

This past week was Valentine's Day. But I want to share one Valentine's Day story that should make all of us feel much better about ourselves if we were disappointed in Valentine's Day in any way this year. Cause hey, I am the first to admit that romance for me means a 50 cent card from Dollar Tree and a \$1 rose added to it. Oh wait, I mean a very expensive card from an upscale store and a freshly cut and expensive rose that was ordered weeks ago. That, of course, is what I did for Valentine's Day.

But let me tell you a story that should make any of us feel better about ourselves if we blew Valentine's Day this year in any way. Author Kerry Patterson tells the story of one Saturday evening when he suddenly realized that he only had about an hour to buy his wife a Valentine's Day gift.

Now this story is so different than anything I would ever do. Because I am someone who spends months and months planning what I am going to get my wife for Valentine's Day. But Patterson is someone who does things spur of the moment without any real thought. Cannot relate to that at all.

So Patterson strapped his six- and four-year-old daughters and six month old son into their car seats and off to the nearest shopping center that he could find. Soon, with Becca, Christine, and a Raggedy Ann doll connected to him through a chain of hand holds, and Taylor swinging gently in the plastic carrier clutched in his other hand, the Patterson family found themselves scurrying through a very high-end shopping center that was close to their apartment.

Kerry had realized that he needed to buy that gift right after he had been cleaning his outdoor grill. So he did not look much like the prim and proper patrons around him. And his kids appeared as if they had just been plucked from the sand pile in their back court. Which they had. The shoppers' genial smiles turned into looks of disapproval as they scrutinized the Patterson family's scruffy clothes and their home-cut hair.

Eventually, Kerry and his three children found their way to the home center of a posh department store where they had on display the very present his wife had hinted she wanted—a variable speed blender, complete with pulse control. Soon, a perky clerk was wrapping up a bright red blender he had chosen in honor of Valentine's Day.

Kerry is like me in that he knows that nothing shows your wife you love her more than a practical kitchen appliance that makes household chores a little bit easier. Pure romance.

Next, as the clock continued to run, Kerry grabbed his girls and scampered out into the shopping center in search of an affordable card. Everything was so expensive. A simple card cost five dollars.

"Daddy," 6 year old Christine uttered, "don't you think . . ."

"Shush," Kerry blurted as they hurried past one high-end store after another. "I need to find your mother a card and we are running out of time."

"I know," Christine continued, "but . . ."

"No ifs-and-or-buts about it. If I don't find a card, I'm in trouble."

Seeing that her sister was getting nowhere, three-year-old Becca asked: "Where's baby Taylor?"

Kerry says it was like being hit by a bucket of cold water. There in the hand that had once carried his son, was a package containing a variable-speed blender, complete with pulse-control. *Where was baby Taylor?*

"He's back in that big store," Christine offered as she pointed to the far end of the shopping center.

Kerry had left his son in the middle of the blender display! In a flash he reversed course and headed back to the scene of the crime where he frantically tried to get into the store—repeatedly banging onto a locked pair of massive glass doors.

"The place is closed," explained an older gentleman walking by. "It's Saturday night."

"But I left my . . ." he cut himself off midword. "But I left something inside."

"You'll have to go around back to the employee entrance," the fellow explained.

Moments later, Kerry and his girls had scurried along a terribly long wall while departing employees appeared from a lone door at the far end of the building. The animated employees were all talking about some idiot. And then they saw Kerry frantically hustling along with his two remaining kids in hand, they quickly concluded that he was the fool they had been bad-mouthing.

All Kerry cared about was getting his son back.

Eventually Kerry and his daughters found themselves inside the building and standing next to a knot of folks who were cooing and making other baby noises while his son, still in his plastic container, smiled back politely. Kerry searched for the proper words.

Eventually he blurted out, "You've found my son! Thank you. Thank you. Thank you."

The lady in charge then gave him a long, hard look before barking, "Do you think you can get him home without losing him?"

Kerry then snatched up baby Taylor and retreated out of the massive building. "Do we tell Mommy the secret?" 6 year old Christine asked as they walked back to the car. "No!" Kerry blurted. "We mustn't tell Mommy that we bought her a variable speed blender, complete with pulse control. It would spoil the surprise and we don't want to spoil the surprise."

But then Christine asked, "I mean. . . how you left baby Taylor in the middle of the store and then got locked out?"

Kerry was doomed. Just like the time I was late to pick up a child from school and I was not worried about the safety of the child but that the school would call my wife and tell her that her child had been left.

Kerry knew that there was no way he was going to be able to keep the two girls from tattling on him. And sure enough, a few minutes later when they pulled up in front of their apartment, the girls bolted from the car as they rushed to tell mom the exciting news. They kept the blender a secret, but not the fact that Dad had left their baby brother in a big, scary store.

"You left him in the store and then got locked out?" Kerry's wife asked incredulously as he presented her a brightly-wrapped gift.

He told her "True." But it happened because he was so focused on expressing his love for his wife with this truly special household item—complete with pulse control—that he lost focus for a second."

"You didn't lose focus," his wife accused, "you lost your son Taylor!"

But then 6 year old Christine reminded them both that "Daddy may have lost baby Taylor but that she didn't lose her Raggedy Ann."

In the story that we have read from the gospel of Mark, Jesus says to beware of the scribes. Beware of how they like to walk around in fancy clothes and to be greeted with respect where they work and where they shop, where they eat, and where they go to church. He says beware of these scribes who demand the best seats at church and at parties. Beware of these scribes who abuse the powerless to the advantage of the ones with power. Beware of these scribes who say the longest prayers in the church services.

So what does this story from the life of Jesus tell us about where we need to focus our attention as a church? What does this story from the life of Jesus tell you about where you are to focus your attention as a Christian? And could it be that we so focused on the ones with great privilege and power and the ones most active in the church, that we are ignoring the ones whom God is paying the most attention to?

The scribes who stand up and pray in the church and draw attention to themselves are not the ones that Jesus pays attention to. Jesus is focused on the poor widow with two small copper coins who gives everything that she has.

Who are we forgetting as we attempt to do ministry? Who are we overlooking when we talk about what we talk about in the church?

Who are we forgetting about because we are so focused on the scribes who draw attention to themselves?

Who is being forgotten that Jesus is paying attention to? AMEN.

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-Patterson, Kerry, "The Great Valentine's Day Debacle," Crucial Skills, Vol 10, Issue 7, 2/15/12

-Text: Mark 12: 35-44

-Given: February 19, 2012 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)