

Recently I had an experience which caused me to become very scared. Anxiety is too mild a word for it – I was VERY scared. It was such an over-whelming experience that it was one of the few times in my life that I absolutely could not wrap my head around it and get my bearings. I was fighting both an objective enemy and the enemy of my own fear.

Lying in bed, struggling to get a grip on things, the story of “The War of the Worlds” -- the original movie – and the terror I experienced watching it as a kid flashed back to me. I decided to rent the movie and see it again. Maybe I could learn something.

The story is based, of course, on the story by H.G. Wells. For those that do not know the story, it begins with a fireball appearing over earth and crashing into the ground in California. A scientist in the community, Dr. Clayton Forrester, recognizes this is not an ordinary meteor. For one thing it is radioactive.

Three men from the town are tasked to guard it. It is nighttime and then slowly and suddenly the top of the “meteor” unscrews and a periscope light device with a flexible metal neck sticks out emitting pulsating colors and unearthly sounds.

The three guys guarding the Martians are pretty frightened but decide on a plan. Be friendly. They say “We ought to let them know we’re friendly – we can show them a white flag – we can say ‘Welcome to California; we’re friends. Everyone understands when you wave a white flag that you are friends.’”

At that moment the periscope probe spits out a death heat ray--- **ZAP!** The men are immediately incinerated leaving their shadows on the ground ala the atomic explosion at Hiroshima, fires are started, electricity goes out, and the people in the community begin becoming freighted – very frightened.

Lesson One with reference to my enemy: I would not be welcoming, friendly, or surrender.

A good man comes forth in the story: Pastor Matthew Collins. As increasing numbers of army personnel (called in from El Toro Marine Base, of all places), are being called up to get in position to confront the invading Martians. Pastor Collins decides that the major problem is that “we haven’t tried to communicate with them and let them understand we mean them no harm. If they are more intellectually advanced than us then they should be nearer the Creator.”

He then walks out from the protection of the military and towards the Martian machines. He holds in front of him what appears to be a book of psalms and begins to try to communicate by reading the 23rd Psalm. As a kid the scene and words were forever imprinted in me; I paraphrase:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.

***Even though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me***

***Surely goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever***

ZAP!!!!

The Martians open up with their death rays again and the pastor is incinerated. The army opens up with their weapons on the Martian enemy but with little effect.

Thus, **Lesson number 2: When confronting a crisis, communication may not be your most powerful tool.**

And also **Lesson number 3: Just because someone is judged more intellectually advanced does not make them, ipso facto, closer to the Creator.**

The scientist and the pastor’s daughter Sylvia run to a farmhouse to escape the invading Martians. There are reports of Martian meteors landing all over the world accompanied by widespread destruction and death.

But in an intimate and quiet moment she tells the professor that when, **“as a young child, when I was terribly scared and felt alone I went to a church for solace.”** There, in the church, she prayed with others. It was there that her family finally found her.

But outside the farmhouse worldwide destruction continues. The Martians appear unstoppable. The military even calls up the Flying Wing Bomber (remember, this is the 1950's), load it with an atomic bomb and drop it directly on the Martian fighting machines-- but to no avail.

Lesson number 4: Brute force and will power do not overcome all.

The professor and Sylvia become separated. In the chaos of the invasion with smoke, fire, buildings collapsing, people dying, he searches the city to try to find her. And then he remembers her conversation: “When I was terribly scared and felt alone I went to a church.”

He begins to search the churches. One of them, by the way, is a beautiful little church that has a wonderful statue of St. Joseph holding the Baby Jesus who, in turn, is holding the world in his hand.

He finally finds the church to which Sylvia retreated. Inside people are praying intently, praying for a miracle. The professor and Sylvia embrace.

Then something begins to change. Outside, Martian spaceships are starting to falter and crash without apparent reason one after another. People slowly start to come out of the church and note the crashed machines and dead Martians among the rubble and their own dead.

The narrator of the film intones:

“Martians didn’t have immunity to our germs. We were all praying for a miracle. After all that men could do had failed, the Martians were destroyed and humanity was saved by the littlest things that God had put upon this earth.”

Lesson Number 5: When terrified out of your mind go to a church. Pray. Have friends pray with you and for you. Ask for miracles. Don't be surprised if they happen.

And sometimes miracles emanate from places you would not expect; from God's littlest things.

My personal story had a happy ending.

But there are some things that I still can't fully comprehend: for example, not everyone in the movie survived. God's plan is loving and merciful, but at times beyond our limited minds.

Actually, an even scarier movie I saw as a kid was "The Thing."

But that's another story.