

THE  
MOSBY  
CHRECHKE  
CHRONICLES



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# CHAPTER NINE



## Purple Nail Polish...

Isaiah 6:1-8; Romans 8:12-17

If it's spring, it's time for Our Savior Presbyterian Church to send its youth on their annual mission trip. The youth at Our Savior call themselves the King's Kids. Matt and his wife, Becca Jean are their advisors. And getting ready for that mission trip always means getting the kids together and planning a fundraiser. It takes some doing to raise enough money to go to Tennessee. But everybody is all for it. The kids have been going on this particular mission trip for five or six years. It's a tradition.

And so is their pink flamingo fundraiser. Folks in Mossy Creek are laid-back, but they're pretty particular about their homes and lawns. Pink flamingos are about as tacky as you can get, and nobody wants them in their yard. So, people buy insurance from the youth group to keep the pink flamingos off their lawns, and then pay the kids to put them in front of their neighbors' homes. It always makes a lot of money, and it's always a lot of fun.

Well, this year it was fun for everybody but Jessie. She was different. Everybody said so. She would've, too, except she didn't have much to say to anybody at church. She and her parents moved to Mossy Creek from Seattle. By Mossy Creek's standards they were hippies. But everybody liked them. They joined Our Savior shortly after they moved to town. Jessie came to youth group meetings, but she didn't fit in. To tell the truth, she didn't even try. She thought Mossy Creek was end-of-the-world weird. Folks thought Jessie was a little weird with her hair dyed black, black nail polish, and black lipstick.

Jessie didn't really get the mission trip. And the pink flamingo fundraiser? That was just ridiculous. Matt and Becca Jean were trying to convince her that the mission trip and fundraiser would be a lot of fun. But Jessie wasn't buying that. "Putting pink flamingos on people's lawns is just so weird. Why doesn't the church just pay for the mission trip?" Becca Jean smiled and said, "The church will help, but this is a King's Kids' project. The fundraiser is how we raise money and have a little fun." Matt chimed in, "Jessie, just give it a chance. This is your first time. You'll see how it works, and you'll have a good time, too. Just give it a chance." Jessie just turned and walked away.

A week passed. The King's Kids were meeting again to continue their preparations. Becca Jean was explaining the dress code for the mission trip. She said, "This is just a reminder. You know the drill. No T-shirts that will offend anybody. Your T-shirts have to have sleeves. No shorts and no holes in your jeans." Jessie blurted out, "You've got to be kidding! You can't tell us how to dress." Matt replied, "Look, we don't want to do anything that would make anybody think less of the church. You're the King's Kids. You've gotta do the things that make you look like the King's Kids." Jessie fumed, "This is ridiculous. First, we have to raise money to go on a trip where we work for free. Then, we have to dress the way somebody else decides. This is totally crazy."

A month later the King's Kids were loading up their vans and getting ready to leave Mossy Creek for Tennessee. The parents were there to see their kids off. It was lots of hugs and smiles. Well, mostly. Jessie let everybody know that she didn't want to go and that her parents were making her. Pastor Marianne says the church is a family. Well, part of the family was feuding that morning. Truth is, the idea of the church as a family was completely lost on Jessie. And the King's Kids were not her family. She was being forced to spend a miserable week surrounded by strangers.

The long drive to Tennessee didn't help matters. Jessie and the other kids just didn't get along all that well. When they got to the camp, things got worse. The camp was full of kids just like the ones Jessie was doing her best to ignore and dislike. She kept to herself and all of Matt and Becca Jean's best efforts to get her involved didn't make any difference. After supper Sunday night Matt and Becca Jean invited her to sit with them at worship. Jessie agreed because, really, who else was she going to sit with?

During worship Ashley, one of the camp's staff members, read from Romans 8. Then she asked, "Who are we? This is how Paul sees it: 'Brothers and sisters, all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. You should behave like God's children, adopted into His family.' Look, when we were baptized, God adopted us. Just think; God loved us enough to make us part of His family. And baptism is the thing. That's when the Holy Spirit moved in. And God's Spirit is what makes us children of God. And if we're children of God, we're also Jesus' brothers and sisters. So, that's who we are. We're all family." Jessie hissed to Becca Jean, "This brother and sister stuff is so ridiculous. I just want to get this week over with and go home."

But it only got worse for Jessie. The next day the hard work began. The kids from each of the churches at the camp were scattered throughout the different work groups. The idea was simple: make new friends and to learn how

to work together. For Jessie, nothing could have been worse. Her adult leaders were really nice. And try as she might, nothing she said or did bothered them. The other kids were complete strangers to her. All they did was keep talking about who they were and where they were from and a million other things Jessie couldn't care less about. Her black hair, black nail polish, and black lipstick perfectly matched her mood.

The next day they went to a new job site. They would be working there for two days repairing a rundown front porch. The lady they were working for, Mrs. Atkins, looked as old and broken as her porch. But she was nice, and she loved talking to the kids. After a couple of hours, one of Jessie's group leaders told her to take a break and visit with Mrs. Atkins. Jessie didn't want to, but taking a break sure beat working in the sun. So she flopped down next to Mrs. Atkins. Mrs. Atkins smiled and just started talking away. She was intrigued by Jessie's black hair, black nail polish, and black lipstick. Jessie said it was something lots of kids in Seattle did. Mrs. Atkins smiled and nodded her head like it was the most logical thing in the world.

