

## The Tale of the Liberal Pastor

Reverend Michael Lynch, was the pastor of an urban community church that had a great reputation for openness to all. It did not matter who came to the church, it was always open to everyone, no matter what they believed or what kind of life they lived in. Reverend Michael took great pride in his parish.

Reverend Michael did not believe it was ever his duty to tell anyone what to do. He was there to build a community, not to preach to people about what was right and what was wrong; what was correct and what was incorrect.

There were no rules to be members of his church. There were no doctrines that had to be followed. There was no code of conduct, there was no requirements for membership, there was no One Truth that all were required to believe in. Each person was free to believe or not to believe what he felt was the right path for him on his spiritual journey. Rev. Michael was there to assist people on their journey, to make them feel more comfortable within the church community, but not to direct them about which road was right and which was wrong on this journey.

There was only one rule, one doctrine, one truth that all had to believe in: respect others, no matter what. Other than this, there were no rules. One could believe or not believe... it didn't matter... but all that mattered was that you respected others, no matter whether they agreed with you or not. One could do or not do... it didn't matter... but all that mattered was that you respected others, no matter whether they agreed with you or not.

In one community, there were a multitude of truths, a colourful rainbow of ways and thoughts, and Michael was greatly pleased, because they treated one another with respect.

One day, Reverend Michael met (to his eyes) a most troublesome individual, who failed to adhere to the one creed of the church. He was an immigrant of some sort, belonging to a different race, although Rev. Michael did not know which country it was.

The troublesome man began arguing with members of the congregation, insisting that there was only one truth, only one doctrine. The man showed such ignorance (to Michael's eyes) in failing to understand that there was no one truth, there was no *right* and *wrong*, but it was just a matter of one's perceptions. The troublesome man said such terrible words, by insisting that the community was not following God, but it was deceived by the devil and headed for perdition. No one could stand such things, but Reverend Michael did not wish to exclude him from the community, for he did not wish to ever exclude anyone.

Reverend Michael argued with the troublesome man, but the troublesome man kept insisting that Reverend Michael was deceived.

'How can you not see?' the troublesome man said, 'that some things are true and some things are false? How can you not see that right is right and wrong is wrong?'

'What I see is not what others see,' Michael responded, 'What you see is not what I see, and what I see is not what you see. There is no *one* beholder of Truth, all are beholders equally.'

'Christ is true and other religions are false. The bible itself says so!'

'The bible is just one way of knowing God, but there are other ways too!'

'How can you be a Christian and say that? You are not a Christian!'

Reverend Lynch had had enough, for the first time in the history of his parish, he made the decision to ask the man to leave. The door was always open, but this was too much for Reverend Lynch to handle. He bid the man to leave and the troublesome man, obediently left, but before the door closed, he shot back, 'I will pray that you wake up from your sleep!'

Reverend Lynch then went back to his community and told them to not be troubled too much by this troublesome man, and to continue their communal activities as they did before.

Reverend Lynch returned home that night, exhausted, he fell into bed and slept. But as he lay in bed, he felt a hand brush his face and he opened his eyes, there were three men standing in his room with him. They were dressed in grey linen, and they had hats on their heads that had veils hanging down, which covered their faces.

The one in the middle spoke with a deep voice, 'Michael Lynch, you are in great danger.'

Reverend Lynch grabbed his blanket tightly and with his heart pumping fast, he panicked and yelled 'HELP! HELP!'

But the one standing on the right, held up his hand in a gesture of 'stop' and spoke, 'No one can hear you, there is no need to scream.'

'WHO ARE YOU?' Reverend Lynch demanded to know.

'We are the souls of other pastors like you in churches like yours, who are now suffering because we made mistakes that you are making now. By the mercy of God, you are receiving a warning that we never received. You should be very thankful.'

Reverend Lynch tried to get out of bed, but he found that his legs couldn't move. The middle one spoke, 'It is time for you to see and understand.'

Reverend Lynch then opened his eyes and woke up. It was all a dream, he breathed a sigh of relief.

Reverend Lynch returned to the church the next day. It was a Monday, and very few usually came that day, although they had social actions groups that were meeting at the church in the evening, which he had to attend to.

He spent much of the day occupied with filing various paperwork and spent lunch with the church secretary who told him about various phone calls that were made that morning, including by a boy who was convinced God wanted him to become a girl.

‘Did you tell her, what I said to you before that you ought to do?’

