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Even in Danger There is Always Hope

By The Rev. Sam Sheridan

Those able to gather for outdoor worship these past few weeks and months may have gotten to see a whole new side of the campus of Virginia Theological Seminary. If you're in the congregation for one of these services, or seeing the service through YouTube, you're looking at the buildings where I lived and took meals for the last three years.

If you look to your right of where our Sunday service takes place, there is the Bishop Payne Library and Addison Academic Center, both places where I spent thousands of hours studying, reading, and occasionally, even understanding.

The little stretch of road between these two sets of buildings, a very short distance, is where this "teachable moment" takes place.

I have a friend. We will call him Dan. He is a black belt and former instructor in some form of martial arts. His arms are like steel beams. He can take

care of himself. Therefore, he was the recipient of a good deal of teasing and ribbing for a late night scare he had on that little stretch of road.

Dan was leaving a late-night class. He believed he'd seen some sort of creepy, shadowy figure hiding in the bushes. He dropped his bags and books and ran full speed toward the residence hall.

Because there were other people getting out of this class at the same time, and because this is a very well-lit stretch of road, there were several witnesses. No one else saw anything in the bushes. So, we made fun of Dan mercilessly.

It is not funny when someone is afraid, and it is not funny when someone feels in danger or unsafe. But it is very funny afterwards when a friend **is** safe, and everyone suspects they were actually safe the whole time.

I did ask Dan why he ran. He is very capable of defending himself, significantly more so than – just to choose someone at random – me.

“Sam, if someone wants to shoot or stab me, they really might kill me. And if someone attacks me unarmed, I really might kill them. I don't want either of those things. So, I will run almost every time.”

That was a very good answer.

If it was advice, I ignored it.

Some weeks later I was getting out of a late-night class and I saw some creepy, shadowy figure hiding in the bushes. I started waving and calling out to them. I was going to stand up to this stranger hiding in the bushes!

I got out my cell phone and turned on the flashlight. I found myself staring at a bronze statue of Jesus. It has been there by the library for years.

It wasn't some creeper.

It was the Lord.

It is a reality that we live in a world with genuine danger. There are times to defend yourself, as Dan is prepared to do. There are other times when it's absolutely appropriate to remove yourself from a situation, as Dan actually did. Like my response, there are even times to confront and stand up against even unknown danger. Dan and I exhibited a lot of the correct responses to danger and fear.

Also, we were wrong.

We were literally wrong about whether or not there was danger. We were also wrong about some shadowy, creepy stranger who turned out to be not just a statue but, literally, a statue of Christ.

Both parts of how we were wrong are worth learning from and remembering.

We must remember that some fears are not based in reality.

We must also remember that even in situations where the source of fear or danger is painfully, lamentably, horribly real, there is also in each and every person – and dangerous situation – some glimmer or flicker of hope. In every darkness, there is the light and presence of Jesus Christ.

In our fear, and when we are in danger, there is always room and hope for God to step in with reconciliation, healing, and peace. There is always Jesus – and, always, whether or not we're near any statues of Jesus – there is always hope.

It is as the psalmist prays, *Whenever I am afraid, I will put my trust in you.* (Psalm 56:3 from [Psalter for the Christian People: An Inclusive Language Revision](#))