

T H E
M O S S Y
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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Heels and Hose...

Hebrews 5:1-10; Mark 10:35-45



October is a month just made for driving in Mossy Creek. The days are cooler. The skies are a deeper shade of blue. And the mountains? They're an explosion of fall colors—reds and yellows, orange and maroon. It is a page straight out of God's coloring book. People come from all over to soak up all that beauty. Folks in Mossy Creek call them "leafers." They're a sure sign of the changing seasons. Some folks like the leafers; most just put up with them. But some people can't wait for winter to come and for the leafers to go home. Corrina was one of those people.

It was a beautiful Saturday morning, and she was on her way to the presbytery office. But she was fuming. The leafers were taking their good,

sweet time seeing the sights. “I’m going to be late, late, late,” she griped. She passed as many cars as she could and a half hour later she got to the presbytery office, just in time for her meeting. But her mood hadn’t improved. She wasn’t going to impress anybody by just showing up on time. And impressing folks was on Corrina’s agenda that day.

The Christian education committee spent two hours on a Sunday school teachers’ workshop that was going to be held at the presbytery’s new church development. A year earlier the presbytery had planted a new church in town within walking distance of the university. Corrina was not impressed with the name. The Community Church—what kind of name was that for a Presbyterian church? The pastor, Tom Strong was there, and her question took him by surprise. But he just laughed it off and said, “We had to have a name. And Community is a whole lot easier to spell than Presbyterian. We figured, ‘What the heck? Let’s give it a try. What’s the worst that can happen?’” Everybody laughed; everybody but Corrina.

She didn’t laugh because she thought everyone was laughing at her, and she didn’t like it. She said, “We’ve never named a church that before. Why didn’t you name it Westminster Presbyterian Church? It comes a lot closer to our history and tradition.” Pastor Tom struck a pose and acted like he was cringing. Then he laughed and said, “I don’t think the name of our church is going to make us or break us. We’re meeting in an old movie theater in a strip mall for crying out loud. We just want to reach out to the people in our community. We think our name makes that point.”

Corrina just dug her heels in. “Don’t you believe in the Presbyterian faith?” It was getting harder for Pastor Tom to laugh off her objections. He had a straight face when he answered her this time. “Like I said, we’re trying to reach out to everyone in our community. It doesn’t matter who they are or where they come from. It doesn’t matter if they’re from another denomination. Our church’s mission statement focuses on one thing: creating servant leaders in our community who imitate Jesus and continue His ministry. We’re going to do whatever it takes to reach that goal.”

The committee chair did a good job of getting everyone back on track. They finalized their plans for the workshop. Pastor Tom was excited about the possibility of a parking lot full of cars and a church full of people on a Saturday morning. He thought that would help make the church more visible in the community and in the presbytery. It wouldn’t be long before folks figured out what the old movie theater was being used for now. The committee members agreed to meet at his church to take part in the workshop, and then everybody went home.

Two weeks later, Corrina found herself in front of a classroom full of Sunday school teachers from all over the presbytery. But that wasn’t where she wanted to be. She wanted to be in charge. She wanted to see and be seen. And she dressed for the part. She was wearing a nice suit complete with high heels. She was striking, and all eyes were on her. And once she figured that out, it didn’t take her long to warm up to her job. She was presenting Sunday school curricula and explaining their strengths and weaknesses.

Near the end of Corrina's presentation, a teacher from Pastor Tom's church asked an innocent-sounding question. She wanted to know why so many of the curricula were emphasizing knowledge over application. Wasn't that a weakness? She said, "We're focusing on discipleship. We want to move beyond knowing about Jesus to creating servant leaders who continue His ministry. He told His disciples they had to be servants. That's why we want a curriculum that's strong on application."

Corrina didn't miss a chance to straighten this young woman out. She told her, "Presbyterians have particular beliefs. Our history and tradition are important, too. It's important to teach all of that." The young woman persisted, "But isn't discipleship the main thing? I mean, isn't what we call ourselves less important than what we're doing as Jesus' disciples? What good is a Presbyterian curriculum if it isn't helping us learn how to follow Him by serving others? I mean, He did say He came to serve others, and we should do the same."

Well, Corrina launched into a full-fledged defense of all things Presbyterian. Her face flushed, and she was nearly growling when she said, "The manager of the Piggly Wiggly isn't going to stock his shelves with food from Kroger's just because he likes it better. Presbyterian churches use Presbyterian curriculum, and if they don't, they should. When I become the chairman of this committee, I'll be pushing that throughout the presbytery. Then she paused and said, "But given your circumstances, I can see why you might think the

curriculum you use isn't all that important." She looked around the theater they were in with a look that had disapproval written all over it.

Well, that young woman got Corrina's message loud and clear. And she shared it with Pastor Tom. He found Corrina after the workshop and thanked her for her help. But he also wanted to know what she had said. "One of my Sunday school teachers got the impression you didn't much care for her or our church. What happened?" Corrina said, "She seemed to think that the curricula I was presenting wasn't good enough. She kept going on and on about servant leaders. I just tried to explain to her how important our history and tradition were."

Pastor Tom asked, "But did you say you were going to make Presbyterian curricula the standard for the presbytery's churches when you become the chair of the CE committee?" "Not in so many words, but something like that," she replied. Pastor Tom chuckled and said, "Oh, I must've missed that memo. When is that going to happen? It sounds like a done deal." Corrina gave him one of her famous thin-lipped smiles and said, "That is something I want to do. I'm sorry if she thinks I misspoke."

