

Last week I attended a vigil for victims at the Aquatic Center on Humboldt Bay. Silhouettes of female and child victims were on display against the windows overlooking our beautiful Bay. The printed stories were sobering, they painted sad portraits of many victims of all ages. ~~Then,~~ one speaker said that at times we can tend to blame victims. Perhaps, she suggested, we do that in order to spin a false web of security around ourselves, convincing ourselves that if we stay out of dangerous company and act smart, we won't get harmed like *them*.

Two women in particular took time to share their respective stories of domestic abuse. Some of the details of humiliation and violence were difficult to listen to; I found myself feeling apologetic, even ashamed, of my own gender. How can *some* men be so cruel?

Perhaps even more heart rending was the Wall of Tears; this listed the names of children who had been victims of murder. The list was linked together like a scroll, naming the child victims throughout our country who had been killed nationwide the past three months. It was a long list—appallingly long: running from the front to the back of our room.

But the sad facts, while they were the penultimate word, are not the ultimate word. The final word was one of hope. These survivors were speaking truth, then moving on--both requiring a good deal of courage. Life often spirals downward, but with courage and hope, it can bounce back. These survivors did.

Many of the victims found that their lives could only get better after they summoned the courage to face the truth. The sequence went something like this: "I am a victim; I deserve better; I've got to get out of here—dangerous as that may be." And so they summoned the courage to extricate themselves from horrendous circumstances by overcoming their fears, confusion and sense of helplessness.

Speaking to you this Maundy Thursday of Holy Week I can't help but observe that the founder of the world's largest religion was also a victim. Jesus did not die to call others to become victims too, but to set the victims free. The key verse for this day is found in John 13: 34: "A New commandment I give unto you, that you love one another even as I have loved you." Nothing could be more opposite of TRUE love than abuse, intimidation or violence.

If you are being victimized, or if you see a friend, neighbor or family member a victim, it does not have to continue. Don't allow fear, discouragement or confusion to make you feel helpless. You can call the Victim Witness program and ask for help. The number is 445 7417.

I closed the meeting with a prayer, thanking God for the courage of the victims who could speak truth. I said something like this: "Thank you God that truth sets us free, that love is stronger than hate, and light stronger than darkness."

This has been Dan Price for community comment