

THE
MOSBY
CREEK
CHRONICLES



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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



I Ain't Skeered...

Revelation 21:1-6; John 13:31-35

Jubal Early is a fine man. Now, I'm not talking about the Confederate general. But Mr. Jubal was named for him. His father thought it would be a fine thing to name his only son for one of Robert E. Lee's favorite generals. Mr. Jubal has always figured he was an American by birth and a Southerner by grace. It had to be more than just luck.

But you know what's strange? He married Ms. Stacy. That's what most folks call her. But her given name is Anastasia. Now, you don't hear that one much in Mossy Creek. Or the South, for that matter. Well, Ms. Stacy isn't from Mossy Creek or the South. That's right, Mr.

Jubal married a, well, you know—a Yankee.

But that's only the half of it. Ms. Stacy is a lifelong Presbyterian. Mr. Jubal grew up Southern Baptist. She has spent years trying to turn him into a proper Presbyterian. Take baptism, for example. She keeps telling him that baptizing babies is the picture of God's grace. She says God chooses us, not vice versa. She says God chooses us before we can even respond. But Mr. Jubal keeps telling her that a real baptism means being old enough to give your life to Jesus and get a good dunking. He says Presbyterians might as well use squirt guns to baptize babies for all the water they use. The two of 'em are a mess.

And by now you've likely heard Ashley Johnson ended up in a mess. She spent a couple of years at the University of Wyoming. Then she left school to work on a ranch. When she came home, her folks, Dave and Corrina and her brother, Walker were tickled to death. When she came home, she brought everything she took with her and then some. Turns out, she was pregnant. Nobody saw that coming. Well, some folks said they did. They said Ashley leaving Mossy Creek was trouble just waiting to happen. And that troubled Mr. Jubal.

He and Ms. Stacy never had any children of their own. And Ashley was the daughter Mr. Jubal never had. He took to praying for Ashley the day she pulled out of Mossy Creek. So when she came home, he was tickled, too. But now she was in a fix, and that was breaking his heart. One night he told Ms. Stacy he was fixin' to have words with the Lord. She told Mr. Jubal to quit fretting. She said the Lord would take care of Ashley, and everything would be just fine. She said God's grace would be sufficient. Well, Mr. Jubal sure hoped so.

When the baby was born, he was pleasantly surprised to discover what a great thing that turned out to be. When he went to see Ashley in the hospital he ran into Dave and Corrina. He told them what a fine thing it was for them to be grandparents. He sure was glad Ashley was

doing well. Then he told them everything would be just fine. The Lord would look after Ashley. Dave and Corrina seemed genuinely pleased to hear that. Of course, that was what Ms. Stacy was telling Mr. Jubal, but it didn't matter. He reckoned she might be right this time.

I wish I could tell you everything was just great after that, but I can't. Some folks in Mossy Creek didn't much like the idea of baptizing babies in general and Ashley's baby in particular. Now how somebody could feel that way about a precious baby girl was more than Mr. Jubal could figure out. Maybe that is how he ended up agreeing with Ms. Stacy who thought God's grace was the cure for all the messes human beings got into. She believes God loves her all the time. She believes God loves everybody all the time. And she sure believed everybody included Ashley and her daughter.

Now, Mr. Jubal and his friends were in Marvin's one morning having coffee when one of them started talking about Ashley and her daughter. It didn't take him long to get Mr. Jubal all riled up. He knew Mr. Jubal objected to baptizing babies. But he didn't know Mr. Jubal knew Ashley and her folks. Didn't know he loved 'em, too. No, sir, it wasn't theology that was making Mr. Jubal mad. He didn't like what he was hearing because it was too mean for his taste. When his friends asked him what he thought, he grumbled he hadn't given it much thought.

Well, you won't believe what happened next. One of Mr. Jubal's friends laughed and called him yellow. It was all Mr. Jubal could do to keep from defending his honor and his family's good name. He wanted to punch his friend right square in the nose. But he reckoned he couldn't be a proper Christian and do that no matter how much they deserved it. So he just set his coffee cup down, looked his friend right in the eye and said, "I ain't skeered, ain't skeered of nothin', and you'd do well to remember that." Well, sir, as you can imagine that was the end of that conversation.

I know what you're thinking. What on earth did Mr. Jubal do after that? Well, the first thing he did was go straight home where he told Ms. Stacy what had happened. Then he asked her what he ought to do. Well, she learned a long time ago to just let Mr. Jubal go until he got cooled off. And if that wasn't going to happen anytime soon, she usually sent him on some errand. And that is exactly what she did this time. She sent him to see Pastor Marianne.

And he went. He wasn't all that sure about this thing of a woman preacher, but he had come to like Pastor Marianne, even trusted her a little bit. So he went sailing up to the church and just walked right into her office. "Preacher, I've got a problem I want you to help me with." She looked up in surprise and said, "Sure. What can I do for you?"

"Well, people are talkin' about Ashley's baby. Some of 'em got it in their head that we shouldn't baptize that young 'un. I might agree with them if this was just about baptizing babies. But this ain't about how to baptize people. This time it's just pure meanness." Tears welled up in his eyes, and he furiously wiped them away. He said, "I think the world of Ashley, and I can't see any reason to treat her or her baby that way. There's no call for that."

Pastor Marianne nodded her head, but he kept right on going. "Preacher, one of my friends called me yellow 'cause I said I didn't have an opinion on it. I'd a liked to punched him, but I didn't. I told him I wasn't skeered." He looked down and said, "But I might be. I've got thoughts about baptism. Stacy has been telling me for years that baptizing babies is the grace of God—He chooses us before we even know He exists. I've got to the point where I think she might be right." He teared up again and said, "If Stacy's right, Ashley and her daughter are the Lord's children. I may not have a lot of schoolin', but I know the Lord didn't turn His back on His Son. And if He didn't turn His back on family, we shouldn't either."

