassed about. But it didn't matter what I said, she felt that she had made an inappropriate joke in front of me and God and that I should have identified myself better.

A couple of the staff have made that comment to me as well. I asked them what would I need to do to identify myself better. Nobody had an answer. Then I asked them why I needed to identify myself. I heard everything from not wanting to worry about saying something offensive in front of me to they didn't want to hear me preach.

I always tell people that I will gladly talk about God and religion, but it is not my intention to lecture them. If they want to talk about anything, I am there to listen and can offer guidance. But, if they want to hear me preach they either have to show up at our service or watch it on Facebook.

There is one young lady that would act like she wanted to talk about God, but wouldn't. She would hang out whenever someone else would ask me a question. Or she would start to ask a question and then say, "Nevermind" and walk away. Finally one day last week, she asked me a question.

We were talking about making tacos, when out of nowhere she asks, "Am I a bad person and I don't know it? God keeps doing bad things to me and I don't understand why." I barely know this

person. I know enough about her to know that she doesn't have the best relationship with her mom. And I know that things haven't been going well with her and her boyfriend. I know that I could fall back on Job or Romans. But, I don't think that is what she wanted to hear. I think she just needed me to listen.

Sally was going through a number of different stressors in her life. She quit her regular full time job. Her mom gave her until December to find somewhere else to live. And she had been fighting with her boyfriend. To some people, these do not seem like that big of a deal. But, to her they are. They were opportunities that she was struggling within herself to find the answers.

She was struggling much like Jacob was. In today's reading from Genesis, we come across Jacob sitting alone on the bank of the river. Much of Jacob's life had not gone the way that he intended. He fought with his brother and family so much that he had to leave his home. He was promised a wife and married the wrong woman. He then married the right sister, whom he loved deeply, but she was barren. He then fought with his in-laws and was forced to return to his home.

He was so concerned with his brother attacking him on their journey that he split his family into smaller groups. He kept separating them into smaller groups until he eventually was left alone. Jacob being alone in the darkness symbolizes how we all feel at some point in our lives. We struggle with opportunities all the time and we try to find answers.

In our reading today, Jacob wrestled with someone that he couldn't see. This can easily represent the struggles that we have within ourselves. Jacob wrestled until he finally found resolution.

The author tells us that he struggled through the night and came to a conclusion just before daybreak. So many times a new day represents a turn in events. In this case, the next day Jacob was a newly transformed man.

He had changed his name to Israel, which means "one who wrestles with God". He also started walking with a limp, which shows a transformation with his physical appearance. He feels more comfortable with himself after his resolution that he allows for himself to be truly seen.

In our gospel reading from Luke, we see how persistence, determination, and prayer can get us through life events that we are struggling through. In Luke, Jesus tells us the parable of the widow and the unjust judge. The widow struggles to get her affairs in order, but is continually blocked by the judge.

During this time, widows have very little standing. So the widow in our parable feels lost and alone, because she is trying to finalize her husband's affairs, but she is not getting any help from the judge. He keeps ignoring her pleas because she does not matter to him.

We've all had someone like this in our lives. It could have been a boss or manager that kept ignoring our requests. Our time off could be denied, or we never got a raise we were promised. There seems to always be an individual who abuses their power to benefit themselves.

But, the widow would not accept his avoidance. She prayed to God asking for direction and for the judge to change his mind. Eventually the judge decided that if he kept ignoring her, it would not be in her best interest. God gave her the faith in her own persistence to find resolution.

So many times we are lost and alone. We struggle to see why God has chosen to give us so many bad and negative events in our lives. But, God didn't give us these bad opportunities; he gave us prayer and determination to get through these difficult times in our lives.

And the best thing that he has given us during these times is that he has given us the opportunity to help others. We have struggled our way through these events and have gained an insight that can help others. We can share our blessings and remind people that they are not alone. We understand and appreciate their frustrations and can assure them that they are not alone.