
Letters to a Young Episcopalian: Story

This letter is part of a series of fictional letters by Canon George Maxwell intended for Episcopalians young and old who wonder what it means to be faithful in the world today.

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Dear Anna,

Your note reminded me of a story about my mother, your great grandmother, Sarah.

Mother was always reaching out to others. I don't know that she thought about it, really. She just did it.

Her hospitality created its own community. There was a police officer who checked on the house every night, an older woman living in the apartment building several blocks over whom mother visited regularly, and a woman who, I guess, lived in a shelter nearby whom mother met quite unexpectedly.

Mother stocked a container in the alley behind our house with things that she thought other people might be able to use. One day, she put out what she assumed to be a dress and pair of shoes she didn't need. It turned out to be a bridesmaid's dress and matching shoes that my sister-in-law planned to wear in a wedding that weekend!

When mother realized what she had done, she put a sign on the container, "Blue dress and shoes put out by mistake. Please return."

The next day, mother answered a knock on the front door to find a woman standing on the porch holding the dress and shoes, still in the dry cleaner's plastic bags. Mother thanked the woman, told her what had happened, and confessed that she didn't think that she would ever see the dress and shoes again.

The woman looked quizzically at mother and said, "after all you have done for me, why would you think that I wouldn't bring them back?"

There was a time when I wanted to forget our family stories, but now I'm thankful for them. I have turned to them often to remember who I am and to decide what to do. It's as if they are the first acts of a drama that I'm now living out.

I suspect this is why Moses talks so much about children in the exodus story. Three times he reminds the people of how they should tell the story to their children. He knows that their ultimate freedom depends on their children remembering that it was God who freed them from slavery.

I wanted you to know the story of how Christ appeared on our porch one day when a woman we had never met handed your great grandmother a blue dress and matching shoes.

It's part of the beginning of your story.

Your affectionate uncle,
Ames

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