Jessie did not know what to think about that. She finally asked Mrs. Atkins, "Don't you think I'm strange?" She answered, "Oh, yes, child. You are strange. You could be home at the swimmin' pool, and here you are working on my ol' porch. Now that is strange." Jessie said, "I mean the way I look." Mrs. Atkins replied, "Heavens, no." She cocked her head to one side and asked, "You're washed in the blood, aren't you?" Jessie asked, "What do you mean?" "I mean baptized, child. You're baptized, aren't you?" Jessie looked down and mumbled, "Yeah, I guess so." Mrs. Atkins smiled triumphantly, "I knew it. You're part of my family. I'd never have anything hard to say about you." Mrs. Atkins leaned forward and whispered, "You and I are children of God. That makes us Jesus' brothers and sisters. We look strange to the world. Followin' Jesus will do that to you." Jessie replied, "I see myself as people see me." She pointed at

the members of her group and said, "And I'm pretty sure they don't like my kind of strange." With that she got up and went back to work.

That night Jessie couldn't get Mrs. Atkins off her mind. She was the first person who ever called Jessie "sister" and got away with it. Well, the next day they were back at Mrs. Atkins' house and Jessie's adult group leaders could see the tiniest change in her. She wasn't spoiling for a fight. When it was Jessie's turn to take a break, she walked over to Mrs. Atkins sitting in her lawn chair and sat down beside her. Mrs. Atkins pulled a bottle of nail polish from the pocket of her dress and handed it to Jessie. "Could you help an old woman get her nails all dolled up? It looks like you're good at it, and my hands aren't steady like they used to be. I'd make a mess of it."

Jessie sat on the ground in front of her, and they talked as she painted Mrs. Atkins' nails. Jessie said, "I've been thinking about something you said yesterday. If baptism makes us strange, and I'm strange and you're strange, then they're strange, too. She nodded her head in the direction of her work group. "Maybe that's why I don't really know them. Who are they?" Mrs. Atkins smiled, and the wrinkles in her face turned into a dozen smaller smiles. "Why, child, we're a family. All of us. We're the picture of God's family. Every day we try to look like Jesus because He is the spittin' image of our heavenly Father. We're just one great big ol' family. See, I knew when my porch went bad my people would come. And here you are!" she exclaimed.

Jessie smiled shyly and asked, "I'm your people?" Mrs. Atkins looked at her sternly and asked, "Haven't you heard a word of what I've been sayin'? Of course you're my people. It doesn't matter what you color your hair or fingernails. All I'm worried about is what's in here." She tapped her chest." She went on, "I know what's in there." She reached out and lightly touched Jessie's chest. "The love of God is in your heart as sure as I'm sittin' here. The Spirit got a hold of you a long time ago. You wouldn't be here if that wasn't so." Then she

looked solemnly at Jessie and said, "In a family there's always chores. Child, the Lord has something more for you to do. He's not done sending you places. He's just waitin' for you to say 'Here I am. Send me.'"

That shocked Jessie, and she quickly changed the subject. She looked at Mrs. Atkins and asked, "So if they see me as their sister, should I see myself that way, too?" Mrs. Atkins smiled and said, "Look at you. See, you're gettin' it. You're God's child and their sister whether you like it or not. That's baptism for you. God did the choosin' and made you a member of His family. You won't always like 'em. Families are like that sometimes. But if I were you, I'd like 'em. After all, they're you're people, too." Jessie finished up her nail job and their chat. After the kids finished fixing Mrs. Atkins' porch, she was busy hugging everybody. That is when she slipped that bottle of nail polish into Jessie's hand. With a smile and a wave, she was gone.

Well, the week came and the week went. Everybody could see the change that was coming over Jessie. It wasn't her hair or her fingernails. And it wasn't the lipstick either. It was something else. During worship on their last night in camp, they celebrated the Lord's Supper. An adult group leader who was also a Lutheran pastor told all of the campers, "When you come forward, here is what you're going to get: you're going to get the body and blood of Christ. And when you take Christ in you, you can't help but look and sound more like Him. Created by God the Father, saved by God the Son, changed by God the Spirit. We're God's workmanship. We're God's children. We're God's servants. Like our brothers and sisters from Mossy Creek have been telling us all week, we're the King's Kids." After worship, Jessie pulled Matt and Becca Jean aside and said, "I want to be one of the King's Kids." Becca Jean smiled, hugged her, and said, "Jessie you've always been of the King's Kids."

Jessie spent quite a bit of time in the showers that night. She barely got to bed before lights-out. On Saturday morning members of her youth group saw a

brand new Jessie. But they didn't say a thing. They didn't know what to say. Everybody piled into the vans and headed for home. When Matt, Becca Jean, and the King's kids came piling out of the vans in the church parking lot that night, the parents thought they had brought a new kid home with them. In the dark it was hard to tell. But when Jessie stepped into the headlights of the van, what they saw was a brand new girl. She had washed the black dye out of her hair. The black lipstick was gone, too.

After Jessie hugged her parents and left them wondering what on earth had happened to her, she walked up to Pastor Marianne. Jessie said, "I'm one of the King's Kids. I always have been. That was a choice God made when I was baptized." Pastor Marianne smiled and said, "I know." Jessie went on, "And Christians are strange. But that's OK; we're supposed to be different." Pastor Marianne laughed and said, "You're right." Jessie finished up in a rush, "God made me, Jesus saved me, and the Holy Spirit is changing me. And that's why God has something for me to do, somewhere they want me to go. But I don't know what it is yet. Will you help me figure it out? I'm willing to go." Pastor Marianne said, "Why, of course." Jessie held out her hands. Her nails were painted purple. She smiled and said, "Strange, huh? I'm one of the King's Kids. That means I'm royalty. That's why they're purple." She handed Pastor Marianne the bottle of nail polish. She smiled and said, "Here, I saved some for you. You're one of my people, too." Amen.



*(This sermon is dedicated to the glory of God and in honor of all the young people who have served God by serving the people of the Cumberland Plateau in Tennessee through the Mt. TOP ministry.)*