

"Making the Mission My Own"

Over the past couple of weeks we've been talking about the parts we all play in supporting the mission of our church in Wake Forest, which is part of the global mission Christ has given his church around the world.

Two weeks ago Pastor Wagner reminded us that we are all Hope's missionaries being sent out into the mission field of daily life, called to make a difference in someone's life through our witness and example of the faith we profess.

And last week, Pastor Puls made it clear that God has given us the opportunity to reach more people for Christ in our community but it takes our time, our talents, and our money do it!

And today, I want to wrap up this series by encouraging us all to make this great mission of the church personal and our own. Yes, we're part of a united flock and together we can do great things in this community but we're not always together. The truth is when we walk out those doors, even though we walk out as representatives of this congregation, we walk out on our own. And on our own, we're faced with a choice. We can either be intentional about our faith and act like Christ is a vital part of our lives, or we can forget about Him until next weekend. Now, hopefully none of us leave here and forget about Christ, but applying his love for us in our lives can be challenging, can't it? The world is changing. People are changing. Many today don't equate faith in Christ as any different from faith in anything else. So yes, we have a challenge before us.

But we have something sacred, which means we don't have to try and figure this out on our own. We have God's Word, and we must always go there first.

And so when we talk about making the mission personal, our Gospel reading from Mark is great place to start because here we find his account of Jesus and his anointing at

Bethany. And while Jesus is the focus of this account, the woman who makes him the focus is our example of faith today.

The woman is Mary, the brother of Lazarus and the sister of Martha. Mark refers to her as “a woman” but we read in the Gospel of John that this woman is Mary. And this beautiful account is also recorded in Matthew as well. Combine each version and we get this magnificent picture of follower of Jesus who sees an opportunity and takes a chance! It’s a picture of faith that’s authentic and raw.

Combine the three accounts, and the story goes like this. The woman— Mary— was serving dinner along with her sister Martha to house-guests of Simon the Leper that included their once dead brother Lazarus, a few disciples including Judas, and of course Jesus. At some point, it appears that Mary left the serving to Martha, went over to where Jesus was reclining, and began pouring this super expensive ointment over his head. John’s account says she also poured it on his feet and wiped them with her hair. What was going on here with Mary and why did she have that expensive ointment anyway? Mark tells us this stuff could have been sold for over 300 denarii, which was apparently the equivalent to a year’s wage! Why she bought it or how she paid for it will forever remain a mystery. But what we do know is what happened after she took that chance of anointing Jesus with such a generous gift.

The first thing we know is that she was harshly judged for wasting such an expensive product in this way. The disciples even scolded her insinuating that she could have sold the ointment and given the money to the poor. But she didn't care. This was her thing and nothing was going to stop her.

What would our own lives be like if our Christian missions were so gutsy and personal? We might not have the chance to host Jesus at a dinner party but we still have the chance to serve him and the mission of his church each and every day don't we? I think about this chance we have all the time. Maybe you do too. But if you’re like me, sometimes you overthink it. I kid you not, just about the time I have some new idea about a unique and awesome way I think we, as a local congregation, could reach more people for Christ, I think of all the reasons it probably wouldn't work. I think of the money and resources it would take that we don't have (at least at the moment). I think of the time it would take to implement—time that I don't seem to have. Do you ever feel like that? Sometimes, it seems like we're just waiting for the right opportunity instead of taking a chance and creating opportunities. Why do we do this? I know practicality has its place and rightly so but sometimes we can over-analyze our way out of some

wonderful opportunities to reach others. Shouldn't we trust God enough to know that he can take our genuine efforts in the name of Christ and make something out of them no matter how challenging they may seem?

The disciples at the dinner party certainly weren't thinking that way. They saw someone wasting some expensive perfume even though that "waste" was directed towards Jesus. They didn't get it. But they didn't have to because this was a God thing. Mary seemed to know what she was doing and why she was doing it and most importantly Jesus knew what she was doing. We must not forget that as she was being scolded by the disciples, Jesus told them to "leave her alone! She has done a beautiful thing." He goes on to say that "she has anointed my body beforehand for burial." Somehow it seems that Mary knew what was going to happen when she bought the ointment. Jesus was going to die. And that's just what happened. The Christ was crucified on a hill outside of Jerusalem only a short time later.

Mary made a sacrifice and gave out of love wanting nothing in return. And Jesus accepted her gift and then he made the ultimate sacrifice for us all. And by doing what no one else could ever do or will ever have to do again by taking our sins upon himself until he breathed his last breath, God in Christ showed us the ultimate act of love and this love was proven by a Jesus Christ who, on the third day rose from dead and is alive! It doesn't get any more personal than that.

So now it's our turn—the mission is ours. And we can either wait around for the right opportunity or we can follow the example of Mary, take a chance, and actually do something in the name of Christ our Lord.

Many of you do just that working tirelessly behind the scenes. I could share numerous stories of your hard work and dedication but for the sake of time, I'll limit it to one couple from our congregation who are wonderful examples among many who are making the mission their own. They are Herman and Connie Cole. Do you know them? They are co-winners of the *2015 Good Neighbor of the Year Award presented by the Wake Forest Human Relations Council*. In the article, which is posted on our bulletin board in the narthex, the person who nominated them wrote that she has watched them in action "caring for not only their neighbors but a great number of people in the Wake Forest community. As far back as I can remember, the Coles have gathered the widows and people without family in town for Thanksgiving Dinner." She also noted how the Coles have cared for the sick in our community by taking them to doctors' appointments, shopping for groceries and preparing meals.

Connie and Herman saw an opportunity. They didn't weigh the risks and the benefits or crunch the numbers first. They didn't talk about it until they talked themselves out of it. They made it happen and out of love gave something real and tangible to their neighbors.

So what about you? What are you waiting for? We're all busy and I admit that sometimes it's easier to just sit on the sidelines and cheer others along. But as much as Christ needs those who seem to always go above and beyond, He needs the benchwarmers as well. Because his desire is that every single person offer our time, our talents, and yes, even our money in real intentional ways, so that through our efforts both large and small, more and more people will get the opportunity to know and believe in his eternal love.

Christ needs us so let's get out there. Let's put more people in our lives. Let's create some opportunities. Let's take some chances. And with His blessing, let's make his mission our own. **Amen.**