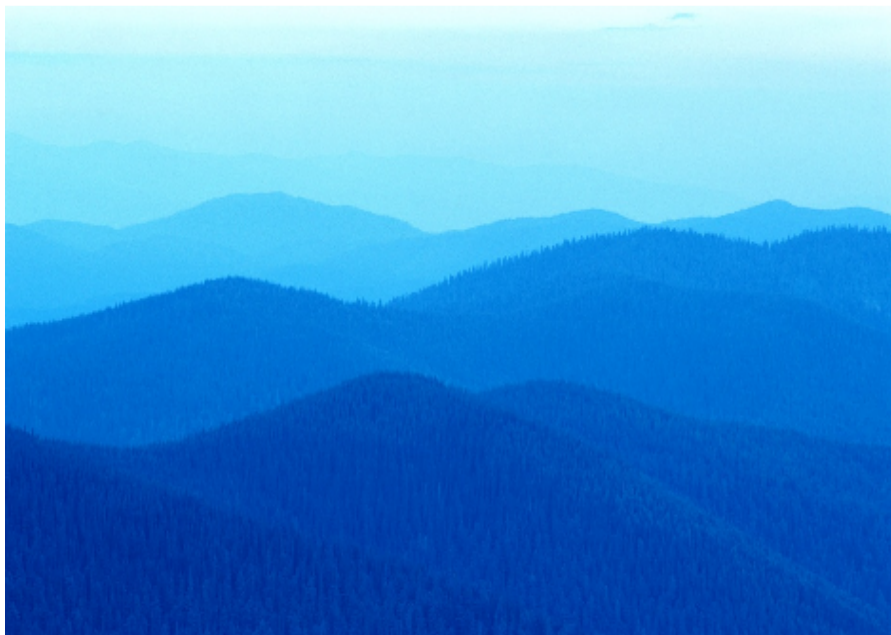


THE
MOSBY
CREEK
CHRONICLES



Rev. Dr. Steven L. Frazier

CHAPTER EIGHT



Showing Up...

1st John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

It's spring in Mossy Creek. The mountains are freckled with dogwoods and redbuds. But most folks haven't noticed. Times are tough, tough all over. Making ends meet is always a little tricky in Mossy Creek. The first thing you've got to know is that the good times are never all that great to start with. And the bad times? That's when things really start falling apart. That's life in the mountains—it's pretty, and it's pretty hard. Folks like to laugh about being so far out in the sticks that they have to ship the sunshine in. But the laughing stops when they start losing their jobs. Once you come down out of the mountains, work is a lot easier to find. And families in Mossy Creek are used to seeing their young 'uns take off for towns big enough to make the map, looking for work.

That's what the kids keep saying anyway. But everybody knows better. They know that what they're really looking for. They're looking for a sure thing.

Well, here is a sure thing. There are some people who are never going to leave Mossy Creek. They've got the mountains running around in their blood, and nothing will take that out. Bobby Ray's brother, Jackson, is one of them. He's one that stayed. Jackson is an electrician. It took some doing, but he built himself a nice little business. He has a shop, an office, and a secretary. When things are going good he has four or five guys working for him full-time. But Jackson is a blue-collar boss man. You might find him fixing a cooler at the gas station on Main Street in the morning and wiring a new house outside of town in the afternoon. Somebody once said the only thing that makes him a master electrician is the fact that he thinks he is the master of electricity in Mossy Creek. But they're just kidding. Everybody likes Jackson. Folks know he is the best. When he fixes something, it stays fixed.

But this spring there are some things he won't be able to fix, and the economy is one of them. Sometimes you do everything right, and things still don't work out the way they should. The trouble didn't start in Mossy Creek, but it sure didn't waste any time getting here. First businesses ran out of work. Then they ran out of money. Everybody knew layoffs would be next. And that's when folks started getting really scared. They quit spending money on anything they didn't need. And an electrician was one of the first things they decided they could do without. Jackson kept his employees on as long as he could. But he finally ran out of work, too. And there is no good way to tell your friends they don't have a job anymore. His men had families to take care of and bills to pay. It wasn't Jackson's fault, but he didn't see it that way. To hear him tell it, it was like he had killed his friends one at a time, one after another.

