

Just Where You Are

From the Bible: Luke 13: 18-21 and Luke 17: 20-21

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I was reminded of this story and shared it with our group of high school students and adults when we were on our recent summer work trip to Colcord, WV.

15 years ago.

Maybe more.

Kate Wissel and Tracey Michaels, who are both now mom's with younger children, were in high school...either Juniors or Seniors, good friends and with me on our summer work trip to Hurley, VA. We were replacing the floors in the home of a single mom whose floors had rotted out because of the water leaking in the kitchen and the water which seeped in as it came down the mountainside. A thin layer of coal dust from the trucks that went by every few minutes covered everything in the house. Both Kate and Tracey were hard workers, and since they had been on several trips before, they knew what to do and how to do it. So, while I was working with a group of students in one room they were in the kitchen working with another group of students. Suddenly, I heard them shout. And, maybe use one or two words you don't normally use or hear on our summer work trips. By the time I got out of the hole I was in and into the other room, water was spraying everywhere from a broken plastic pipe connected to the hot water heater. I had tools to rebuild a floor, but not to fix a broken pipe. As we frantically tried to turn off the water and figure out what to do, the next door neighbor appeared. He must have heard Kate and Tracey shout and came over to see what had happened. When he saw the broken pipe, he laughed and told them not to worry. Helped us turn off the water. Disappeared for about 10 minutes. Then reappeared with everything needed to repair the pipe and save the day. When Kate and Tracey talked about what happened in our reflection that evening, they described the neighbor as an angel who appeared out of nowhere.

At just the right time.

With just what was needed.

Then was gone again.

An angel.

Who chewed tobacco.

And, who was missing a few teeth.

And, who spoke with a mountain drawl.

But, an angel nevertheless.

I remembered that story again this summer when the crew who was building the deck and walkway for an older couple so they could safely walk from their house to their car told the story of breaking the a water line as they were doing the digging for the deck and walkway. Water

was suddenly everywhere and headed downhill towards the couple's house. Everyone stopped what they were doing to work together to divert the water away from the house while Paul Verdesi and the homeowner crawled under the house to where the water shutoff was located. But, the pipe was still broken and work could not continue until the pipe was repaired. When, again, a neighbor showed up.

Tools in hand.

To repair the pipe.

An angel in disguise.

Or, maybe just an angel.

In the Bible, the word *angel* simply means *messenger*.

One who shows up to speak God's word or to be God's presence.

Renaissance painters did us a great disservice when they started portraying angels as cherubs with wings rather than old men chewing tobacco. When they had them floating in the air rather than walking on two legs.

All of this leads to another story.

Which is really the story I want to tell this morning.

A little more than two weeks ago now, on the Thursday evening of our summer work, our group gathered in the First Presbyterian Church of Colcord, WV to listen to Emmett sing. Emmett grew up in Colcord. His family's homestead was at the top of the hollar. As he tells it, when he was a teenager he couldn't wait to leave. He left home at 16. Somehow found his way to Oregon. Then, with the help and encouragement of another angel, he became trained as a chef. Found his way back to church. Drove a truck for a living. And, then found his way home. Back to Colcord. And, as I said, he sings. Beautifully.

I wish I could remember exactly what he said that evening.

But I know it went something like this.

A prayer he said, in the middle of a song he was singing.

Thank you God for having these young people and their leaders be where you want them and mean them and need them to be.

Generally, my theology doesn't go very much in that direction.

Where God directs events and people.

Was it God's will...

God's plan...

That I was in Colcord that week?

As I said, my theology doesn't go very much that way, but I walked away from that prayer and from Emmett's singing wondering...

"Was I where I was supposed to be? Where God wanted and needed me to be?"

Maybe, myself an angel.

Meant by God...

Sent by God...

To be that interruption in someone else's life.

To be God's presence in the moment at hand.

And, if me...

Maybe also you?

Could it be that just where you are, in the moment at hand, is where God means and needs for you to be. To be God's presence.

To be light and hope and compassion and kindness.

To shed tears with and for another and to feel holy anger and to stir up courage.

What if you walked into work or school or the grocery store tomorrow and said to yourself,

This is where God means for me to be.

What would it be like?

What would you notice?

What would you do?

And, how does all this connect with where I began?

With Jesus talking about the Kingdom of God?

If God's Kingdom is, as Jesus claims it is, *in our midst* and not about someplace up there or about someday out there, then maybe it is about those moments when we recognize God in the moments we have and in the places we live. And, recognize we are in those places and that moment, as well. And where we are is just where we are meant to be.