‘Yes, of course, I told her that she should listen to her heart and not let anyone tell her what she was and how she should behave. I directed her to clinics that offer counseling on gender transitioning and re-assignment surgery.’

Reverend Lynch did not have much thought of his dream the previous night, except briefly during the evening meeting, when there was some discussion about the question of the afterlife between the different religions. Reverend Lynch, strangely felt like he didn’t want to say anything, because he felt something very uncomfortable with the question.

He returned home and went to bed again. He believed that the dream the previous night was only a dream, but he worried that the dream would somehow repeat itself.

After an hour in bed, he woke up again, and when he looked around the room there was no one there, but he thought he could hear something like the sound of machinery outside of his bedroom.

‘What is going on?’ He thought to himself.

He could move his legs this time. He got out of bed and put on his slippers and went out of his room. Rather than seeing a hallway, however, he saw a propeller airplane sitting in an airfield. He was outside, the sun was shining brightly, but it was not too hot.

There were some mechanics that looked like they were servicing the plane.

Reverend Lynch walked over to it and said, ‘What are you doing?’

A mechanic looked up and said, ‘We got to get this thing ready to fly’

‘Fly to where?’

The mechanic pointed up and said, ‘Up there, of course, where else do you think?’

Reverend Michael looked up and only saw the sky, with the white clouds against the blue background and the sun shining off to the side.

The other mechanic was engaged in his work, using a wrench to tighten something on the fuselage, and said, ‘Look we got to be careful with what we are doing. It is an airplane you know, if this thing isn’t ready to fly, then people will fall and die! When you do a job, you better you do it right!’

Reverend Michael opened his eyes again and woke up from the dream. He paused in bed and wondered if this really was more than just a dream?

He went back to sleep again and woke the next morning. Tuesday had the youth group in the evening, and they were engaged in a ministry to help the homeless in the community.

During the afternoon, he went to another church where a meeting of several pastors was taking place from different denominations.

The pastor who hosted the event was a good friend of Reverend Lynch. He was once a business lawyer, who gave up his high paying job in order to become a shepherd of souls. At the same time, he still offered services to help with labour unions whose bosses had had a good relationship with him. His name was Alexander. Reverend Lynch sometimes liked to talk to Alexander about problems in his mind that he didn't like to talk to other people about.

The meeting was discussing about an ecumenical prayer meeting that they had scheduled for the next month and about details of how it was to be hosted. The local Catholic priest volunteered his parish for it, and they took a vote and all agreed to it.

The meeting was very short, less than half an hour and then they adjourned.

However, Reverend Lynch stayed longer, because he wanted to talk with Alexander about his dreams. He had a great deal of respect for Alexander, and felt like he was a role model to him, because he was such a great example of a person who had seen more to life than just money.

Reverend Lynch said, "Alexander, have you ever had dreams that bothered you?"

Alexander thought for a moment and said, "Not unless you mean nightmares when I was a kid."

"I've been having these strange dreams in the past couple of nights, and while I've never believed that supernatural things exist, I feel like there is just something too coincidental about what is going on here."

"Tell me more"

"Well, on Sunday, there was this guy, I am not sure if he was Vietnamese or Philippino or whatever, but he came and started arguing with everyone about how we were not really Christians. He said that there is only one Truth, and that we were not Christians because we didn't believe that the bible was the only way."

"Sounds like a fundamentalist to me. Why would he bother you?"

"Well, he didn't. But then when I went to bed that night, I felt like something tugged on my blanket and I woke up and there were these three things standing in my room."

"Things?"

"People, I mean. But they were not like people, they were more like ghosts, and they had these veils covering their faces. They said that they were pastors like me and that they were suffering because they made the mistake I am making."

"It's just a dream, Mike, no need to worry."

“Well, I thought so too, except it was so real, it was like I wasn’t sleeping. I woke up from it, but I’ve never had a dream like that before.”

“Maybe, but that doesn’t mean it was anything more than a dream.”

“Well, but then again last night I had this dream and there were these two guys servicing an airplane. They kind of looked like they were in air force uniforms that you see in movies from World War II and they had a big propeller plane that they were doing work on that was sitting on a landing strip.”

“And what happened?”

“Nothing happened, I just woke up.”

“Mike, I am looking at this as a neutral observer, I can’t see any connection between those two dreams. You’re worrying about nothing.”

“But, have you ever had doubts?”

“All the time, about lots of things.”

“No, I mean doubts about your faith.”

