

We now turn to the gospel lesson found in Luke. A version of this story is found in all 4 of the gospels. However, the other 3 gospels include this story toward the end of their gospels. The other 3 gospels also include details which connect this story as a predictor of Jesus' death. Luke doesn't do that.

This story that we are about to read from Luke is also unique compared to the gospels of Matthew and Mark because in Luke we will find the feet of Jesus anointed whereas Matthew and Mark say it was the head of Jesus. This is a story where a woman will cross the established cultural boundaries between men and women because she will touch a man.

In this story we are about to read we will be introduced to two characters on the opposite ends of the economic spectrum. On the one hand we will be invited into the home of Simon the Pharisee. Pharisees are portrayed in the gospels as religiously well-educated and religious leaders. Simon is a homeowner. Simon is also a man and men had built in economic advantages. On the other end we will meet a woman who is poor and on the outside and is described as a sinner.

We are invited into this story when Jesus is reclining at a table and eating. This is where it is important to understand a little about how Jesus would have been eating. He would not have been at a table like we would eat a meal. Jesus would be lying on his side and eating with his hands.

Read Luke 7:36-50

You may have seen the recent story about 11 year old Jackson Johnston in Iowa. Jackson's grandfather was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer and began to lose his hair. Jackson loved his grandfather very much and he wanted to show him. So the next time Jackson went to visit his grandfather, Jackson pulled off his cap and revealed to his grandfather that he had shaved off all of his hair. Jackson's grandfather was very touched and Jackson was very happy that he had done this.

But then the next day Jackson went to school and some of his classmates started to pick on him. They called him "baldy boy" and started to laugh at him for looking like a cancer patient. That is when Jackson's school principal, Tim Hadley, found out what was happening.

Principal Hadley then called for a school assembly. In front of all of the students, Principal Hadley invited Jackson to come forward. Principal Hadley then invited Jackson to shave all of the principal's hair off as well. Principal Hadley, now bald like Jackson, then talked to the students about how they need to support one another and always say words that are encouraging of others.

I share this story because the principal chose to focus his attention on the most vulnerable in his school. The child being bullied. The principal chose to do what he could to lift up the one on the outside and do what he could to show that each child is valuable. He affirmed for the child that this child is special to God.

It's very easy in our culture to focus our attention on those of us who seem to have made it in our world. It's easy to decide to overlook those who are on the outside. If someone is being picked on it is easy to join in with the ones in power. But Jesus certainly does not lift up the powerful in the story we read today.

Jesus accepts the invitation to eat at the home of the powerful and well connected Simon. Jesus does not discriminate against the rich and well educated. But Jesus pays attention to the woman on the outside and lifts up her generosity. For it is the woman described as the sinful outsider that Jesus points to as the model of hospitality, faith, and love.

I am so thankful for the ways that this congregation focuses its attention in so many ways on the outsider and those who may seem forgotten. You are doing it in ways you do not even know. For instance, you only catch glimpses of the impact you are making through what you have done with this property and how you have opened it up to so many to come and experience God. Let me read to you this letter I found in the journal in the Jackson prayer chapel out there.

(Read letter)

You are receiving information on your church budget today in the service. It's just a bunch of numbers. Important numbers but numbers nonetheless. But what is missing is the stories behind the numbers.

What is missing is the story of the person who came from Winston-Salem, a 2 hour trip, to specifically take his mother with dementia to attend a bluegrass concert here on a Thursday night. He made that trek for his mom because bluegrass music is the one thing which his mother can still relate to as she becomes more and more confused because of her illness.

What is missing in these numbers is the preschool mom who tells me that her child behaves better in their church now after attending chapel on Thursdays in this sanctuary. What is missing from these numbers is the grieving person who tells me that the prayer shawl she received gives her hope to keep going.

What is missing from these numbers is the story of the 5 people who are raising thousands of dollars and getting shots and taking time off work and away from family to spend 10 days in Liberia because lives are being impacted on a faraway continent by the ministry of this congregation and they will be your representatives.

What is missing from these numbers are the 8 or 9 people who are working tirelessly to put together an event in May to tell the story of the African-American ancestors of this area who were overlooked and tortured and no one outside of their family cared at the time.

What is missing from these numbers are the youth and their adult covenant partners from this congregation who will be at Bethelwoods next weekend learning about what faith in Jesus Christ is all about.

What is missing from these numbers are the phone calls of support and encouragement you provide people who are going through rough and difficult times. What is missing from these numbers are the stories of the children and adults who have coats this winter from your generosity or school supplies in their classroom.

I could go on and on with more and more stories of how your ministry touches so many lives. I am reminded of the words of a recent college graduate of one of our great South Carolina institutions named Deshaun Watson. When Watson, quarterback of the Clemson University football team looked into the huddle on Monday night with two minutes to go and his team down by 3 to the greatest defense in the land, Watson said to his 10 teammates, "Let's be great." He then led his team down the field to the winning touchdown with 1 second left in the game. Freeing up Clemson grads like myself to have permission to be obnoxious forever.

In the gospel of Luke, when Jesus looks at the sinful woman who has crossed cultural boundaries to wash his feet, Jesus says to her, "Go in peace for your faith has saved you."

I hope and pray that when Jesus looks at all of us he too can look at the way we use our talents and resources and says, "Go in peace for your faith has saved you." In the words of Deshaun Watson, "Let's be great." AMEN.

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- <http://abcnews.go.com/Lifestyle/middle-school-principal-iowa-shaves-head-support-bullied/story?id=44732893>

-Given: January 15, 2017 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)