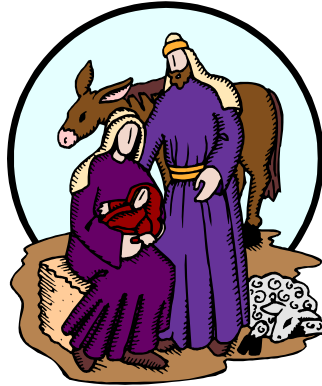


THE  
MOSSY  
CREEK  
CHRONICLES



*Rev. Dr. Steven L. Frazier*

# CHAPTER FOUR



## ***Just Let Me Be...***

Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

As Emmy Lou pulled into the church parking lot the radio in her truck was joyfully singing, “It’s the most wonderful time of the year!” She parked her truck and sighed, “Don’t let a song get on your nerves.” But it did. In the morning Emmy Lou worked for the church daycare program at Mossy Creek Lutheran Church. After lunch she was the church secretary. Her two part-time jobs felt like a job and a half this time of year. Mothers were Christmas shopping, so there were more kids to take care of. The bulletin was fuller, and the newsletter was longer. Throw in an Advent Bible study, special offerings, and Christmas projects for folks in Mossy Creek who were up in years or down on their luck, and there were days when Emmy Lou could hardly keep up with it all. Between working at the Lutheran church and being a faithful member of Our Savior Presbyterian Church, she was feeling plum wore out. As she shut her truck door, she grouched, “It isn’t the most wonderful time of the year, not by a long shot.”

Once Emmy Lou got in the church, little Nellie and Sadie came streaking down the hall. Nellie grabbed Emmy Lou’s right leg and Sadie grabbed the other. That was their daily routine. But the cloud hanging over Emmy Lou’s truck had followed her into

the church. She snapped, “Sadie! Nellie! Let go of me! Why do y’all keep carrying on like this every day? Just let me be!” Well, nobody was used to hearing anything like that coming from Emmy Lou. Liz stepped out of the nursery to see what was happening, and Pastor Mark stepped out of the church office and started down the hall. Emmy Lou was embarrassed. Nellie and Sadie were standing there looking like they had just done the worst thing in the world. Liz called them over and gave them each a big hug. “Why don’t y’all come with me?” Pastor Mark smiled at Emmy Lou and said, “Come on. Let’s go get some coffee.” Emmy Lou felt like a kid headed for timeout.

When they got to the coffee pot in the church office, Emmy Lou didn’t know what to say. That she was tired first thing in the morning? That she was tired of having so much work this time of year? That she sure would be glad when Christmas had come and gone? None of those sounded like a good way of kicking off a conversation with the pastor. “Mark, I’m sorry I lost my temper with Nellie and Sadie. I don’t know what got into me.” He smiled and said, “Well, this is one of the busiest times of the year. Advent can be tough, can’t it?” Emmy Lou looked into her coffee cup and did the only thing she knew to do—she agreed. “There are times when I go home, fix supper, watch a little TV, and go to bed. Next thing you know the sun’s up, and I’m at it again. I love the kids. And I love working with you. I guess I’m just worn out today.”

Pastor Mark and Emmy Lou finished their coffee and then they finished their conversation. It wasn’t near as bad as Emmy Lou had expected. She went back to the nursery and gave Nellie and Sadie a big hug. And they gave her crumbly, Animal Cracker kisses that would have driven her up the wall just an hour earlier. Now they were the greatest thing in the world. Emmy Lou thanked the good Lord that things turned out as well as they did. It was starting to look like a good day after all. That afternoon she was working on Sunday’s bulletin when she looked at the sermon title—Give Mary Her Due. It sounded strange. Wasn’t Advent about getting ready for Jesus? When Pastor Mark saw Emmy Lou’s puzzled look, he laughed and asked, “What did I foul up this time?” Emmy Lou looked up in surprise and said, “Nothing. Nothing. I was

just looking at the sermon title. It slowed me up for a second.” Pastor Mark smiled and said, “Great!”