“Yes, that’s what I mean, all the time, I often have doubts about whether these things are true. I don’t believe in miracles either, like you, but I also sometimes wonder if Jesus is really God or if there is something else that is true.”

“What if we are not following the right religion?”

“Look, even if we are not, I don’t worry about this, because God’s mercy is endless. I think that when we die, we can all hope that the same mercy that sent Jesus to die for us will also be there to forgive us if we followed the wrong way in life. God is a merciful God, not a punishing God – we don’t need to fret so much about those kinds of rules.”

“But, what if you die and He sends you to hell?”

“Trust in the divine mercy, there is nothing else to it than that, and everything will be well in the end. Don’t worry so much about getting it right. Just know that God is merciful.”

While there was still some unease in Reverend Lynch’s mind, he did feel more comfortable when hearing this reply. He said, “Thanks Alex, that makes me feel better.”

Alexander padded him on the shoulder and said, “You know, you’ve always been such an honest person, a lot of people in the clergy wouldn’t ever admit to those kinds of feelings.”

Reverend Lynch returned home that night and went to rest again. He rarely prayed, except as a kind of spiritual meditation, but the thought remained in the back of his mind as to whether those dreams really were something more than dreams and for some reason he had a weird feeling like he should have been praying before he went to bed.

He chose not to do so, and went asleep.

A few hours later, he woke up again, and there was more noise of machinery outside the room again. He went and looked. The same two mechanics were next to the airplane again, but it looked like it had just landed this time, as the propeller was still spinning lightly. The pilot, however, was nowhere to be seen.

The two mechanics were pushing some kind of machine over that was connected to a fuel truck, and it had a rubber hose attached to it. On the machine, there was a label 'WARNING: When refueling the airplane, remember to ground it first before inserting the hose, to defuse the static electricity, otherwise there may be a spark!'

The mechanics took the hose out of its holster and extended it over to the aircraft. One of them said, "Come on, we got to get this thing back into the air in an hour, we can't waste any time."

Reverend Flynych felt his heart pounding as he saw that they were not grounding the aircraft first. He yelled out at them, "You guys, stop! You need to ground the aircraft, or else there could be a spark!"

One of the mechanics turned his head and looked at Reverend Flynych with a puzzled look. He then said, "Look Friar Tuck, that's just written there to scare you, you don't need to worry so much about rules! Nothing bad will happen, trust me, everything will be all right."

The man then put the hose into the fuselage, Reverend Flynych yelled, "STOP!", but it was too late. The hose ignited and a fireball engulfed both men and the aircraft together. After the fireball cleared, the men were on the ground, their clothes and bodies burning as they shrieked from side to side in pain. Reverend Lynch saw a fire extinguisher by the truck and ran to get it, but when he tried to pull it out, he saw that no one had bothered to fill it, and the valve meter read that it was empty of pressure. The men died on the spot.

He woke up. No matter what Alexander said, how wise and comforting it may have been, he knew that there was something here and he couldn't ignore it.

The next day, he had lunch with the secretary again. She seemed a bit depressed, and Reverend Lynch wondered what the problem could have been.

She was bothered, because the whole morning she had to take one call after another from people, who were complaining about different things in their life, and like the good secretary she always had been, she patiently listened to each of them and tried her best to make them feel better.

Reverend Lynch said, "Nancy, how are you doing?"

"I just spent 3 hours on the phone with who knows how many people."

"Ouch... long morning."

"I don't mind talking to people, it's just that so many people have so many problems. And they call like they think I can solve them for them."

"What problems?"

"Several divorces, one abortion, one guy who was angry at his mom over the inheritance, an atheist complaining about how we believe in a personal God is bad for children."

“They think that you must have the answers to everything.”

“And I don’t! I just tell them that our community is very welcoming and we love them, and that I’ll pray for them. I can’t say anything else.”

“That’s the best you can do. Don’t worry about it.”

“But, you know, people are suffering. I wish I could give them all the answer they needed to know what was the right path and what was the wrong path, so they didn’t have to suffer any longer.”

“Nancy, you know, that there is no one right path and one wrong path. Each person is different and they have decide for themselves about what the right way to live is. “

“I know you are right, but I just see so many people making choices that lead them to ruin themselves, and I wish I could just do what they did in the Old Testament, and just ask God to tell them what the right answer is for any given situation, so they don’t have to destroy themselves. “

“Those are just stories, Nancy, they didn’t really happen.”

Nancy was puzzled and said, “You don’t believe they are real? I thought you did?”

