

[JOHN 13:31-35](#)

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**MORE GOOD NEWS FROM LAKE MOORE: One Man's Love**

Well, it's been a quiet week in my hometown, Lake Moore, that tiny village of 300 that sits on the map where Massachusetts, Vermont and New Hampshire all converge into a single DOT. They had a FUNERAL this week at the *Lake Moore Community Church*, a funeral for old Emma Thompson, a life-long resident of Lake Moore and a long-time PILLAR of the church. Until VERY recently, in fact, Emma was church TREASURER. She had served in that position since 1958, and the NEW Treasurer, Linda McKnight, SWEARS that old Emma must have kept the books in her pocketbook, because all she received for records was a checkbook and a small file of receipts.

Well, in Emma's WILL, she requested that, IF it be possible, she'd like to have the Rev. Dr. Mary Franklin officiate at her funeral. Now, Mary was the FIRST female pastor ever to SERVE at the *Lake Moore Community Church*. In fact, Mary was the first female minister ever to serve at ANY church in the COUNTY. And she was GREEN when she came. She was RIGHT out of seminary, and it was the late 1960's. And BEING the FIRST female, and NEWLY ordained, Mary did NOT have an easy TIME of it in Lake Moore. She has SINCE gone on to do some GREAT things with her career. In fact, she's a PREACHING professor at a major SEMINARY in New York City, and has written and published several BOOKS. BUT, the BEGINNING of her career was a BUMPY ride.

Mary Franklin tells the story of when she first ARRIVED in Lake Moore. She drove into town, and the SIGN at the edge of town said: **Welcome to Lake Moore . Population: 231.** Now, when she GOT into town, she wasn't exactly SURE what to DO. It seems that the SEMINARY had forgotten to TEACH her what to DO on her first DAY in a new church. SO, she went to the General STORE, owned and operated by an OLD man, George Pierce. Now, George had been the proprietor of that General Store for over 50 years. He was a life-long member of the *Lake Moore Community Church*. And even though he no longer SERVED as First SELECTMAN in town, he had BEEN in that position for over 30 years. SO, there wasn't MUCH that old George didn't KNOW about Lake Moore.

When she walked IN, old George KNEW who she had to BE, and he said to her: *Mary, there was an ACCIDENT on the highway just outside of town . Well, Mary's HEART skipped a beat, of COURSE. If the seminary had not taught her what to DO on her first day in a new church, it CERTAINLY had NOT taught her what to do in a CRISIS like this. And then George went ON to say: It was a young man and a young woman, who were engaged to be married, and THEY went to HEAVEN. He said this with a TWINKLE in his eye, and it turned out to be the first of MANY jokes that old George would tell Mary Franklin during her YEARS as PASTOR there. In fact, EVERY time she visited the store, George would tell her another JOKE, most of them retrieved from *Reader's Digest*. He said: They WENT to heaven and they said to God, "We really want to be married. We were GOING to be married and then we had the ACCIDENT, but we really WANT to be married." And God said to them, "Wait 500 years, and if you STILL want to be married, come see me." SO, they waited 500 years and then asked the same question. And God said, "Well, let's wait ANOTHER 500 years." SO, they waited another 500 years, and then 500 more. Finally, they said to God, "We really DO want to be MARRIED! PLEASE let us get MARRIED." And God said, "I'll tell you what: you wait 500 more years, and if there's STILL no minister up here, I'll MARRY you MYSELF!"*

Well, THAT was her introduction to old George Pierce. Then he gave her a key to the church, an old SKELETON key, and she walked down to the FIRST pew in the sanctuary and PRAYED like she'd NEVER prayed before. For the next few weeks, Mary BEGAN the process of getting to KNOW this little church and its members, and pretty soon, she decided to publish the first EVER newsletter of the *Lake Moore Community Church*. Now, there wasn't really a list of NAMES and addresses of church members and friends of the church, so she went about COLLECTING that information with the

help of a long-time resident. Together, they collected the names and addresses of about 50 or 60 families, and Mary published the first EVER newsletter on what she came to call *the big, evil, black INK machine*. THEN, she addressed them, one-by-one, and at about 1 o'clock in the afternoon, she walked to the General Store, which also SERVED as the Post Office, and PROUDLY handed George Pierce the BRAND new, FIRST ever NEWSLETTER of the *Lake Moore Community Church*. Well, old George took them in his hand and went through them one-by-one. And then he said, *Honey, you didn't need to put ADDRESSES on these. WE know where all these people LIVE.*

