A Hidden Heroine
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Mark 14:1-9

It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; [2]for they said, 'Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people.' 3 While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head.[4]But some were there who said to one another in anger, 'Why was the ointment wasted in this way? [5]For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.' And they scolded her. [6]But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. [7]For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. [8]She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. [9]Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'

1. Hidden Figures

A few weeks ago, Christine and I saw a movie entitled "Hidden Figures." The movie is based on the true story of three brilliant African-American women who worked at NASA in the 1950s and '60s. These women made calculations and contributions that helped launch the Apollo 11 and Apollo 13 space missions. Dorothy Vaughn, Mary Jackson, and Katherine Johnson were engineers at a time when both women and African Americans were still widely discriminated against. While an all-male team of engineers performed the calculations for potential space travel, female mathematicians checked their work. They played a vital role at a moment when the United States was neck-and-neck with the Soviets in the space race. These three female heroines worked behind the scenes, helping to send Alan Shepard and John Glenn into space. The three African-American women were the hidden heroines who made a big difference in U.S. space history.

2. An Unknown Woman

There are many hidden figures of the Bible. These hidden heroes also made a big difference in history but were often overlooked. Mark 14 tells us that a woman came to Jesus to pour her very expensive perfume on the head of Jesus. Who was she? Matthew and Mark's gospels don't name the woman, but in John's

gospel, she is identified as Mary, Martha and Lazarus' sister who lived in Bethany. When we read today's passage, we notice that Jesus' disciples and Jesus' responses to her actions are quite different.

Jesus' disciples were angry and scolded her because they thought she wasted the expensive perfume. However, Jesus said, "**Let her alone. …she has performed a good service for me**" (14:6). Jesus saw her action as an expression of love and devotion in light of His approaching death, a sign of the messianic acclamation. In many ways, the response from Jesus' disciples would seem natural. The perfume used on Jesus would have been about 300 denarii which was a year's wages. This would be about $15,000 today. John 12:4 tells us that Judas Iscariot commented that the money could be used for the poor. However, the writer of John's gospel tells us, **"He (Judas Iscariot) said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it"** (14:6). Unlike Judas, Jesus said "**what she has done will be told in remembrance of her**" (Mark 14:9). Jesus was so moved by her deed.

Why did Jesus compliment the woman on her deed? According to Mark 14:1-2, the chief priests and the teachers of the law were planning to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. Jesus was in the middle of a crisis. Yet Jesus' disciples did not know what to do. But in the midst of this crisis, the woman expressed her love for Jesus by pouring the ointment over Jesus' head. As Mary Magdalene and other women went later to Jesus' tomb to anoint his body, the very same action was done by this woman while Jesus was alive. Besides expressing her love and thanks to Jesus, we can see another deep theological meaning behind her action. The pouring of the ointment over Jesus' head shows her faith in Jesus. This would be the same action used to anoint kings in the Old Testament. Pouring the oil over Jesus would be seen as a sign that Jesus was the anointed one, the Messiah. Mary would be confirming her faith that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah of Israel even though he would be crucified.

Verse 10 and following tells us that Judas Iscariot who scolded the women went to the chief priests to sell Jesus. What often gets overlooked is that the action of the woman and Judas were motivated by very different reasons. The woman had a spiritual insight and was sensitive to the needs of Jesus. As a result of her deed, Jesus was confirmed as the savior and he was pleased in the face of his impending death. But Judas was seeking to betray Jesus for his own personal gain. Even though she is not recognized as an important person, this woman becomes one of the hidden heroes in Jesus' life.

3. A Hidden Hero in My Journey

Who are your hidden heroes in your life? For over the past 30 years in the U.S., I've met many people. There have been times when I've been disappointed by Christians. But there have also been many times when I've been surprised by the level of faith and dedication I've seen from pastors and lay people in the church. These have been the hidden heroes in my life. I'd like to share briefly about one of those heroes today. Mr. Park was one of the elders in my previous church. He was a founding member who became a Christian after immigrating to the U.S. And he was known in the church as the person who was willing to spend all the money he had to do anything for the church. That was 35 years ago. At the time, the church was looking for a new building. Many of the church members were against buying a building because raising enough money didn't seem possible. But Mr. Park was determined to buy a building.

The church today wouldn't be what it is without him. Besides his financial commitment to the church, Mr. Park was present at worship services always. He never missed church, unless he was sick or out of town. He was at every Sunday service and every weekday morning prayer meeting. I still remember the day a few years ago when there were several feet of snow. We cancelled our prayer meeting, but Mr. Park came to church anyway. He told me later that he could not start a day without praying to the Lord. Mr. Park loved God with all his heart, with all his mind, and with all his soul. He was also dedicated to his work, working at his auto body shop until a week before he passed at age 84. He wanted to work to help others when they had problems with their cars. For me, Mr. Park was one of the hidden heroes who showed me how to love the Lord and His people. I am so thankful to God for letting me meet him in New England.

4. Hidden Heroes at Swift Memorial

What about our story here at Swift Memorial? We have some of us today who have been in the church for 30 or 40 years. I'm sure you may remember some of the hidden heroes in our church. I recently was reading our church history and came across the name of a woman named Jennie P. Nye. She was a Sunday school superintendent for 19 years when the stone church was built. I wish I could have met her. She must have been one of the hidden heroes of our church. I found out that there were more heroes. I read about Rev. Tom Banks and his wife Dotti in the 1970s. While they served at the church, the church grew from 35 to 75 people in a year. Rev. Banks organized the New Foundation, which was a group made up of young married couples in their twenties and thirties. They were the backbone of the Swift Sound of Love musical productions.

During this time, the church was carpeted and the pews were cushioned. Gibbs Hall was named in honor of William and Anna Gibbs on the occasion of their 50th wedding anniversary. The chimes in the church were installed in the tower in memory of Sydney Clark in 1976. A school bus was acquired as a gift of Hamilton Whiting. Through the generosity of Jessie and Juanita Grimes, the church was given a 2 ¼ acre parcel of land. That is the land where the Activity Center is located today. The land was given to provide a place for the local youth to meet. And Dottie Banks established a thrift shop which was called the Red Roost. During the time of Rev. Banks' ministry, a new member of the church said, "I have never looked forward to going to church so much in my life." I wish we could have such a member today. When you look around the church today, have you seen anyone whom you might consider as a hidden hero or heroine? Among us, definitely there are hidden heroes and heroines.

5. Characteristics of the Hidden Heroes

What are the characteristics of the hidden heroes? They are brave and do not want to be recognized. They do not care about what other people think or say. They might face prejudice, discrimination, segregation, and rejection. But they would go forward anyway and do what they believe without any fear and worries. And they do not mind taking any risk wasting their money, time, and talents for the Lord and others. They are glad to be fools. And I want to be one of them.

6. Conclusion

There are many people who were rejected, discriminated, and marginalized in the Bible because they were women, children, foreigners, tax collectors, and lepers. The unnamed woman is one of them. The same thing is happening today. However, we need to remember that God calls not only our leaders but also every person to be a hidden hero to fulfill the dreams that God has for the world.

7. Application

As we begin with a new administration for our country, there are feelings of anxiety and concern. We don't know what will happen. But regardless of what is happening around us, our charge from God is clear which is to be his hidden heroes and heroines. What we can contribute and do may seem very small at times. But I believe that God has called each one of us to Swift Memorial and this community because we can make a difference. You and I are called to be hidden heroes and heroines for the glory of God in this church, in this community, in this country, and in this world. And I would like to search for those hidden heroes and heroines and celebrate their lives with you. Thanks be to God who has called each one of us as hidden heroes and heroines. Amen.