

St. Mark's Episcopal Church
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042317

The Funny Story of the Taxi Driver and St Peter

One Easter a priest and a taxi driver both died and went to heaven. St. Peter was at the Pearly gates waiting for them.

'Come with me,' said St. Peter to the taxi driver.

The taxi driver did as he was told and followed St Peter to a mansion. It had everything you could imagine from a bowling alley to an Olympic size pool.

'Oh my word, thank you,' said the taxi driver.

Next, St. Peter led the priest to a rough old shack with a bunk bed and a little old television set.

'Wait, I think you are a little mixed up,' said the priest. 'Shouldn't I be the one who gets the mansion? After all I was a priest, went to church every day, and preached God's word.'

'Yes, that's true.' St Peter rejoined, 'But during your Easter sermons people slept. When the taxi driver drove, everyone prayed.'

Oh boy. God is always trying to give us clarity.

In the name of God, who is our Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

He just appeared. It was the strangest thing. Foy showed up at the church last Friday, mistakenly thinking that it was Family Promise week, the week that we house and feed parents and guardians and children who are homeless. He is one who stays the night at the church to make sure that the needs of the families are met. What he found as he arrived at the church was an enormous cross laid outside of my office windows. It was just lying there, eight feet tall, weighing over a hundred pounds. He called his friend Larry to come down and check it out. As you can see, there were two massive eight-by-two pieces of wood securely brought together to make the foundation. There were places for candles on the cross section. Hooks hung below. A beautiful turquoise stone lay in the center. Whoever it was did not want to be recognized. They just wanted the church to have the ornate cross. In a strange sort of way, Jesus appeared on Good Friday in the cross. Jesus worked through someone, inspiring him to build this wonderful and perplexing structure. Maybe it was one of you who made it and brought it.

What do we do with it? Well, we honor it in some way. I do not know how we will honor it. But that is what we will do. This structure clarified the cross. It clarified the pain that Jesus went through, and reminded us of the pain that we all go through. Of course, it is not a crucifix. Jesus is not still hanging on the cross. He has risen from the dead. And we have hope now that death will not be the end. We have hope that suffering will not last. Because Jesus has risen from the dead, he has defeated death, and given us new life.

He appeared to his disciples after his death. He just appeared outside their house and then entered. It wasn't enough for him to leave them behind. Even though he had spoken to them about his death while he was alive, it was still bewildering and confusing, as death often is. He needed to offer clarity, the meaning behind his death and resurrection to them.

It was evening on the first day of the week. The doors of the disciple's houses were locked for fear of some of the Jews, the ones who had turned in their Messiah to the Romans to be executed and murdered. "Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side."

When Jesus appears to people, he does not keep them in mystery and confusion. He clarifies who he is. The disciples, perhaps, thought that he was a ghost. He had died. And yet, he was back again with them, showing them his wounds. He had been raised by God from the dead. Also notice how he just entered the house even though the house was locked. Jesus uses whatever it takes to make his messages, his guidance, clear. When a door is locked in our lives, he walks through them. When we are not able to understand God or even reach out to God, God reaches out to us. He sends us a message, which is what he did on Good Friday for the people of St. Mark's Church. We just didn't know it at the time. Foy did.

The reaction of the disciples was also typical when someone receives clarity in their lives. They rejoiced when they saw the Lord. He said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." In other words, do not be alarmed in your life and in your walk with the Lord. This is about God, and God sent Jesus into our lives and into the lives of the original disciples.

"When (Jesus) had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit (, the third part of the Trinity. There is God, the Father, God the Son, who is Jesus, and God, the Holy Spirit, the advocate, the one who helps us keep our faith in Jesus.). Receive the Holy Spirit.'" He then makes it clear what that means. "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." This was about the entire community forgiving and loving, not just an individual, as we understand in the Western culture. Individualism in the faith is more of a Western idea. Faith was in the community of people. It takes a village, and we are only as strong as our weakest link. If we forgive, they are forgiven. If we retain the sins, we hold on to them, allowing sin to have power over us.

The clarification continues. "Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'" Thomas needed proof. He needed Jesus to make himself real to him, not unlike us. And so, God delivered.

Can't you relate with Thomas? We need to know who you are, Lord. And we need to know now. And we need to know how that impacts our lives. In other words, by knowing Jesus, how does that impact my job, my relationship with my family, my kids and wife and mom and her husband and my sister and family, our friends? With Jesus in our lives, we have deep-seeded forgiveness and love and compassion dwelling within us. We find strength and knowledge where there is no strength and knowledge.

"A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said (a third time), 'Peace

be with you.” Notice again how Jesus just walked through the doors even though they were shut. Jesus will find whatever means possible to deliver his messages, to deliver the clarity that is necessary for us. Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’” Jesus gets personal. He makes himself real to Thomas, who incidentally had to wait a week for clarification. He needed to learn patience. Thomas responded, “My Lord and my God!”

Many of us can relate to Thomas. We need proof. We need something extra to understand the meaning of life and the meaning of Jesus. We don’t understand, and Jesus surprises us.

When the cross, when Jesus, arrived on Good Friday outside the doors of our church, I was reminded of the cross, the struggle of life and faith, the struggle that Jesus had gone through.

Then Jesus responded to Thomas, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” In other words, our clarity can come whether we have seen Jesus or not in the flesh. Jesus can reach us despite our sins. And we trust that God will deliver what He has promised.

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

Jesus gave us clarity, and he did it through signs. He has given us stories in the Bible, and he has given us stories in our own lives, real life scenarios. He shows himself to us to help us believe in Him. And in believing in Jesus, we find life in his name.

What does this mean? We stay awake and we talk with God through Jesus, hopefully unlike the sleepy sermons of the priest and the experience of the taxi driver. We turn to the Lord and talk with him about our needs. And God leads us to forgiveness and love, the clarity that is necessary to live a faithful life. It is God who reaches out to us, even more than we reach out to him, showing himself to us, offering clarity, and helping us where we most need help.

God gave clarity to all those who serve with Family Promise, inspiring them to serve. May God be with you.