She then walked over to the Town Hall to pick up something, and went back to church. When she got to CHURCH, the PHONE was ringing. It was Helen Johnson, 90 years old and a LIFE-LONG church member. It seems that she'd ALREADY received HER newsletter. And Mary LEARNED that NEWS travels FAST in a small town, and that most EVERYONE is somehow RELATED. Lately, Mary has been reading a book by Mary Cartledgehayes entitled, *Grace: A Memoir*. And IN that book, there is a description of a pastor's FIRST church, which makes MARY think of her TIME at the *Lake Moore Community Church*. It reads: *Your first church is like your first BABY. It's the most ADORABLE thing you've ever SEEN. You want to dress it in cute CLOTHES and take PICTURES of it to send to all your FRIENDS. You always WORRY whether it's getting enough to EAT. And you PEEK into its CRIB at night, and stand very STILL until you can see its CHEST moving and know that it's STILL breathing. And SOME moments you LOVE it so MUCH you can HARDLY breathe YOURSELF.*

And while that was TRUE for MARY, Mary's time in Lake Moore was not ALL positive. In fact, it was not LONG after these EARLY days in the church, when the RESISTANCE started to come. There were a NUMBER of people, you see, who did not WANT a WOMAN minister, especially a SINGLE woman minister. Emma Thompson's MOTHER was ONE of them. HAZEL Thompson could be a very VICIOUS woman. And over the years, she said MANY terrible things about MARY. In fact, she started a number of HORRIBLE rumors. And SHE was not the only ONE. It TORE Mary's heart out to have her FIRST church, her BABY, REJECT her the way it did. She always got along with Emma Thompson, however, and they became fast FRIENDS. But Emma's MOTHER drove Mary NUTS. And THAT'S why, when old Hazel Thompson got into a CAR accident one night on the mountain road, and was HOSPITALIZED, Mary had a VERY hard time going to SEE her. She KNEW that she would NOT be well-received by Hazel. And AS she DROVE the 30 miles to GET to the hospital, ALL of Hazel's RUMORS and BITING words came INTO her mind, and she CRIED. She KNEW that she would SOON have to LEAVE the *Lake Moore Community Church*, and that HURT.

Well, Mary was RIGHT. She was NOT well-received by Hazel Thompson. They'd only visited for a MINUTE or two, and Hazel PRETENDED to be ASLEEP. SO, Mary said a PRAYER, a BEAUTIFUL prayer, and went OUT to WAITING room to talk with EMMA. It was toward EMMA, NOT Hazel, that Mary's MINISTRY would need to be DIRECTED. That was OBVIOUS. And they talked OPENLY about how HURTFUL Emma's mom had BEEN to Mary. And though Mary TRIED to remain STRONG for Emma, she could NOT hold back her TEARS. And it MOVED Emma when Mary CRIED, and TWO have remained FRIENDS ever since. We MAY forget those with whom we LAUGH, but we NEVER forget those with whom we WEEP.

Well, even though Mary KNEW that her days at the *Lake Moore Community Church* were NUMBERED, and that she would SOON have to RESIGN, she decided to STAY for the duration of old George Pierce's ILLNESS. He became VERY ill, and it was OBVIOUS that he would soon DIE. Mary had grown to LOVE this man and his family. SO, she just COULDN'T leave while he was sick, EVEN if it meant POSTPONING her WORK on her Ph.D., which is what she had decided to pursue.

