

Afraid

I'm not sure which one of us woke up first, but since Martha admitted to us last year that she had never seen a sunrise, I'm guessing it was me. It was before dawn, when the faint light of the eastern sky was only beginning to chase the stars from the sky. In the darkness there was something big—really big—just outside the tent. Even though we were laying on an air mattress, we could feel the ground vibrate with each slow and deliberate step. A blast of air exhaled through giant nostrils seemed to move the suddenly insignificant tent fabric.

Silently, I inched toward the tent window and peered out. I could see a huge lumbering shadow between our tent and that of our friends. Then more shadows...and more. I crept back to the air mattress. "Buffalo," I whispered.

Camping in the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge near Lawton Oklahoma was a great way to get up close to nature—you know, camp in the habitat of wildlife and all that sort of thing. But this was the "sort of thing" that we hadn't really thought through. What do you do when an animal weighing in at nearly a ton is breathing down your neck?

While I was leisurely pondering this question, the giant next to us mistakenly thought our tent was substantial enough to scratch itself on. The aforementioned insignificant tent fabric pushed into our space—how much, I don't know...but far enough.

Back then I was not a very religious man. But Martha had me going to church as much as she could, and I had grown up in Sunday School, so I knew some of the basics. Instinctively I figured out that in a situation where you don't have a prayer, then you better get praying. I'm not sure exactly what I said to God, but I know I prayed that God would make the buffalo leave our tent—and us—in one piece.

I was still silently praying when, in a flurry of thunder the Buffalo were gone. Seriously, in less than two seconds, with the grace of 2000-pound ballet dancers a dozen buffalo had disappeared. Nothing was disturbed in the camp—not a chair tipped over, nothing.... What had spooked the buffalo? I'll never know for sure, but I immediately had the profound sense that God had done this—all of it.

It's been at least 30 years since the great Wichita Mountains buffalo invasion, but I think about it every now and then—especially when anxiety starts to set in. And, that's pretty much all the time nowadays. We live in a culture where marketers, politicians, and news reporters have figured out that we are highly motivated by fear—motivated to buy, vote, and watch.... We even make up our own terrors. For example, "smart phone separation anxiety." It's called FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out).

If we add to this anxiety all the things that are truly frightening, well it can be overwhelming. What are we to do when the beasts are breathing down our necks? Pray...really pray...pray like we mean it—like our life depends on it. Yes, God may chase the beasts away—or not. But God most certainly will chase our fear away. Because in the end, God is still in control. God has our backs...and more importantly, our souls (Luke 12:4-7).

See you in church, --pastor tony