

# “The Most Important Thing...”

a sermon based on  
2 Corinthians 8:7-15 and Mark 5:21-43

and delivered on  
July 1, 2018  
6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Year B)

at  
Cherry Valley United Methodist Church

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It's good to be here in Cherry Valley. For most of you, this will be the first time that you hear me preach. So let me start first by telling you that I'm generally a lectionary preacher – that is – I follow the Revised Common Lectionary – a three year cycle of Scripture readings which if every passage were read every Sunday – we would hear about eighty percent (80%) of the Bible read out loud over three years.

As a preacher, the lectionary keeps me honest – sermon preparation always begins with Scripture – and not just the passages that support what I want to say.

Here's the irony. In that passage from 2 Corinthians that we just heard, St. Paul is encouraging the church in Corinth to be more generous. Just before that passage he had bragged on the generosity of the Macedonian church. But when he comes for the collection in Corinth, he hears, "We would, but we just can't. We're not as well off as those Macedonians."

Sounds like a stewardship sermon. But for as many preachers get accused of always talking about money even if they do one stewardship sermon a year, if I were to go there today, tomorrow you'd be able to say, "All he talks about is money." So let's go somewhere else.

You've got a new pastor. I've got a new ministry setting. I'm excited! Are you?! But what does this mean? We don't really know each other yet. So let me tell you some things about myself.

{TAKE OFF SHOES} First, what you just saw was the longest I've worn shoes in church for years. There's a theological reason for it. If you remember back in the Exodus story, when Moses went up to see that bush that was on fire but not burning – the voice of the LORD told him to take off his sandals because this was holy ground. THIS is holy ground. When I stand here to proclaim the gospel, when I stand here to pray, to read Scripture – when I rise at a funeral service to pronounce God's word of hope to those who grieve – these are holy moments – and this is part of how I prepare.

The socks... just because I'm a little goofy.

What else would you want to know about me? I know that there was an article in the Messenger that covered a lot of my background. Susan and I have been married eleven years. My daughter, Caitlin, and her husband, George, live with their son, Aaron (the best looking and smartest one year old in the world) – in Kansas City.

I grew up in the Peoria area – thinking that you go to school then go to work for Caterpillar. I went to college at Northern Illinois University with an academic scholarship to study computer science (I wanted to work at Fermilab or NASA), but switched majors to sociology during my fourth year (hence the five year plan).

Through college I had a myriad of jobs. I won't list them all, but I do still bear the scars from acid burns during my time in the plating factory.

After college, I eventually got a job working at Bethesda Lutheran Homes (now Bethesda Lutheran Communities) a nationwide not-for-profit agency serving people with intellectual disabilities (although it was called mental retardation when I began). During my time there I had several positions, including as the director of a 16-bed home and eventually N. Ill. CILA director with responsibility for three homes.

I kept working there while I attended seminary at Garrett-Evangelical in Evanston. I've done doctoral studies at Nashotah House (but not finished – who knows? Maybe someday).

I describe myself as a Methodist with Anglo-Catholic and Pentecostal tendencies. (Anglo-Catholics are fancy Episcopalians). I'd be happy swinging incense while a praise band plays, and then laying hands on folks for healing after church. Praising the Lord is good!

But do you want to know the most important thing about me? The most important thing about me is that I have been washed clean in the blood of Jesus Christ – the Word made Flesh – through whom I was made in the image of God and through his love restored to God's good favor. That's the most important thing to know about me.

It's also the most important thing I can know about any of you. That through Christ you are made in the image of the Almighty – and through Jesus Christ, no infirmity nor any sin can take that away. What more do we need?

When Paul was telling the Corinthians to eagerly share what they have – it was more than money – it was a call to live out the hope of salvation that they had received.

Too many congregations fret – “We don't have enough people. We don't have enough money. We don't have... fill in the blank” We've all heard it. But what if we were to give with eagerness what we do have? This great treasure of promise – of hope – of healing – of LIFE in Jesus Christ. What if we were to do that not buy self-righteous glorification to say to the world “See you can be like us. See you can be like me.”? But what if we were to offer Jesus on a daily basis? Not to get members or grow the church.

That woman who reached out to grab Jesus' tassels – that woman who reached out to touch him for healing, never expected to be a part of his inner circle. She knew that she wasn't worthy. But just getting close to Jesus was enough to heal her. Then she discovered that she truly was worthy to be called a child of God.

As we engage in ministry together, here, that is my hope. Not that we can find people to join our group so that then they can find healing – hope – or promise; but rather that we would be so generous in what we do have – salvation in Jesus Christ – that others will only need to get close to experience his power – and then join with us in sharing him.

As Paul encouraged the Corinthians to “excel in this generous undertaking,” let us do so as well. AMEN.