“No, modern scholars think that most of those things were written down long after the events supposedly took place, and they were written by Jews who wanted the stories to say a particular thing. They are not historical.”

Nancy was surprised by this. She had always assumed that Reverend Lynch believed in all of those stories, although admittedly they rarely talked about this kind of topic together.

She said, “But, don’t you believe that God is real?”

“Nancy, just because I believe that God is real, doesn’t mean that others need to believe He is real or that they need to follow the same idea I do. To me, He is God, to another He is The Light or The Way, and to another person maybe something else entirely guides them in life. Who am I to judge that only my way is the right way of looking at Him?”

“But, if God is real for you and not real for others, doesn’t that mean that mean that God isn’t real at all? Doesn’t it refute the entire concept of God? “

“Nancy, you are starting to get a little narrow-minded.”

“No, I’m not, I’m just saying that if God is real, then He can’t be a Person to me and an impersonal force to someone else. He can’t exist for me and not exist for someone else.”

“Nancy, I understand your point, but you can’t judge these things like that. You can’t just look at your own way as being the only way that is right. You know there are many people in the world who don’t share the same beliefs that you do, and you can’t say that they are all wrong and that you are right.”

She dropped the point and they continued eating.

Reverend Michael returned home that day and wondered about going to bed again. This time, he said a prayer, "God, if you are a God that hears prayers, please help keep me safe this night and give me nice dreams, Amen"

An hour later he woke up. There were sounds of a lot of machinery outside of the room, and loud voices as well.

He went out the door again and found himself inside of a factory of some sort. There were aircraft parts being fitted together and many tradesmen busying themselves with the work on the assembly line.

Reverend Michael walked around and bumped into a mechanic by accident. The mechanic said, "So, you're back again are you? "

"What do you mean?" the reverend said.

"For another night with us, of course!"

The entire experience was a bit surreal. Reverend Michael said, "Where am I and who are you?"

"What does it look like. We are building aircraft here."

"What are you building them for?"

"To fly up there, of course!" the mechanic pointed up.

Another mechanic called out, "Whenever you do a job, you better do it right!"

The reverend continued walking. He saw a mechanic holding a roll of duct tape. Then, to the reverend's horror, he watched the mechanic using the duct tape by rolling it around the engine in order to keep it attached to the wing.

The reverend said to the mechanic, "What on Earth, are you doing?"

"I am attaching the engine to the plane, can't you see that?" the mechanic responded.

"But, don't you know that this is an airplane? It's going to fly high up in the sky!"

"Right, and what's the problem. You don't have respect for my duct tape? You think your methods are better?"

All the noise and commotion in the factory stopped. Everyone fell silent and looked at the two arguing. What looked like the line manager came down a metal staircase attached to an overhanging catwalk to walk over to both of them.

The manager said, "Reverend Michael, what seems to be the problem, here?"

The reverend pointed at the engine and said, "Look! Can't you see something dangerous about this?"

The manager squinted and looked at the engine, "No, I don't see a problem with the engine." He looked back at Reverend Michael, "What I see here is a problem of intolerance."

"Intolerance?"

“You need to learn to tolerate ways that are different from yours.”

“But, you need to weld the engine to the frame, and probably use screws as well, you don’t use duct tape to attach it!”

“You use welding and screws, and that’s fine. But he chooses to use duct tape, and that’s also fine. Our factory is a community, and we don’t judge between whose method is right and whose method is wrong.”

“Are you crazy? They are not both fine! One is right, the other is wrong!”

The other workmen in the factory shook their heads in disapproval and murmured among themselves.

“Reverend Michael, why can’t you learn a little tolerance and see the value of diversity? There is not only one right way to build an airplane. You know sometimes people use welding and screws, but the machine still breaks, and sometimes you can use a lot of duct tape, you can make things very strong. So how can you think that your way is necessarily the right one? You need to learn to be more open-minded and stop thinking like there is only one right way.”

“But, people will die! Can’t you see that!”

“You make too much of a big deal out of things. You don’t need to worry so much about rules and getting things right. Just learn to trust, and everything will be fine.”

The manager turned his back and walked away. The other workers went back to their work.

Reverend Lynch went around the factory, trying to reason with the workers, but they ignored him.

He found the worker installing the electrical circuits inside the plane. He was eating an ice cream sundae while installing and the cream went into the wiring.

Reverend Lynch said, “Look! I don’t think you should be eating ice cream when you install electrical equipment, some of the melted cream is getting into the wiring and maybe it will start a fire when you turn it on.”