That might have surprised someone else, but Emmy Lou knew Pastor Mark used his sermon titles to get people thinking. He said, “You know, for the longest time Protestants have been so careful about not sounding too Catholic that they’ve come close to ignoring Mary. I’ve been wondering—is she getting the respect she deserves?” It seemed awfully late in Advent to be talking about Mary and not saying more about Jesus. But Emmy Lou knew Pastor Mark well enough to know he wouldn’t just let her agree or disagree and let it go at that.

So Emmy Lou sat back in her chair and asked Pastor Mark what he meant. “Well, there are times when we pay so much attention to Jesus we miss some other pretty important people. That’s especially true in Advent. You know, we won’t throw baby Jesus out with the bathwater, but we come close to doing that with Mary. Just think about what happened to her and how she had to explain her pregnancy to Joseph and her family. She deserves a little credit for everything she went through in becoming Jesus’ mother, don’t you think?” Just then Pastor Mark’s cell phone rang. He took a look at the caller ID, but before he answered the phone, he grinned and asked, “I’ve been wondering lately—where would we be without Mary?”

After he left, Emmy Lou reached over and grabbed the Bible she kept on her desk. She looked up the Gospel passage from the bulletin. The angel Gabriel said, “Greetings, favored one!” Then he started telling Mary what was fixin’ to happen to her. She wasn’t doing anything. She was just sitting there listening to God’s plans for her life and saving His people. Then Mary asked the angel, “But how can I have a baby? I am a virgin.” That bothered Emmy Lou a little bit. She didn’t mean to criticize, but she wanted to believe that if the Lord sent her an angel to tell her something, she would just believe it. Best Emmy Lou could tell, it sounded like Mary had her doubts. It also sounded like she was wrestling with the angel Gabriel a little bit. Why should anyone give Mary her due if she doubted God or wasn’t too happy about being Jesus’ mother?

Well, Emmy Lou's job was to print the bulletins, not write the sermons. So she just let it go and headed for the copy machine.

The rest of that week went pretty well, all things considered. It was busy, but Pastor Mark always had things planned out, and it looked like everything would be ready right on time. Emmy Lou even had time to finish her preparations for Christmas. She was at Wal-Mart one afternoon picking up some chips, dip, and soft drinks for Christmas Eve. She always had her parents and Bobby Ray's folks come over for a little get together after the Christmas Eve service. It was the best part of Christmas. But a wooden manger scene in the store got Emmy Lou to thinking about Mary again. "Maybe we're supposed to give Mary her due because God picked her over everyone else. She must've been something else to have God pick her to be Jesus' mother." Then Emmy Lou laughed. Was it the sermon title or Mary that just wouldn't let her be?

Well, Christmas Eve came, and it was a beautiful day. Emmy Lou was glad to be home and have some time with Bobby Ray and their kids, Taylor and Jake. But after lunch the three of them took off. Bobby Ray said it was a big secret. Well, he thought it was a secret anyway. He still thought Emmy Lou didn't know he did all of his Christmas shopping for her on Christmas Eve. But even that tickled her today. Emmy Lou looked around. The house looked nice. The smell of freshly-baked cookies made it even nicer. And that's when Emmy Lou's cell phone rang. It was Pastor Mark, and he was in a pure panic. "Emmy Lou, I was just watering the poinsettias on the table in the narthex, and I got water all over the bulletins. They're ruined. I hate to ask you to do this, but can you come in and run them over again? If I knew how, I'd do it myself. I hate it that I'm calling you on Christmas Eve, but I'm in a bad bind."