Jackson's friends tried to make him feel better, but nothing they said made any difference. It wasn't long before he started fading away. When Jackson

wasn't working, he disappeared way back up in the mountains where nobody could find him. His wife, Sarah and their two kids, Stevie Ray and Bonnie were always at Our Savior Presbyterian Church on Sundays. But after a while Jackson gave up on that. That's what people thought when he stopped showing up. And that is about the time Bobby Ray made a point of tracking Jackson down to find out how he was doing.

Bobby Ray found him rewiring the front porch light on the old Olinger house. After some small talk he said, "Jackson, none of this is your fault." Jackson said, "I know that, Bobby Ray." Then Bobby Ray took a deep breath and said, "Isn't God's fault, either." Jackson looked up and said, "I didn't say it was." That surprised Bobby Ray. He thought a second and said, "That's good. That's good. That'll make coming back to church easier." Jackson shook his head. "Nope. I'm givin' it a break for a little bit."

That didn't make any sense at all to Bobby Ray. "If it isn't your fault, and it isn't God's fault, what's staying away from church got to do with anything?" Jackson leaned up against the door jam and said, "I've got a lot of things on my mind. I'm tryin' to find a way to put my men back to work. Their families are countin' on me. This mess isn't my doin', but I'm likely the only one who is goin' to get me and them out of it. When I get things straightened out, I'll be back."

Bobby Ray picked up an old piece of wire and started fidgeting with it. After a while he said, "There's a lot of people prayin' for you. They miss you. Heck, I even miss you." Jackson smiled weakly and said, "I appreciate you sayin' so; I do. I'll be back one of these days." Bobby Ray hung around for a little bit longer, but Jackson was focused on what he was doing. It wasn't long before Bobby Ray was pretty sure there wasn't anything left to talk about.

There might not have been anything to talk about, but Bobby Ray sure gave Jackson something to think about. After Bobby Ray left, Jackson went to

his truck and fished a Diet-Pepsi out of his cooler. He sat on the tailgate of his truck and spent some time thinking. By the time he finished his drink he was pretty sure he wasn't losing his faith. It wasn't anything that serious. It was just covered up for the time being. He figured it was about like that stack of old hunting magazines he kept by his bed; he didn't have to flip through them every day to know the ones he liked the best were tucked away in there somewhere. That thought comforted Jackson. It wasn't like he doubted the Lord. He just wasn't sure things were going to get better by themselves. And whatever Jackson is, he is a practical man. He got up, threw his Diet-Pepsi can in the back of his truck and said, "I haven't lost my faith in common sense or hard work, either."

Jackson ended up taking a call on Good Friday. A project manager for a chain of hunting and fishing stores was going to be in the area on Sunday looking at some sites for a new store. One of them was on the highway leading into Mossy Creek. This guy wanted to talk to some local contractors about the project. Jackson felt like he couldn't turn him down. And so that is how Jackson missed church on Easter Sunday. Sarah and the kids were there, but he was nowhere to be found. When Sarah told Jackson's mother what was going on, she got all riled up. And when mamma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy. So Easter didn't pass without her calling Jackson, and then sending Bobby Ray by to visit him again. Come the end of the day, Jackson was glad to be done with Easter.

The week passed. On Friday night Jackson made good and sure he showed up at Bobby Ray's house. Bobby Ray was doing some grilling. And in Mossy Creek there is nothing better than a little barbecue on a Friday night. Some pig, cole slaw, baked beans, and sweet tea—you can't beat that. Jackson knew lots of folks from church would be there. It would be an easy way of getting back into the swing of things. He was visiting with some friends when Pastor Marianne showed up. Jackson took a quick look around for a way out but he was stuck. Pastor Marianne was her usual cheerful self. She was glad to see

Jackson and wanted him to know she had missed him. She wondered how things were going. It was just about that time that Jackson was glad he had spent that time thinking on the tailgate of his truck. He had an answer for Pastor Marianne.

And with that, Jackson got to explaining. "Pastor Marianne, I got to thinking about this the other day when Bobby Ray stopped by to see me." He laughed, "I think he thought I was losin' my religion, but I'm not. I know folks are worried that I didn't come to church on Easter and that I've been missing lately. I'm just tryin' to do everything I can to get my guys back to work. They're dependin' on me. The way I figure it, my faith is like this big ol' stack of hunting magazines I have at home. The ones I like the best are in there; they're just covered up. If I hunt around long enough, I always find 'em."

