

23 rd Sunday      A      Sept. 4, 2011

We all know the story of the Titanic, 882 feet long, largest passenger steamship in the world. The maiden voyage of the “unsinkable” Titanic began in England April 10, 1912. Four days later, at 11:40 pm, a lookout sighted the iceberg. 37 seconds later, 399 feet of the side of the Titanic was torn below the water line. Three hours after that, the great ship lay on the bottom of the North Atlantic; 1517 perished.

A few years ago, artifacts of the Titanic came to the Museum Center. One stays with me: it was a pair of binoculars, locked in a glass cabinet. As I recall it, the lookouts could not find the key and did not want to damage the cabinet. For want of a key, *no one warned the helmsman until it was much too late, and the entire ship was lost.*

No one warned the helmsman. If a little child is about to put her hand on a hot stove, we will certainly warn her. If a toddler got hold of a medicine bottle, we would not hesitate to take it away. If a friend drank too much at a party, we’d certainly find a ride for them. If a relative or coworker were in an abusive relationship, surely we would try to do something to help.

Most of us will at least try to protect someone from physical or emotional harm. Why are so reluctant to try to protect them from spiritual harm? From sin, if you will? We are we so reluctant to warn of spiritual icebergs? Will do we watch the whole ship go down without saying something?

600 years before Christ, God appointed Ezekiel to be the watchman—to be the lookout--for the community. God said, “Ezekiel, here’s the binoculars. If you do not warn the people, if they sink—I God will hold you responsible.”

In Matthew’s church, everyone was a watchman: if someone in the church community wrongs you, point it out to them, privately. If that doesn’t work, get a couple of people to go with you.

This is so hard, because we all have our faults. Somebody could point out our problems if they wanted to: maybe I should be looking at my own darkness instead of somebody else’s. And we don’t want to judge anybody wrongly, either: maybe things aren’t what they seem to us. Or maybe they won’t like us; maybe they will turn away from us completely.

But is it loving to let someone sink because we didn’t speak to them? Because we were afraid? Or too polite? Especially when we are talking about their immortal soul?

I suppose there is only one rule: we have to speak out of real love for the other person. We care about them. What they are doing is not just hurting others, it’s hurting themselves. We’re not attacking them, we’re addressing a problem. Carefully. Lovingly. Humbly. It’s hard to hear, but the truth will set you free.