Pastor Tom said, "Look, this congregation is doing something different. But we're trying our best to be faithful. We want to be a disciple-making church. That's our goal. That's our plan. We aren't worried about being a big, traditional church. Who knows? We might be small. We might be here for years. But that's OK. We think this is the work Jesus is giving us to do. The ultimate measure of our success won't be our size. It will be our faithfulness."

Corrina was fuming, so Pastor Tom invited her into his office. She snarled, "I didn't come all the way down here to be talked to that way." Well, that did it. She had finally pushed Pastor Tom too far. He said, "Unbelievable! You're making this all about you. You remind me of James and John. You could be their sister. Where did you get those genes? James and John wanted to sit in the places of honor right next to Jesus where everybody would see them. And that's what it looks like you're up to. Just look at you. Who wears a suit and high heels to a CE workshop? I respect the Presbyterian church as much as the next guy. But this church is serving Jesus, not history. If you want to help us, that would be great. Get out of your heels and hose and join us. But that may end up being your cup of suffering. And if it is, I wonder how willing you will be to drink it." That did it. Corrina blew up like a summer storm and left twice as fast.

It was a long drive home. Corrina spent half of that time mad. The rest of it she spent crying. As much as she hated doing it, she broke down and decided to ask Pastor Marianne for help. Who else would understand? After church the next day, Corrina waited until everyone was gone and Pastor Marianne was back in her office. Corrina tapped on her door jamb and asked, "Could I talk with you for just a bit?" Pastor Marianne looked surprised but said, "Sure. Come on in."

Corrina gave her a rundown on what had happened the day before. Then she asked, "What is so wrong with our history and tradition?" Pastor Marianne thought a second and then said, "Nothing. It only gets to be a problem when it keeps us from shaping the character of the people who come to church. I don't know how he made his point, but I agree with Tom in principle. When you weight

the two, discipleship is more important than church history and tradition. They are important, but they aren't more important than teaching people how to be Jesus' disciples. Tom's church is emphasizing the lifeblood of teaching—application. And application is the lifeblood of discipleship, too. The church tries to help people apply what they know and what they're learning. What we know doesn't matter until it changes what we do and who we are. Think about it—our history and tradition are really just a running record of our discipleship." Corrina started to wonder, wonder if she had the right idea but had lost the forest for all the trees.

Well, the Spirit blows where it will and comes and goes as it pleases. And it was really working on Corrina. Maybe that is why she got someone to teach her Sunday school class the next Sunday and worshiped at The Community Church. She was willing to figure out what she needed to learn. Or was it what she had to do? She ended up in a Sunday school class taught by the same woman she had given such a hard time to at the presbytery workshop. Corrina wanted to be inconspicuous. But the teacher kept asking questions, and members of the class kept answering. There was no place to hide.

And it wasn't long before that young woman was calling on Corrina. "What does Jesus mean when He says whoever wants to be first of all has to be a slave of all?" Well, Corrina couldn't answer that question with history or tradition. She said, "A slave does what he's told to do. He doesn't get to control his life." The young woman said, "Right. But what does that have to do with being Jesus' disciples?" Her eyes were boring into Corrina. Corrina said, "Well, I

guess if we knew what the Lord wanted us to do, we'd have to do it no matter what." Then she paused and thought out loud, "I guess that means right away, too." The young woman exclaimed, "Right! So what does Jesus want you to do right away?" Corrina didn't have an answer for that one. "I don't know, not today anyway."

The young woman said to the rest of the class, "Look at Hebrews 5:9. See what it says? 'Jesus became the source of salvation for all those who obey Him.' Let's translate that this way: For all those who are obeying Him. For all those who are obeying Him right now." She continued, "Corrina is pointing us in the right direction. Discipleship means letting Jesus be our Master. And that's what it means for Him to be our Lord. And obeying Jesus is a saving thing. It's what His disciples are saying and doing that helps save others. And it's Jesus' obedience that puts Him on the cross. That's what He did that saves us."

After class, the young woman walked over to Corrina, thanked her for joining in, and gave her a big hug. Corrina felt like a member of the family. Another member of the class walked with her to worship in the main theater. There was a time when Corrina wouldn't have been caught dead in a church like this. But there she was, and in an odd way it was starting to feel like a fit.

After the sermon Pastor Tom reminded everyone that they would be walking next Sunday afternoon to raise money for a community food bank. Everybody was invited, and everybody should bring a friend. Then he smiled and said, "We're gonna do a little discipleship next Sunday." Someone shouted from the back of the theater, "We do discipleship every Sunday!" He laughed,

“OK. Just remember to dress for the occasion.” The congregation laughed. Almost everyone was dressed casually. Well, except for Corrina. She was in her heels and hose.

The next Sunday Corrina drove all the way from Mossy Creek to The Community Church again. The lunch after church was light, short, and fun. People were ready to walk. As they left the theater and started across the parking lot, Pastor Tom saw Corrina and jogged over to welcome her. He was surprised and delighted; you could see it on his face. “Hey, Corrina! Just look at you!” She beamed and said, “I thought I’d get rid of my heels and hose and try these on for size. What do you think?” She struck a pose with her worn jeans, sweat shirt, and running shoes. Pastor Tom gave her a big hug and said, “Where did you get those jeans, sister? I like ‘em just fine.” Amen.

