

**Luke 8:1-3**

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Series-1)

**Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY**

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Lent 5 (Stewardship)

*Luke 8:1 Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, <sup>2</sup>and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; <sup>3</sup>Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

### **NOW WHY WOULD THEY DO THAT?**

A couple miles east of St. Louis, Missouri, well within the interstate by-passes encircling that city is a pile of dirt. It's not just any pile of dirt. This pile of dirt covers almost 14 acres, stands 100 feet tall and contains as much dirt as 50,000 dump trucks can haul. That pile of dirt is a little more amazing when you find out that it was built three or four hundred years before Columbus discovered the Americas. It was piled up by a culture that didn't have the wheel, much less excavators and dump trucks. All the dirt was carried in baskets of woven reeds. Now why would they do that? I mean, I think of digging up potatoes in the garden as a lot of work. Why would they do 50,000 dump trucks of dirt?

The question comes up again and again when we look at monuments of the ancient world. Why that dirt mound east of St. Louis? Why those stones precisely arranged at Stonehenge? Why those angular stone heads on Easter Island? Why the Nazca lines in the Peruvian desert, sometimes miles long, that can be appreciated as line art only from an airplane? Why did they do that? What were they thinking?

When cultures didn't leave a written record of their reasons, we are left piecing together what little evidence we have. Meanwhile the Nazca lines, the mute monuments, the unspeaking statues keep their secrets.

Why this church? This parking lot? This isn't quite as impressive as those ancient wonders, but if I were a visitor driving the length of Lincoln Trail Boulevard, I might well consider this facility the most notable building on the whole street. Maybe not the biggest, but it just seems to have something to say. Why did people do this? And why do people volunteer their time to clean it. And why do others volunteer their services to usher and make music. And why do many donate significant portions of their paychecks to keep the lights on and the pulpit filled? What's going on here? Why do you do that?

People had to be asking similar questions in the northern Palestine, Galilee, about the year 30AD. Wherever Jesus went, things went just a little bit weird. Fishermen, not guys who like fishing but lifelong fishermen who fed their families off what their nets caught, were pulling their boats up on shore and abandoning them to follow a rabbi named Jesus.

Tax collectors were leaving their booths. Activists were leaving their causes. Sinners were leaving their wicked fascinations. Women were breaking bottles of ludicrously expensive perfume, Magi were leaving their homeland, and shepherds out by their flocks at night left their sheep. Oh, sure, not everyone was doing that stuff, but a lot were. And it surely left many asking, “What’s going on? Why would they do that?”

This reading, these few verses seem like an addendum or a marginal note to the Gospel of Luke—the sort of minor detail that you quickly pass over to get to the real story about Jesus. But this reading offers an insight. It lets us peak inside and piece together at least a little bit of the mystery of why the fishermen, the tax collectors, the sinners, were doing what they were doing.

To figure this out, maybe the first thing we should do is grab a bench and simply watch the crowds around Jesus. Don’t just watch them for a day. Watch them every day for a week. Follow Jesus down the roads of Galilee to the towns and villages. Then sit down and take note of the people in the crowd; look at their faces. After a few days some of the faces will become familiar. There are that dozen of men who always seem closest to Jesus. When Jesus enters a house, obviously the whole crowd can’t go with him, but those twelve do. Day after day they listen to every word, every sermon, every question and answer session. These are The Twelve, devoting their lives to Jesus’ message. Eleven have come down to us as saints and one in infamy. They appear again and again, asking questions, sometimes chastised by Jesus, always with the hearts of learners with lots to learn. But we hear about them often, so while we could say much about them today, we will not.

As we sit on our bench and watch the Jesus crowd day after day, other faces become familiar, faces we didn’t expect to be regulars in the crowd; faces we maybe never thought about being in the Jesus crowd day after day. These, too, listen to the words of Jesus, but they can’t listen all the time. They can’t listen all the time because they have other work to do. When it comes time for meals, they must hurry off to prepare a meal for the Teacher and the Twelve. On entering a town, these unexpected ones are the ones who find and arrange a place where Jesus and company can stay that night. Who knows all the logistics that fell to them day after day on the road? From our human vantage point they were the ones who made it possible for Jesus to tour Galilee with the good news of the kingdom of God. Whom am I talking about? ***“[With Jesus and the Twelve were] also some women... These women were helping to support them out of their own means.”***

These women in their vital work are mentioned just one other time in the Gospels—at the end. At the cross we are told, *“Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs.”* Which only deepens our realization of what is going on here in Luke 8. They are in it for keeps. Their devotion to Jesus is complete. Their commitment to his ministry 100%.