Pastor Marianne smiled. "I can see what you're getting at. What if that stack ever gets so big you get tired of looking and give up? What if you decide you can do without the magazine you're looking for? What then?" Jackson took a long look at his tea and then took a drink. Finally he replied, "I guess I hadn't thought of it that way." He hadn't thought this conversation was going to be so hard, either.

But Pastor Marianne wasn't done, not by a long shot. She said, "This Sunday I've got a sermon I'd like for you to hear. It's about Thomas. The thing about Thomas is..." Jackson cut her off. "Wait a minute. I know how that one ends up. I'm no Doubtin' Thomas. That's what I was telling Bobby Ray the other day. I'm not doubtin' the Lord. It's just I got a lot of work stuff goin' on. It's got me goin' most of the time. That's what's coverin' my faith up a little bit. But it's still there. Things will get better sooner or later. When they do, I'll be back." Jackson knew he shouldn't say any more, but he just couldn't help himself. "Look, Marianne, I'm all for miracles and all that. But I put a lot of stock in hard

work and common sense. The way I see it, miracles start happenin' when you're ready to make 'em happen."

Pastor Marianne raised her eyebrows and said, "Really? Well, how do you account for the miracle of the resurrection? Who made that one happen?" Now Jackson knew he was in a world of trouble. He had just dug himself a hole he wasn't going to be able to get out of. "Well, God did that. But Jesus was His Son. The Lord wasn't goin' to leave Him in the tomb." Pastor Marianne smiled and nodded her head in agreement. Then she looked Jackson right in the eye and said, "Here are three things I believe with all my heart. Right now, you're in a grave. You didn't start digging it, but you've been helping for all you're worth the last few weeks. The next thing is that you're a child of God, and the Lord won't leave you in that grave. He's still in the resurrection business. The only way you're going to end up stuck there is if you're bound and determined not to come out." When she paused, Jackson cautiously asked, "Well, what's the third thing?"

Pastor Marianne said, "Come with me." They went over to the grill. She picked up a pair of tongs and took one of the coals and set it off by itself away from the fire. Jackson watched as it quit burning. Then it changed colors. It went from being bright red to a dull orange. It wasn't long before it turned gray. Jackson looked at Pastor Marianne and said, "I get it." But she said, "Wait a minute; I'm not done yet." She took the tongs picked up the coal and put it back in the fire. In no time, it was burning again.

The two of them stood there silently watching the fire. Pastor Marianne finally said, "Thomas was a good man. He doesn't deserve that nickname he's been stuck with. His sin wasn't doubting. We all do that once in a while. He got himself in trouble when he quit showing up. That's how he missed seeing Jesus the first time He came looking for His disciples—Thomas just didn't show up. But when he finally did so did Jesus. And He didn't mind giving Thomas the proof he

wanted that He was alive. Jesus never gave up on him. Now as good a story as that is, it's an even better lesson." Jackson said, "Let me get this straight. You're saying that if I'll just have enough faith to keep showin' up, the Lord will help get me through this mess." Pastor Marianne smiled and said, "He sure will. It's just another kind of resurrection. But the Lord will be doing that through your church family. You'll be fine as long as you keep showing up."

Later that evening Jackson laughed and said, "All I needed was a little pork barbecue to get straightened out." But he knows better than that. Since then things have started getting better; they always do. And Jackson? He prays twice as much, worries half as much, and makes sure he shows up for church every Sunday. You can see he has a whole new way of seeing things. He can see that making ends meet is still tough. But that's life in the mountains—it's still pretty, and it's still pretty hard. Some folks left; most stayed. The ones who are here are back to laughing about being so far out in the sticks that they have to ship the sunshine in. You know, that joke is so old it'll never go away. But the way Jackson has it figured now Jesus isn't leaving, either. It's a whole lot easier to laugh when you know Jesus is staying, just waiting for you to show up. That's what Jackson is saying anyway. He just keeps telling folks it's a sure thing. Amen.