The worker frowned and said, “You are so judgmental! You think that you know better than everyone else about how to do things!”

The manager reappeared again, standing behind Reverend Lynch, “Reverend Michael, you should not judge others. Do you think that you have done everything perfectly? You are not perfect either, and you can’t tell other people what is the right way and the wrong way.”

The worker said, “That’s right, you should learn to be a little more humble!”

Reverend Lynch said, “But, I’m just pointing out the obvious! If he wants to eat ice cream, then he shouldn’t be installing electrical equipment at the same time! I want to try to help him to do his job better.”

The factory floor fell silent again as scores of workers shook their heads in disapproval at the conversation.

The manager said, "There used to be managers like you, in past times, who were very harsh on their employees when they didn't follow the narrow directives of how to build the plane. But we have become more enlightened today and we have learned to respect the opinions and ideas of everyone."

Reverend Lynch said, "Look, if you don't believe me, then try turning it on and see what happens!"

The manager said, "Now you are trying to scare people! This kind of psychological abuse is just revolting, I think, Reverend Michael. You should be ashamed of yourself! It is people like you that drive people away from working in our factory."

Reverend Lynch walked away again and the workers in the factory continued their labour.

He did not understand how they couldn't see that there was something wrong with all of this. No one could seem to understand that not every way of building an airplane was correct.

He could not believe his eyes at what he was seeing. They were using milk to grease the engines. The cockpit had a rocking chair in it. The tail fin was made of a Halloween costume.

Reverend Lynch came to the two workers placing the rocking chair in the cockpit.

They looked at him and one of them said, "Are you here to judge us too, reverend?"

Reverend Lynch said, "Can't you see a problem with the idea of putting a rocking chair for the pilot's use in the cockpit? Won't the plane go through G-forces in the sky and get pulled around?"

The worker said, "But, reverend, rocking chairs are an important part of our culture. We are an indigenous people and rocking chairs were always used by our ancestors for important positions. Are you trying to suggest that our culture is wrong? How can you be so arrogant?"

The factory floor stopped working again and looked at the reverend in disapproval. The manager came down and came to them.

The manager said, "Reverend, you are becoming a very troublesome man here. You are trying to argue with everyone, and insisting that only you know the right way. If this was your church, you would have thrown the person out by now."

Reverend Lynch said, "Look, I respect their culture, and the importance they place on rocking chairs, but can't we just not put them in the cockpit of the airplane? Won't it be dangerous for the pilot and everyone else on board if the pilot uses this as his seat?"

The manager said, "Stop worrying so much about danger. I told you to trust and stop thinking that everything is just a matter of rules. There was a time in the past when we would have looked down on his culture, but not anymore. Now we see it as something to learn from."

Reverend Lynch, "Look, I have profound respect for it too, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't use a fixed seat just because his culture values rocking chairs."

The manager said, "I hope that one day you can learn more and stop being so ignorant about other peoples of the world."

A bell then rang. The manager said, "It's ready! Time for us to fly!"

Reverend Lynch said, "What? No, we can't fly with anything you built here!"

A big door in the wall of the factory opened up, and the airplane was wheeled out onto an airstrip. The workers followed out and Reverend Lynch followed them.

He saw the aircraft, at the front of the landing strip. At the end of it, he could see a cliff.

He saw the three ghosts again, standing by the door of the plane, still with their veils over their heads. One of them reached out his hand to Reverend Lynch and Reverend Lynch found himself unable to stop his feet from moving forward, coming to the door and boarding the plane.

But he could still talk, "Look, this plane is going to crash! It was not built the right way!"

The manager boarded the plane after him. One of the workers said, "Reverend, why do you always need to insist on your own way of being right?"

Reverend Lynch said, "But look, I really am right, it is not like every answer is equally right. Some answers are right and others are wrong. I am not being arrogant for saying so."

The cabin doors closed. Inside, people took their seats in the passenger cabin and the pilot got into his rocking chair in the cockpit. The three ghosts stood in front of the passengers, one next to the other.

The ghost who stood on the left said, "Reverend Michael Lynch, you wouldn't trust your life to something that was built like this. Why do you entrust the eternal souls of people to it?"

The propellers began moving and the plane started inching forward. The duct tape holding the engines began coming undone and smoke began coming from inside of the cabin as the plane steadily sped up towards the cliff.

He woke up. He did not return to bed again. He spent the whole night in prayer, begging the Lord to show him the right way.

All Glory to God