And George DID last longer than ANYONE expected, and Mary MISSED the fall semester. George Pierce's FUNERAL was at 2 o'clock on a Sunday afternoon. It was the FIRST Sunday of ADVENT. And AS Mary was preparing the church for his FUNERAL, the funeral director came to her and said: *Mary, we are holding about 4 to 500 people outside. Can't we open the DOOR yet?* And Mary thought how AMAZING that WAS. After all: George was the FIRST Selectman in this TINY village of 231 and the proprietor of a General Store SO small that it was only 18 feet long by 12 feet wide. YET, almost 500 people waited to get IN. And the church could only SEAT about 100.

JUST before the service, little 7-year old, Betsy Johnson somehow broke FREE from her mother in the back row and ran down front, past the casket, and TUGGED on Mary's ROBE. Mary leaned over to LISTEN. Little Betsy said, *Miss Mary, I HAD to BE here today, because I was Mr. Pierce's VERY best FRIEND in the world.* And Mary thought to herself, *I thought I was Mr. Pierce's VERY best FRIEND in the world. And I'll BET that all 500 people HERE think that THEY were Mr. Pierce's very best FRIEND in the world.*

Well, that WEEK in one of the BOSTON newspapers, believe it or not, one of their regular columnists wrote an ARTICLE about old George Pierce. She said that she had not KNOWN that he was ILL; otherwise, she would have come to VISIT him. And then, she chronicled HER story of getting to know George. It seems that she was LOST one HOT summer day, years ago, on the BACK roads of Massachusetts, and she STOPPED for a DRINK at a little General Store in the TINY town of Lake Moore. She said: *I went IN to get something to drink and ended up staying the ENTIRE afternoon. I met OLD George Pierce, and HE starting TALKING to me about LIFE in Lake Moore. Well, I was MESMERIZED and couldn't LEAVE. Off and on, CHILDREN would come in from playing to buy CANDY or SODA, but MORE, so that George could TUSSLE their HAIR, say a good WORD to them and SEND them on their way. Later, a MAN came in, who began having a QUIET conversation with George. I could hardly HEAR them, but he said: George, I...ah... I'm having trouble with my CROPS, my CHILDREN are HUNGRY. I'm SORRY, but I... I really need an EXTENSION on my CREDIT, if you don't mind. Well, you would have THOUGHT that this was GOVERNOR of Massachusetts with the RESPECT with which old George treated him. George GAVE him the GOODS that he needed, and many MORE. He said that he wouldn't CHARGE the man for them, and then he SENT him on his WAY. I was MOVED to TEARS by THAT gesture, and thought to myself: I can't imagine that this little STORE makes much of a PROFIT. I wonder who WON'T eat so that that MAN and his family CAN eat. And she WROTE in her article, in that Boston newspaper, something that MARY had said at George's FUNERAL: George Pierce HEARD the ONE and ONLY commandment of his LORD, Jesus, which is LOVE one another as I have loved YOU. And George, like NO ONE I've ever KNOWN, LIVED by that commandment. LOVE and you are a SUCCESS, whether or NOT the WORLD thinks so. The HIGHEST purpose of Christianity – which is primarily a way of LIFE, NOT a system of belief – is to LOVE one another. Too MANY religious people make FAITH their AIM, but LOVE is what measures our TRUE stature. The MORE we LOVE, the BIGGER we ARE. And that's why George Pierce was a BIG man, and an IMPORTANT one. And WE can LEARN from that him that there is no SMALLER package in this WORLD than that of a person all WRAPPED up in oneself. But likewise, there is no BIGGER person than that person who is FILLED with LOVE.*

And when Mary drove back into town this week for Emma Thompson's funeral, and she saw the ABANDONED General Store across from the Town Hall, she stopped her car and WEPT. She wept for her friend, Emma. She wept for old George Pierce. She WEPT because she HERSELF is getting OLD and nearing RETIREMENT. And MOST of all, she WEPT for her BABY, her FIRST church – and ALL that WAS, and MIGHT have BEEN. Yes, Mary WEPT.

Well, THAT'S the good news from Lake Moore, where ALL the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the CHILDREN are above average. Amen.