You could've bought and sold Emmy Lou for a nickel. But it was the church. And Emmy Lou's momma raised her right. She said God gave us His best when he sent Jesus, and that we should always give the Lord our best. And Pastor Mark was her friend. Worship on Christmas Eve was important for everyone, the ones who came all the time and those who only came every once in a while. She sighed and told Pastor

Mark she would be there in a few minutes. She left a note for Bobby Ray, picked up her truck keys, and left. A few minutes later she pulled into the church parking lot and wearily parked her truck. That cloud was back again. This wasn't the Christmas Eve she had been waiting and hoping for. But she knew things like this happened. Emmy Lou sighed, "Why me, Lord? It's Christmas Eve."

As Emmy Lou went in the church she stopped long enough to look at the live nativity that Mossy Creek Lutheran Church did every year. Folks from all over town drove by to see it. Later, some would even stop and go to the Christmas Eve service. When Emmy Lou got to her office, she started running off the bulletins. A couple of hours later she put them in the narthex and headed for the parking lot. It was starting to get dark. It was getting cold, too. But she stopped one more time to look at the nativity scene. The kids looked just grand. They were the angels, shepherds, and wise men. There were two adults all dressed up like Joseph and Mary. And the animals were even cooperating. The whole thing was so beautiful. And then out of nowhere a thought came to Emmy Lou. She wondered, "Why on earth am I workin' on Christmas Eve?" Maybe she would just go home and spend the evening with Bobby Ray, the kids, and the rest of their family. Just about that time Bobby Ray, Jake, and Taylor showed up. They had come to take Emmy Lou to dinner before the Christmas Eve service at Our Savior Presbyterian Church.

Well, that's what Bobby Ray was trying to tell her, but Emmy Lou couldn't hear him. Carol and her infant daughter, Hannah were standing right next to Emmy Lou. And Hannah, was crying her eyes out. It was getting colder by the minute, and Emmy Lou thought Hannah likely wanted to go inside. Carol's son was one of the shepherds. Her husband was Joseph. He was also a doctoral student at the university in the next town over. Carol and her family were from Germany and had been in the States for a few years. But now Carol looked like she was a world and a half away from home. She was trying her best to take pictures of her son and husband. But she had her hands full with a camera and a fussy baby. Emmy Lou could see Carol was just about to come undone.

Just then a warm, out-of-place breeze blew into Emmy Lou's face and through her hair. And that's when it happened. That's when she finally figured it out. She figured Pastor Mark's sermon title out. She also figured it was the Lord's doing that she was at work and not at home. But she was in the right place at the right time. Question was, could she do what the Lord was calling her to do on a night when that would be so inconvenient? Mary's words came rushing back to her. "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Emmy Lou thought, "Give Mary her due—she was a faithful woman who raised a faithful son." Inconvenient, crazy, frightening—best Emmy Lou could tell, none of that mattered much to Mary. Emmy Lou could see Mary was more than Jesus' mother. She was a role model for all of Jesus' disciples. And her life was a faithful example of Christian living for the three hundred and sixty-four other days of the year that weren't Christmas Eve. Emmy Lou looked at her watch and prayed, "Lord, just let me be... Let me be a little more like Mary."

Emmy Lou turned to Carol and said, "Carol, why don't you just let me take Hannah for you? You take your pictures, and I'll take her inside and let her get warmed up." Carol's voice was a mix of doubt and hope when she asked, "Are you sure?" Emmy Lou smiled and said, "Heavens, yes. Taking care of a baby tonight—I can't think of anything else I'd rather do." Hannah knew Emmy Lou from Mother's Day Out, so she went straight to her and snuggled up inside Emmy Lou's jacket. Well, if Carol looked grateful, Bobby Ray, Taylor, and Jake looked just as confused. The Christmas Eve service at Our Savior Presbyterian Church would be starting in a couple of hours. Emmy Lou turned and said, "Bobby Ray, stop by the Piggly Wiggly and get something for you and the kids to eat. As soon as I'm done here I'll come home and help you get Taylor and Jake ready for church. I won't be long." And with that Emmy Lou started humming Silent Night for Hannah and headed back to her office. Amen.

