

St. Mark's Episcopal Church
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041617

Divine Intervention?

“One Easter afternoon Jasper, a little boy, was playing outdoors. He used his mother's broom as a horse and had a wonderful time until it was getting dark. He left the broom on the back porch.

His mother was cleaning up the kitchen when she realized that her broom was missing. She asked Jasper about the broom and he told her where it was.

She then asked him to please go get it. Jasper informed his mother that he was afraid of the dark and didn't want to go out to get the broom.

His mother smiled and said, 'The Lord is out there too, Jasper, don't be afraid.'

Jasper then opened the back door a little and said, 'Lord, since you're out there, would you get me the broom?’

Ah, the wisdom. Trying to figure out the wisdom of the Lord can be tricky, right?

John Stewart said, “A guy comes down to earth, takes your sins, dies, and comes back three days later. You believe in him and go to heaven forever. How do you get from that to Hide-The-Eggs? Did Jesus have a problem with eggs? Did he go, “When I come back, if I see any eggs, the whole salvation thing is off.”

(Light a candle)

It seems that God is always trying to shed new light, give us a new understanding in life. Jesus dies. Jesus is resurrected. There is sadness, and there is joy. We think we know something. Then God offers us something new.

In the St. Mark's membership classes, we discuss the fist and open hand message. A fist represents everything we believe to be true. Jesus is our Lord and Savior. We are to treat people as we would want to be treated, with kindness, love and compassion. We hold on to what we firmly believe to be true. An open hand represents a new understanding and wisdom. The world is flat. The world is roundish. Did you know that the church supported at one time that the world was flat? Not anymore. God, through science, has taught us something new. Years ago, many people living in America accepted the idea that people who were black had to be slaves. Today, we know that to be wrong. We support women as homemakers and as professionals outside the home. We don't support the stoning and killing of people who are gay. We instead try to love and support them in their walk with the Lord. Why? Because God has given us a new message, a new understanding.

In the Bible today, we learn three things that occur when God gives us a new message, when God sheds light on something. First, God makes things happen. He makes, or allows things to happen. Second, these happenings or events can often create fear in people. When life changes, people can become afraid. And third, when God sheds light, He calms the fears of people. He sends them comforting wisdom.

First, God makes, or allows things to happen. “After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, (probably the mother of the disciple James), went to see the tomb.” When he was alive, Jesus had told them that after his execution, after three days, he would rise again. “And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.”

In the Bible, quite often when God is going to make something happen, or allow something to happen, you see the word “suddenly.” Suddenly, an earthquake occurs and God sends an angel from heaven. The angel rolls back the enormous stone that covers Jesus’ tomb and the angel sits on the stone. A bit odd. But then again, God often works in strange and mysterious ways.

Next, “For fear of (the angel) the guards shook and became like dead men.” Fear creeps in. The guards not only must have thought that they had seen a ghost, but this supposed-ghost had just moved the tombstone away, the one that they were supposed to be guarding. They could be in danger of losing their jobs, let alone, being attacked by this strange ghost-like figure.

The angel comforts. “But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.’”

First, God makes something happen. Second, fear creeps in. And third, God calms the fears. God, through this angel, teaches the women about the promises of Jesus. After he dies, three days later, he will be raised from the dead, thereby defeating death forever. This can be comforting knowing that death for any of us is not the end.

Next, God, through the angel, tells the women to go quickly and tell others. Tell them that Jesus has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.” As if the whole resurrection thing wasn’t eerie enough, now Jesus was going to come visit them. Not surprisingly, they become afraid again. Actually, they become both afraid and joyful. And they go, just as the angel had commanded them.

SUDDENLY. There is that ‘suddenly’ word again. “Suddenly Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.” Jesus says to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” God, through Jesus, offers them peace and comfort. He sheds new light. They were sad from the death and loss of their friend and savior, Jesus. They were perplexed by the appearing of this angel. But God calmed them with the understanding that everything will be okay.

When God sheds light in the world, quite often, he makes things happen. Those happenings can cause fear. And God, time after time, calms people’s fears.

So, what is your story? How has God moved in your life? What strange and mysterious occurrences have happened to you? What fears did it bring, and how were you comforted?

Throughout this week, I have preached about the death of my father back in 1996. It was devastating for him and us when he had been diagnosed with cancer. It was devastating when he went through radiation and eventually had a lung removed. But then, the strangest thing occurred. He was nearing his death. Mom and I were downstairs in the living room, as the hospice nurse was tending to dad. At that point, we had had enough. It was time not to pray for healing anymore. We knew it in our hearts. He had suffered enough. His body was in pain, and it was shutting down. The two of us got together and prayed. We prayed, "Lord, take him, take him now. Take him out of this horrible pain." SUDDENLY, at that very moment, it was at that VERY moment, literally, that the nurse came walking down the stairs and told us that he had just died. We all looked at each other in fear. Did this actually just happen? Did we just pray and receive what we had wanted? We immediately went upstairs, and sure enough, dad had stopped breathing. He was dead, and now in heaven. God then was on the move to comfort us. We were all so, so sad. Mom, I think, was the most effected, at least, initially. She just wept and wept. And God was there. And God comforted us. And our new light, our new life had begun, our frightening and yet joyful new life. Dad was out of the pain now, and God was with us.

What is your God story, your fear and new light story? When was there a time when God enlightened your life?

So, I know people are always curious about what the Easter Chachke will be each year. Every year since the Veit's have been at St. Mark's, at Easter, I have given a Chachke to everyone, that matches up with the Easter sermon. It always has St. M and the date on the side. This year is the 12th one. Each of you will receive a tealight candle representing the light of Jesus in your life. Take it and remember that God is always with you, shedding new light and understanding. In the light, God makes or allows things to happen. Fear often rises out of those happenings. And God calms our fears and give us hope.

Happy Easter Everyone.