

Do you ever find some things hard to believe?

I have a friend who is retired from the FBI. He told of a true story that happened in his life. It was when he was taking part in a sting to see if a certain California Psychiatric hospital was illegally taking money from insurance companies. It so happened that he was leading a team of 45 who had been working all day long. Near the end of the day, they still had a ton of work to do. So they decided to get some food. They ordered out for pizza.

My friend, the director, went to the phone and called the local Pizza Hut. When the phone was answered he said, "I would like to order 29 large pizzas and 45 cokes." The person taking the orders said, "Great, where would you like to have the pizza's delivered?"

"I would like to have the pizza's delivered to the psychiatric hospital."

"To where?"

"To the psychiatric hospital. There are 45 of us here. We are all FBI agents."

"There are 45 FBI agents at the psychiatric hospital?"

"Yes, we have been working all day and we are hungry."

"How are you going to pay for this?"

"I have my checkbook."

"You have a checkbook, and you are all FBI agents."

"Yes, could you please deliver the pizza's here?"

"I don't think so."

Click.

Isn't that great? Yes, some things are hard to believe. I bet the guy who took orders from Pizza Hut had been burned a time or two before by crank calls. What would you have done if you had been the person taking the order? What do you do when you find some things hard to believe?

In some ways, that is what is going on with the disciples in our scripture for today. Jesus has invited them to gather in Galilee after his death and resurrection. They journey there, really not sure what they will find. When they arrive they discover that Jesus was indeed in Galilee. When they saw him, they worshipped him. But we are told that some held back. They weren't sure about giving themselves totally to him in worship. They

doubted. Do you ever find yourself doubting? Do you ever find yourself having a hard time believing? If so, what do you do?

This passage tells us that Jesus drew near to them. In the very act of drawing near to them, Jesus reminds them and reminds us when doubt threatens to overwhelm us, that we are not alone.

This is important to remember. I know that when doubt threatens to overwhelm me, I often feel very alone. I often feel as if I am the only one who is or has gone through what I am facing. But I am learning that when doubt threatens to overwhelm me; God is already there. God is already reaching out to me. I need to open myself up to God and to God's loving presence.

Most of the time, I open myself up to God by doing a few simple things. I make sure that I am taking time to read scripture, to pray and journal. This often allows me to slow down my thinking and re-examine my actions in the light of God's love. This process of self-reflection before God helps me to learn about myself.

A second way I pause and open myself up to God is that I have several trusted friends. I admire them and how they live their faith. I will often pick up the phone and say, "This is what I am facing . . . This is what has happened . . . This is what I have done . . . What do you think? What would you have done?"

By being intentional myself, before God and before other people, it helps me to become more open to the presence, the guidance, the calling of God in my life. What are you doing to be intentional about opening yourself up to God? What are you doing to intentionally work at living a life of faith?

Not only does Jesus draw near to the disciples in this passage, he gives them a mission. He gives them and us a reason for being faithful followers it is not so that we can keep this relationship with God as a private possession. It is so that we can find ways to share the hope, the life and the love we have been given with other people.

Michael Yaconnelli tells a great story of showing love and grace. He tells of one of his son's friends, Greg, who recently celebrated his 28th

birthday. Greg's parents were not thrilled with his life choices, especially his decision to live with his girlfriend, Diane. Knowing his parents displeasure, Greg and Dianne decided to get married, and they called his parents to give them the good news. "We want to get married in Minnesota, so the entire family can come." Greg's parents were happy but restrained.

While they were planning the wedding, Diane discovered she was pregnant. Realizing the pregnancy would upset his parents, Greg decided to call off the wedding and use the money to prepare for the baby instead. Greg and Diane opted for a courthouse wedding with a justice of the peace presiding. Only Michael Yaconelli's son and his girlfriend witnessed the wedding.

A couple of weeks later, his son and girlfriend were with other friends and the subject of Greg's wedding came up. Everyone concluded that it was more like a nonwedding - impersonal and isolated. As they talked, their conviction grew. No wedding should be an impersonal, isolated. Weddings should be celebrated. The couple should be surrounded by the support of family and friends. The group looked at each other and almost in unison said, "Why don't we give Greg and Diane the wedding they never had?"

As soon as the words left their mouth, they knew what had to be done. Even though Greg and Diane were legally married, the group decided to give them a real wedding. The date was set, both families were called, and surprisingly they all agreed to come to the surprise wedding. Sixty family and friends were involved in the conspiracy of Grace.

To ensure that the couple was available on their new wedding day, Greg and Diane were invited out to a dress up dinner. When they arrived a group of friends kidnapped them separately and each was given a bachelor and bachelorette party they'd never had. The bride and groom were driven to different secluded places where seated in a circle of same gender friends, they were asked a series of questions like, "Now that you have been married for three months, what mistakes have you made? How can we help your marriage?" Both the young husband and wife were given a picture of their spouse and asked to write on the back, all the reasons they loved that person.

When the parties were finished, Greg and Diane thought that the surprise was over. You can imagine their shock when they were returned to

the house, only to discover sixty of their family and friends waiting for them, laughing and yelling "surprise!" The hugging and the crying began. It took Greg and Diane a long time to stop crying, and after they regained their composure, the entire group moved to the back yard, surrounded with flowers, where a minister was waiting.

The couple exchanged vows, each parent vowed their support, and each friend walked by and whispered a blessing to Greg and Dianne. When the service was over, there wasn't a dry eye anywhere. Everyone left knowing they had participated in a moment of Grace.

On that day, in that event, Greg and Diane's friends acted with love, compassion and grace. They acted like the church. The church is strongest when we live out of a sense of mission and ministry. When we, together, can live for God and allow God to live through us that is when we can have the greatest impact on a world that is desperate to hear a word of grace and good news.

May God help us to live, so the world can see God's love and grace living through us.

Amen