Imagine what they gave over the course of three years, feeding Jesus and twelve other grown men, finding places for them to stay. Who knows, maybe even clothing them! How much time was that? How much money? But couldn’t Jesus just make bread appear out of thin air? Whether he could or not, Jesus relied on the gifts of those who were willing. And we never hear of Jesus going begging. He did not go to the government for a grant, or set

up a business whose income would fund his ministry. As it had been in Old Testament times, so it was to his, and remains even to our own. God has been pleased that *his* people should support the Gospel work. It is our God-given work.

But those women in Luke 8, why would they do that? As Luke introduces them, we begin to understand. There were ***“some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others.”*** Here we meet Mary Magdalene. Contrary to many traditions in the church and many more rumors started by outsiders, this is all we know about Mary Magdalene. All the smears of her pre-Jesus years being a life of wanton sin are just smears. All the lies started by the enemies of Christ’s Church about her after her conversion are not worth mentioning. Of her we are only told that she had known the torment of seven demons. We know little of Joanna other than that her husband was a man of power and wealth; and yet the Holy Spirit had worked through the temptations of wealth and the confusions of power to open her heart to Jesus. Of Susanna we know nothing but her name. And there were others. Many cured of diseases and devils.

In different ways each had known the goodness of Jesus. And after experiencing the goodness of Jesus each thought to herself, “This message needs to get out. Others have to know Jesus. Others need to be blessed like I have been blessed.” And so they made themselves voluntary servants of Jesus and his ministry, not for a couple hours a week, but every moment. They didn’t look at their bank balance and then Jesus and say, “How much can I afford to give to Jesus.” They asked “How much does Jesus need?” They had known his goodness. That’s why they did it.

But it was more than his goodness. They heard the message Jesus preached. Immediately before our reading, a sinful woman had come to Jesus and anointed his feet with perfume. While some sneered at her reputation, Jesus commended her to their faces. Then, after defending her, Jesus looked at her and said, *“Your sins are forgiven... Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”*

Forgiveness, faith, peace, in Jesus. That’s the good news of the kingdom of heaven that Jesus proclaimed. When you wonder why in the world these women tramped around the countryside with Jesus, providing food, lodging and clothing for Jesus and others, now you know.

How does that forgiveness, faith and peace in Jesus affect you? Is it with a yawn? Is it with a “Tell me something I don’t already know, preacher?” Do we bear any resemblance to these faithful women following Jesus and their tireless and joyful thanksgiving—or maybe it was tired but determined thanksgiving—to Jesus?

We have to ask ourselves: Did those devoted followers of Jesus have any more than we do? At first, we might think Mary Magdalene had a unique advantage—having seven demons driven out—wouldn’t that make you eternally grateful? But what about her time under those seven demons? How does that compare with your entire lifetime of faith? Can

you say your blessing is less? Maybe Joanna with her rich powerful husband had all the blessings—but is it not it's own blessing to *not* have the distractions of wealth and power? Each of us has our own blessings, measured out and lavished on by God in his wisdom. Count those blessings. Realize God's goodness. Don't be the sort of person who can only count the blessings other people have.

Hebrews chapter eleven teaches us to realize our blessings. It tells us of the great heroes of faith. It reminds us of the faith of Noah, Abraham, Moses, the prophets and others—people whose stories loom large on the Bible's pages. At first, thinking of such people, we might think that the small blessings of our life bear little resemblance to the huge blessings they had and thus relieve us of serious service to God like they gave.

That chapter of Hebrews ends the list of heroes of faith with this: *“Yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”* Do you think that these women accompanying Jesus gave an over-the-top generous response to Jesus' mercy because they experienced more of Jesus mercy, or have a greater reward in heaven than you or I? Oh, we would like that excuse, wouldn't we? But Hebrews reminds us, *“Only together with us will they be made perfect.”*

Those who financially supported Jesus' ministry in Luke 8 understood that. Though they would not be the Twelve, though most of them would remain unnamed, they would still contribute generously. They had known too much good from Jesus to quibble about who should do more and who gets to do what. They just gave, and they loved it because they loved Him! Just pure Gospel: forgiveness, faith and peace.

We have experienced the same gospel: forgiveness, faith and peace in Jesus. Some of our other blessings may be different than theirs, but to count them less is to question God's wisdom.

Lord, forgive us for making excuses for our reluctant thanksgiving, our stingy hearts toward the Gospel, our selfish pursuits of what we want in this world. Lord, fill us with a realization of all that Jesus has given us through his life and death for us, and your daily rich blessings upon us your children. Amen.