

If You Don't Go With Us ...

Have you ever left something important behind? Your keys? A camera? Your car? Maybe even a child? Here's a story from last year's holiday party scene that really riled up reporter Cindy Uken of the Desert Sun:

Pop quiz time. If you were the parents of two small children and were invited to a party but the children weren't, what would you do with the children?

- A) Hire a baby sitter.
- B) Send your regrets; stay home with the children.
- C) Take them to the party but leave them in the car while you drink yourself silly.

A would be a satisfactory answer; B would be even better. C is not -- or at least should not be -- an option.

Yet, in one of the most gut-wrenching stories to surface in the Coachella Valley this year, a Palm Springs couple apparently chose Option C. It is child abuse in its purest form. It is the zenith of selfishness. It defies the word parenting. Angel Gabriel Jimenez, 30, and Maria Belen Jaime Lozano, 30, were booked into Palm Springs City Jail this week after allegedly getting hammered at a friend's house Monday and forgetting they left their children alone overnight in a van. Seems the children -- ages 5 and 6 -- were an inconvenience to the couple's party plans.

The youngsters were found unharmed and asleep Tuesday morning in the van parked outside the couple's friend's home. The image of those two children huddled in a van alone in the dead of night raises myriad heartbreaking questions: Were they cold? Were they hungry? Were they afraid of the bogeyman? Did they cry themselves to sleep? Did they think their parents had abandoned them for the night -- or forever? The parents reported their children missing Tuesday morning more than two hours after the couple arrived home, police said.

Seems the father took a taxi home; the mother caught a ride home with a friend. Seems more than a little odd that they could figure out to get themselves home but forgot the children. The word self-centered readily comes to mind. The boy and girl were found several hours later and are now in the care of Child Protective Services, which is where they should stay until they can be placed in the permanent care of someone -- some adult -- who will love them and care for them the way children need to be -- and should be. Jimenez and Lozano don't deserve the title of parent. Party animal, maybe. But not parent.

Time for another pop quiz. If you were judge and jury in this case, how would you punish the parents?

- A) Take the children away from the couple.
- B) Send the couple to jail for no less than five years.
- C) Order them sterilized so they could never have children again.
- D) None of the above.
- E) All of the above.

If you answered E, you've scored 100 percent.

Think about it one more time. Have you ever left something important behind? I don't have much of a sermon today, just a story really. But hopefully we'll all get the message.

The setting is Mount Sinai, and Moses has been up on the mountain for 40 days receiving commandments and instructions from the Lord about how the people of Israel should serve Him. But the people got tired of waiting to hear from God. It's always waiting that's the problem, isn't it?

Isaiah 40:31 But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Humanly speaking, there are two things drastically wrong with this verse. The first is that God expects us to be renewed (not frustrated) while we wait. That's how God's upside-down economy works. The second problem with Isaiah 40:31 is the sequence of Isaiah's threefold promise to those who wait. Quite frankly, he's got it backwards! According to the rules of Hebrew poetry, the sequence of ideas should progress from the lesser to the greater. So we would expect the promises here to be reversed: walk and not faint, run and not be weary, mount up with wings as eagles. That sequence is far more dramatic and inspiring. Any of us can walk -- that's commonplace! But God sees it otherwise. We may want wings, but what we really need is to walk without falling down ... to live for God consistently and faithfully ... to simply not faint.

Israel just didn't get it, so instead of renewal they experienced rebellion. They created a golden calf -- their own idea of God -- and they cast off all restraints, basically designing their own comfortable religion. Needless to say, God was not happy about it!

Exodus 33:1-4 (KJV) And the Lord said unto Moses, Depart, and go up hence, thou and the people which thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt, unto the land which I swore unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, Unto thy seed will I give it: [2] And I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite: [3] Unto a land flowing with milk and honey: for I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiffnecked people: lest I consume thee in the way. [4] And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned: and no man did put on him his ornaments.

God said, "I will send my angel with you and keep my promises to you. I will let you prosper and even give you some victories along the way. But I will not go with you, because you have rejected my way and replaced it with your own way."

There's nothing wrong with angels – they represent the power of God!

- Over 230 times in Scripture we find angels carrying out their work; they were present at every crisis in history
- Angels have some type of “spiritual body” that can appear to man when God wills it
- Angels can “fly swiftly” (Daniel 9:21) to do God’s bidding
- There are “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands” (Revelation 5:11), or “an innumerable company” of angels (Hebrews 12:22) - we cannot comprehend their number
- Angels are spoken of as: Watchers, Hosts of God, Holy Ones, Ministering Spirits, Flames of Fire, Elect, Sons of God, Morning Stars, Sons of the Mighty, Princes, Thrones, Dominions, Powers

- In the OT, an angel ministered to Hagar and Ishmael when they were cast out, three angels brought God’s promise to Abraham and Sarah, two angels rescued Lot out of Sodom, an angel called to Abraham to spare Isaac, an angel gave Moses the revelation of God’s name, angels present at giving of Law, an angel warned Balaam of his disobedience, an angel destroyed 70,000 Israelites when David disobeyed, an angel strengthened Elijah, an angel slew 185,000 Assyrians, an angel preserved Daniel in the lions den, an angel preserved the three Hebrew boys in the fiery furnace

- In the Life of Christ, angels announced His birth to Mary, Joseph and the shepherds, angels ministered to Him in His temptation, angels ascended and descended upon Him in His ministry (John 1:51 - Jesus was the ladder!), an angel strengthened Him as He prayed in Gethsemane, an angel rolled the stone away from His tomb, two angels stood guard after His resurrection, two angels spoke to the disciples at His ascension (“Why stand ye gazing up into Heaven?”)

- In the Early Church, an angel opened prison doors to release the apostles, an angel sent Philip to the desert to witness, an angel told Cornelius to send for Peter, an angel rescued Peter out of prison, an angel killed Herod for his pride, an angel stood by Paul in a storm

But an angel is just an angel. A service is just a service. A sermon is just a sermon. A preacher is just a preacher. A song is just a song. A prayer is just a prayer. A miracle is just a miracle. **BUT GOD ... HE IS GOD!**

Quote lyrics: *It's All In Him ... or ... The Great I Am*

Moses went immediately to the Tent of Meeting to talk with God. He was determined that, whatever else happened, they were not going to move forward one step unless God’s PRESENCE went with them!

Exodus 33:15 (KJV) And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.

Exodus 33:15 (NLT) Then Moses said, "If you don't go with us personally, don't let us move a step from this place.

Exodus 33:18 (KJV) And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.

God, if you don't go with us, we're not moving! It seems that every other church has learned how to have services, songs and sermons without you anywhere near the place. But we want to be different ... we're willing to be different. We have seen glimpses, felt touches, experienced moments of your presence ... and we can't go on without it!

Psalms 114:7 (KJV) Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob;

Psalms 16:11 (KJV) Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

Psalms 51:11 (KJV) Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

Acts 3:19 (KJV) Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;