Pastor Marianne took off her glasses and said, "You're right; He didn't. And He wouldn't

do this: Jesus would never tell His disciples that they could follow Him without loving people for all their worth no matter what kind of situation they were in. Just listen to this passage I'm preaching Sunday. Jesus tells His disciples, 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. Your love for one another will prove that you are My disciples.'" She looked at Mr. Jubal and asked, "What do you think He means?"

Mr. Jubal thought a second and said, "Well, He doesn't likely mean how we feel 'bout each other. We're all the time doin' somethin' or another to make somebody mad. Just like my buddy this morning. I love him, but right now I don't much care for him. But if he needed help, I'd do anything I could for him."

Pastor Marianne nodded her head and said, "Right! That's exactly right. And when Jesus is talking to His disciples, He is talking to us, too. I think He's telling us not to be scared. 'Don't be scared to love each other with everything you've got.' It's hard to do that. We let each other down way more than we'd like to admit. But we have to quit worrying about getting our feelings hurt and keep on loving each other anyway. You're right. In the church, love isn't a feeling; it's a way of life. Being family isn't easy, and it is scary. But that is what we promised in our baptisms, isn't it?"

Well, Mr. Jubal wasn't a theologian by any means, but he knew that was right. In a little bit he thanked Pastor Marianne for her help and went on home. During supper he told Ms. Stacy he had been doing some thinking. And he was thinking she might just be right. The church ought to stand behind Ashley and her daughter and be the best church family they could and help her baby grow up to be a first-rate Christian. He said that was what Jesus meant when He told His disciples to love each other. They were in it together for better or worse. He

reckoned baptizing Ashley's baby was a pretty fair idea. As he got up from the table, he told Ms. Stacy God's grace didn't depend on how you were baptized or how much water you got baptized with. Ms. Stacy might near fainted and murmured, "Oh, my goodness...".

Well, small towns being what they are and all, people were still talking about Ashley's daughter long after they should've moved on to something else. But they didn't. And there Mr. Jubal was at Marvin's having his morning coffee when his friends showed up. It wasn't long before one of them brought that baptism up again. And the one that called him yellow laughed and said, "I reckon you still don't have an opinion."

Before he could say another word, Mr. Jubal said, "No, I've got one." He put his coffee cup down and said, "When Jesus told His disciples to love each other, He wasn't kiddin'. And lovin' people is hard work. But church is family, and a family sticks together. And God knew that baby before the beginnin' of the world. That may be Ashley's baby, but she's the Lord's child, too. And baptizin' her is the right thing to do. I'll tell you what; God's grace grabbed us before we knew which end was up. The Lord ain't never let me down. And I don't believe He'd have me let my church family down neither. When they need a Sunday school teacher for that young 'un or any of our young 'uns, I won't turn 'em down. Same thing for Vacation Bible School. I love 'em all, so they can count me in. That's what I think." He picked up his cup, glared over it, and said, "I may be a lot of things, but I ain't skeered to do the right thing. And lovin' Ashley and her daughter is the right thing to do."

Well, sir, the day for that baptism was beautiful. Ashley was glowing, and people said her baby was likely the cutest thing they had seen in a good long while. Mr. Jubal was there early. He said he wanted a good seat and promptly sat down in the front row. He picked up a Bible and leafed through it to Revelation. And then he smiled. He was looking for a true fact and

found exactly the one he was looking for. He read to himself, "God will wipe every tear from His people's eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, because the former things have passed away." This morning all the sadness and crying and pain were gone, long gone. Mr. Jubal smiled and murmured, "Thank You, Lord."

But there was one problem. Dave and Corrina told folks they wouldn't be standing with Ashley during the baptism. Now that was a sad thing for a lot of people who knew them and Ashley. They just couldn't understand. And they couldn't stand the thought of her being up there all by herself with that baby. This baptism was going to be lacking something.

When Ashley brought her daughter forward, there was movement in the front of the sanctuary that caught everyone's eye. It was Mr. Jubal getting up and smoothing out his gray dress jacket. Well, I know what you're thinking. Mr. Jubal was there as an elder representing the session. And he was. After he presented Ashley's daughter for baptism, Pastor Marianne asked Ashley if she put her whole trust in the grace and love of Jesus Christ and if she wanted her daughter baptized. Ashley nodded her head and said yes, she did.

Then it happened. Pastor Marianne turned to Mr. Jubal and asked, "Will you, by your prayers and witness, help this child grow into the full stature of Christ?" Lord, Mr. Jubal was putting his money where his mouth was. He was standing with Ashley as a sponsor for her daughter. General Lee himself could have heard Mr. Jubal say, "I will, with God's help."

Well, sir, turns out that was a baptism for the ages. Some folks said they had lived to see the kingdom come. Mr. Jubal had come around to Ms. Stacy's opinion of baptism. When he heard them say that after church he said, "Have not. I was standing up for Ashley. And I wasn't just speakin' for myself. I was answerin' for our church family, too. She's family, and I'm doing what a church family does—I'm lovin' her and her baby girl no matter what. The Lord said we

should love one another no matter what. Those are the Lord's orders, and I was just followin' orders." And you know Mr. Jubal. He was as good as his word.

Well, I'm going to tell you something, but you've got to promise not to tell. You and I will be the only ones who know, but when Mr. Jubal said that Ashley's daughter, Grace just smiled. And that's the Gospel truth.

