



I was reminded of one of my favorite Easter stories yesterday, 'Easter at the Boondocks' by William White. It is the story of a young pastor, David Zwanziger, at his first call, preparing his first Easter sermon. He is SO VERY excited to have an opportunity to preach the Easter gospel. He ends up out and about on Holy Saturday, and being new to the area, ends up lost. It is now 10pm and his car is also out of gas. He starts walking and finds himself in the middle of nowhere, but before long he sees a neon sign flashing at what is undoubtedly the seediest tavern he has ever seen. The Boondocks, it proclaims. Out front there are rusted ol' pick-up trucks and six shiny motorcycles. Both vehicles make him nervous, but what other choice does he have? When he walks in, he does not recognize anyone, and he is not sure if that is good or bad. As he makes his way to the bar, every eye in the room is on him. The bartender says, "What da' ya' have?" What he really wants is a ride to town, but what he says is "I'll have a Coca Cola, please." The bartender finds a dusty bottle under the bar and passes it along. David then notices a group of men in the corner playing pool. Because his father sold sporting equipment, he knows not only the love of God in Jesus ... he knows pool. So, he walks over with his Cola and asks if he can play, hoping he will get a ride into town from all this. The men, obviously bikers, smirk at him as they say "rack um' up." David wins the first game, and then he wins the next. Finally someone says, "You gotta play Turk." And the call goes out, "Hey Turk we got a hotshot over here." Turk comes over. He is well under six foot, and well over 250 pounds. Pulling a leather case out of nowhere, he yells "Rack um' up." When David wins again, Turk calls him "Shark" and tells him he owes the Shark another drink. David orders another Coke, and they settle down for a conversation. Turk asks Shark what he does, and David momentarily contemplates lying, but instead takes a deep breath and tells him that he is the new pastor in town, and how it is Holy Saturday, and he cannot wait for Sunday. It is Easter Sunday. The whole bar is quiet. Turk ends up telling Shark that he has never been to church. You see, his Mama never married his Daddy and the good church people did not want anything to do with them. In fact, they often would make his Ma feel down right bad. He knows something about the commandments from TV, but to be truthful, he does not even know what Easter is all about. Once again the bar gets absolutely silent, and David realizes that Turk has given him an invitation. He looks around at the faces of those in leather jackets and he says, "Jesus was born about 2000 years ago, and his mother wasn't married either. When he began preaching, the people used that against him. They wondered how God could speak through a man with his background, but it was clear that God did speak through him." David continued his sermon, "during his life, he traveled from town to town, teaching, healing, sharing stories of God's incredible love, acceptance and grace. He ate and socialized with people the good folks never gave a second thought to, unless it was to call them sinners. He called the people his brothers and sisters." "As his popularity grew, so did the resentment of the religious authorities. When he finally rode into town on a donkey, on what is now known as Palm Sunday, the people threw him a parade. That was the last straw. The good religious folks lied about him. They simply lied to make him go away." "They nailed him to a cross and crucified him. His friends, his disciples, deserted him. It was the worst death imaginable." David realized that he had everyone's attention. "And, still worse, It looked like the authorities had won. That was Friday. On Sunday morning, three women, one of which had once been a prostitute, went to the tomb. They found the body gone. Suddenly, an angel appeared telling them that Jesus was alive, not dead. The angel told them to go tell the other disciples." Turk interrupted for the first time, "You mean he was still talking to those bums?" "That's the kind of man he was," said David. "He treats people like God treats us, even when we are unfaithful and don't deserve it. He forgives us, even when we betray him. That is the good news of the gospel." Turk spoke for the crowd, "That's a crazy story, Shark." "It's a crazy world," David told Turk. "Jesus spent his life loving and serving the people, and he calls others to do the same. That's what God was saying "yes" to when he raised Jesus from death. That's the way of Jesus, and I try," said David, "to make it my way too. Because he lives, we live too. And, if we believe in him, we will never die." A few minutes later, after telling Turk about his car trouble, one of the men came back after syphoning off enough gas for him to make it home. David invited them all for Easter service the next day. People still talk about the sermon Pastor David gave his first year, but what they really talk about is the day those six shiny motorcycles started showing up at church. When the men were asked what brought them to church, they said, "We're friends of Shark." It is a great story, and it reminds me that we all have a story. What brought you to faith? What continues to nurture your life? What are the God moments you experienced this last week? I encouraged you to be bold and share your story this Easter. It is the way we too follow Jesus. Easter Blessings!! Share a story!! *Pastor Karen*