

This morning, I want to tell you a story. An unexpected phone call came to the church one afternoon. The caller was a man asking that one of the pastors come to their home that evening at 8pm. This struck the Pastor as odd because EVERYTHING in Green Valley shuts down before 5pm, but when called we come. Checking the directory, the couple were not members or regular attenders, they had not even attended once, yet they were clearly Formerly Important People, who believed they were still Very Important People. The pastor rang their doorbell and as gracious hosts, they invited me into their home.

I have shared with you before that if you want to drive your pastors crazy, schedule a meeting and do not tell us what it is about! Had the church done something wrong? Did they want to make a gift to the Church? Were they looking for a Patio Sale pick-up? Was one of them given a terminal medical diagnosis?

Stuart got directly to the point. "You may have been wondering why we invited you here after dark?" Pastor began to have all the fears of a Horror Movie... rarely do good things happen in the dark of night. "The truth of the matter is, we have heard about you and the good work being done through your church. We are SPIRITUALLY INTRIGUED... We have never been religious, and being well known, we cannot just show up on a Sunday anonymously. Even if people saw you coming here they might wonder what was going on." He went on to describe that they owned homes in the Hamptons and Aspen, as well as a sail boat in the Bahamas. In each community, they were highly respected, successful pillars of the community. He is still CEO of their family company, sits on the Board of Directors of several firms, they belong to Country Clubs, Civic and Philanthropic organizations and have established a Trust for charitable purposes.

Sonya was getting impatient and said: "Church was never part of our lives growing up, but we know the basics, being ethical and when you have been successful to give something back. So we have done so."

Feeling as though they were dancing around something, and needed direction, the Pastor offered: "I am hearing possibility of two Bible stories that seem to apply. I have never thought of these two together before, one is in the Gospel of Mark about a Rich, Young Ruler who came to Jesus asking what he needed to do to receive Eternal Life and is told to sell everything he has to give to the poor." At which point Stuart cleared his throat loudly. "The other from John is about a well-known prestigious leader who came to Jesus, identifying that as a learned man he knew Jesus came from God, and Jesus told him that he needed to be "BORN ANEW." Stuart made a HRRMPH noise and got up to refresh his drink, "So either we give everything we have, or we become one of the Born Again types like my cousin's son. They always struck me as being like a Used Car Salesman trying to sell you something you don't want. We called you because we thought Presbyterians didn't go for all of that stuff."

"Sometimes we do shoot ourselves in the foot, and have things misunderstood, Jesus' nocturnal visitor did not understand this either. What Jesus said can be taken three different ways: BORN AGAIN, BORN FROM ABOVE or BORN ANEW. What this could mean is that we want to have a Do-Over at Life." Sonya jumped in, "I have thought about if I could live life over, what would I have done or said differently. But then again, I've lived according to the rules, succeeded by other's expectations, even my Father's and we have had a good life. Even if I had the chance to be born again, I am not sure what I would do differently."

Maybe this will help, "Born From Above" is not an intellectual idea, it refers to having another kind of experience, about life having a different dimension to it. I have heard some people refer to this as "VALUE ADDED". Stuart said "That's what I'm looking for. What is it we have to do?"

I could not resist saying "Give away all your money!"

But before they could react, I said "Not really, or at least not right away... Being born anew is not something you can do for yourself any more than being born a second time. Being born from above is

something God does, for us it is passive, not active.” Stuart said, “But I am a self-made man, I have always seen what I wanted and gone after it. Even talking to you, I initiated, I called and invited you.” “Being Born For Above means giving up the need to CONTROL, entering into a relationship where we trust someone or something else to be in control.” Stuart said, “That sounds scary. Couldn’t we just come to worship, maybe put something in the offering plate?” I responded “That would be a good start!”

“But let me try to explain it this way. The Church has this annual event called The Patio Sale.” Sonya said “O my PEO Group told me about that, it’s a kind of Rummage Sale isn’t it, with all the profit going to charities?” “Yes, except most of what is available is not rummage. These were someone’s treasures, that are in brand new condition, but tastes change, people change, sometimes they die, and everything from their life becomes available for others to RECLAIM. Imagine that instead of being asked to give away all your money, you were asked to give what once meant a great deal to you, is first quality, but no longer fits who you want to be...” Stuart said, “You mean tools and clothes, right?” “Artwork, Golf Clubs, Jewelry, small Appliances, Furniture, I’ve seen signed Baseballs and other collectables. OKAY, now what if we envision Offering OURSELVES, our lives and identity as what is being put up to be RECLAIMED by God.” You could see the gears of their minds trying to work to grasp this. “Try it this way. Have the two of you ever had a problem in your marriage? You did not just throw away the relationship, your marriage was not rummage, it is a treasure. So you worked to forgive each other, you RECLAIMED THE RELATIONSHIP, you reclaimed that other person as precious to you.” Sonya volunteered, “It is more important and better now, even than it was before.”

Sensing the time was right, I said “We have something very special to us, that we celebrate on the first Sunday of every month and when ever else it seems needed. We call it a SACRAMENT, which means “sacred” and this sacrament is called Communion. In Communion, we each offer ourselves up, making ourselves vulnerable by naming what is broken, or needs to be forgiven, with someone else, within us, or between us and God. AND asking for forgiveness, we are reclaimed and brought closer to one another, to GOD, and feel more whole ourselves.”