

**Rev. Mike Cole**  
**Providence Presbyterian Church**  
**Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**July 20, 2025**  
**Psalm 52; Luke 10:38-42**

**"Gospel Snapshots"**

Mike takes photos of the congregation. This is how we preserve memories. On FB our old photos occasionally pop up and bring a smile or a tear with the memory. We used to have photo albums. I'm not sure that anyone saves photo prints anymore. Several years ago I started digitizing our print photos but never really finished. I've got photo albums sitting in my home office waiting for action that will likely never happen.

Looking at photos of dear friends, vacations, reunions, accomplishments and major events reminds us of the fullness of life and refreshes our memories. But it hasn't always been this way. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century memories were preserved exclusively in writing and art. So, if we want to know more about events of the distant past we have to read them

When we read about Biblical figures we discover a real kinship with them. They are more like us than different from us. They've got the same motivations, ideals, struggles and challenges that we experience today.

We try to go it alone, strutting through this mad creation as if we owned it all and as if the world will never end. That is the problem, isn't it? We try to operate as if we are not a part of the body of Christ; and march on as if we were not children of a Creator we desperately need. Not that this is particularly new. No, it is as old as Eden.

It was that way there with Adam, the man who was alone. In a lovely garden, he had everything he needed and more than he wanted; he had all the best things that life can give. But something restless deep inside pushed and tugged and pulled until... well, the Bible tells it simply: it was not good for a person to be alone.

Walk with me then, through the little streets of Old Jerusalem and beside the Galilee for a few snapshots of gospel figures. First we come to Peter, proud and competent, certain of himself, able to convince the world what he knew was right; a bit bombastic maybe, pushing forward when he shouldn't, making promises he sometimes could not keep, jumping to conclusions before the facts were in – but with a dynamic flare for leading, moving to the top of every club and congregation, successful in his work, but never wedded to it. Peter - tough, strong, and competent - but lost inside, a restless wondering and

wandering. How easy to master other people; how impossible to master self. Until one day when, standing at the shore of Lake Galilee beside his little boat and mended nets, he met the Lord of all. And he was never alone again.

Then there was the woman called Mary Magdalene. She was lovelier than most, causing envy, even jealousy among other followers. Lithe, savvy, quick, and open - that God-given smile to make a moment sparkle; living on her talents until the Lord came by. Finally, there was one who was not interested in what she had to offer; only what was deep inside her soul. And the emptiness began to fill. The little question deep inside was answered once and for all: "Why go it alone dear Mary Magdalene?" There is one who loves you just as you are.

Then there was another Mary, the sister of Jesus' best friend, Lazarus, a remarkable woman, searching out ideas, never settling for the ordinary way that women are supposed to be, but plodding on through the mud and the deep debris of what society said should be the boundaries. This Mary loved to talk and learn from others, not content to work within the house, she escapes the dishes every night and seldom sweeps the floor. Her house was quite a wreck, and everybody knew it and tried to make her feel guilty for it.

But she was searching. She was lonely down inside until the day Jesus came by and took her hand. He treated her as an equal, said it was all right to be her own person, and that she would not have to be a slave to the little voices of society. "You don't need to struggle so hard anymore, Mary," Jesus said. I'll defend you. I'll be your friend and guide. You don't need to walk that road alone."

And what of her sister, Martha? Many of us may identify far more with her, whose Aramaic name means "lady." She is dependable, proper and nice. Martha was the sort of person who was drawn to duty; she couldn't leave the house until all the beds were made, until everything was set right. That was her way. And yet, something was missing in her life, too. She was going it alone, living within the pressures of her responsibilities, the pressure to do what needed doing and others might not do. We know the problem, I am sure. And Jesus changed her life by giving her, herself, showing her that she did not have to depend on the self-imposed rigors of lady-like ways. He said, "Be free to be the person that God intended you to be. You don't have to be afraid. I'll help you."

Or take Nicodemus. Well-to-do and complete, a man of stature with his peers, respected by all; on all the charity lists in the town, a Pharisee to boot, and a member of the coveted Sanhedrin. But think back to the night when he slipped out quietly, so no one else could see, sneaked off to visit this roadside evangelist. Money, Nicodemus had, but money does not ease the pain of walking through this life alone. Poor rich, old Nicodemus

needed something he did not have; and almost no one knew it. He probably never even told his wife and children, so he sought an interview with this prophet, Jesus.

Some of us have enough to live on, too. Some of us have made successes of our lives. We fit the mold of the achiever, oriented to succeed; to have everything we need, and then some. The only victory we lack in life is the victory over self; and we cannot go that alone. What is more, we know it. So maybe we'll want to sneak out by night and listen to our inner voices speaking. We may not want to make a public declaration of it, but deep down we're scared to death. Even the strongest have that fear; The ones that everyone leans upon need someone to lean upon as well.

So, Nicodemus, if that be us, listen to the voice. We don't have to go it by ourselves, not one day longer, not one moment more. For, sitting down beside us now, is that ONE, the only one who wants nothing from us in return for what he gives.

We can all sense the transitoriness of life, the journey Will Rogers laughed about and called a gyp because no one comes out of it alive. The Psalmist said it is just a sojourn on the earth; we are pilgrims on our way through time. And as we speed along, we know the day will come, sooner or later, when you and I will turn the farthest corner of them all, in the one pilgrimage that each of us must make alone. We must be brave enough to enter that hour in our lives. We must be strong enough to know that we are too weak to walk it by ourselves.

It is peace of mind that we need, everyone of us, at whatever stage of growing old we are – peace within and peace without, and then that final peace will come and a light will shine to open our way – a kind of inner peace will lift us on a cloud, and we will sail and soar beyond our highest fears, for there is ONE who stands with us through all our agonizing moments. We don't need to walk this road alone. The Lord's hand is there to hold and guide us.

Ultimately, it comes down at last to us and all we need for all our various journeys - proud and tall, stooped and worried, going somewhere or spinning wheels, trapped or free. It comes down to us. Life was not made for us to walk alone. Christ came to offer us his life and peace.

Take a moment then and let it sink in. Christ knows our needs, our mortal frame, and loves us as we are. He forgives and starts us out anew just like he did with those early disciples. They were just as puzzled by life as we are. They were going through the motions like many of us are. They harbored self-doubt and self-recrimination like most of us. They too had broken relationships and family dysfunction. They struggled with health issues and end of life quandaries.

But in Jesus they found one who not only understood them but even accepted them as they were. In Jesus they found a companion who would stick with them no matter what. With Jesus at their side they would never, never, never be alone again.

Why try to go it alone? When, in our heart of hearts, we hear his invitation, let's accept it and share the journey with him. We have but to ask, and Jesus will walk along with us just as he did those first disciples. And together we will go places, serve others and make memories that no camera can capture.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen**