

Day 37

A Warrior's Heart for Living Outside the Lines Letting God Clean Up Your Paint Mess

Any given day on 5th Street I could be found at one of the sweet Warrior neighbor ladies houses. Many afternoons though I was right next door visiting with Mary Miller. She was a favorite. Her face always lit up when she saw me at the door and she immediately invited me in. Mary was a petite, slightly grey-haired woman with two grown sons. They lived in other states with their families. It was always exciting when her grandkids came to visit in the summer for a week. She had been a widow as long as I knew her in my young life. She never remarried, but her heart had a second love and passion. Painting. Mary always had an easel set up somewhere in her house with her paint pallet looking like Joseph's coat of many colors.

I had the privilege of seeing the blank canvas that she started with on her easel. It was usually white. Perfect. Spotless. However, as she started painting it soon became a slightly messy canvas, usually even messier when I would visit a few days later...and then even messier! But then one day...I would be delighted with surprise...all the lines, colors, swirls, dots, and swishes she formed with her paint brush had finally brought something beautiful together on the messy canvas. Brightly colored chrysanthemums, daffodils, iris and posies were formed in gardens, leaves of multicolored green hues with tiny etched veins grew alongside the flowers, roses glistening with small dew drops clung to white lattice fences, cloudless blue skies had appeared, birds were flying, the sun was shining, green grass blades showed throughout the gardens...it was a 'Masterpiece by Mary' as I used to tell her.

As Mary got older (and so did I) we had an even stronger bond. Mary began having a very difficult time with her vision. Her hand began to shake often as she would paint. The brush that was so steady now seemed to be straying outside the lines where the paint belonged. It took her longer to create the paintings and they didn't look like a 'Masterpiece by Mary'.

While still much better than I could ever paint, Mary's canvases looked less and less like masterpieces. They were still beautiful. My perception might have been biased because I loved the person who painted them. In reality, I could see the paint outside of the lines blurring the finished painting. It was no longer perfect. She had painted outside the lines.

Somedays life on 5th Street as a young girl seemed almost perfect. Even though my mom may have been battling symptoms of illness and even a hospitalization...the wonderful 5th Street Warriors stepped to the frontlines of the battle to help. Our neighborhood had the pristine look of happiness. Yards were neatly mowed, shrubs trimmed, houses painted, front doors welcoming, baked cookies waiting. Like a clean canvas being slowly painted by an artist, the little Mayberry neighborhood with Sheriff Taylor and the various Aunt Bee's of different shapes and sizes were all exactly where they were supposed to be...in my corner of the world. But time passed and it came time to leave Mayberry and the circle of comfort that surrounded me growing up. I moved to a new canvas painted by the world. While there were lots of beautiful moments on that canvas...there were sections that the paint freely flowed outside the perfect lines I'd traced for my life growing up on 5th Street. Unknown colors appeared. Colors not on the pallet I'd selected for my life...colors of hurt, anger, pain, insecurity, disappointment, abandonment, betrayal, broken relationships, rejection, crushed dreams, broken promises, lies, deceit...and so many other colors life painted.

One of our sisters in the Bible knew what those worldly colors were like. In a small town outside of Samaria there was a woman whose paint had smeared broadly outside the lines. We don't know her heart except to read her story in John 4 and draw some lines with our paint brush as her Biblical sisters. We learn she had been married 5 times and perhaps not wanting to be hurt or rejected again...she was living with a 6th man. She approached the well one day to retrieve water at the very hottest part of the afternoon (John 4:6). Perhaps she simply forgot to get her water that morning. She certainly wasn't detained because she was scrolling the latest Pinterest Board on her cell phone. Most likely...she was used to drawing her water at the hottest part of the day...to avoid the ridicule of the town women. Women in Samaria can be so gossipy unlike the Aunt Bee's on 5th Street.

Sisters, we don't know why she had been married FIVE times and was now living with another man. Perhaps, her husbands had all died and left her widowed (life's color of disappointment), or maybe they had left her for other women (life's color of betrayal), or they were abusive (life's color of broken promises)...the Bible simply does not give us an answer as to why she had been married 5 times. We do not know why she found herself covered in life's paint of color's she didn't ask for.

We do know...Jesus, Lord of the Universe, spoke to her at the well in the heat of the day. He spoke to a woman dripping with paint and He knew it. He asked her for a drink of water (John 4:7). Jesus offered her compassion and living water. Living water to wash off her paint. He saw what was beneath the layers of life's paint colors and he knew it was beautiful. He spoke to her and revealed who He was (John 4:26). He could have easily done nothing. He knew everything she had ever done. But He spoke to the woman covered in paint.

When Jesus revealed Himself to our Biblical sister and the coats of long dried paint began to wash from her, she must have had a transformation. She left her water jar at the well (John 4:28) returning to town (I like to think she ran excitedly since she left her water jar, paint flying off as she ran feeling free) no longer worried or afraid...about ridicule or gossip and told the town Who she had met (John 4:29). Jesus.

Our sister from Samaria wanted to settle for living life covered in paint, but Jesus wanted to wash her with living water. If you read John 8, you'll see another sister covered in paint...and Jesus again showed compassion and offered instruction.

Putting this into action - Are you covered in paint? Paint doesn't have to be fresh...old paint often leaves a stain...that impacts how you view Jesus, your decisions, and yourself. If you met Jesus at the well...would you too want the conversation to be at the hottest part of the day? Has someone or some circumstance left you feeling like a painted hot mess? Wouldn't it be awesome to apply the living water offered by Jesus and have the layers of paint removed?

Mary's paintings were not the quality they once were, but God didn't see the painting she created...He saw His daughter. He watched her struggle with the brush to complete the canvas neatly placing the paint inside the lines and He loved her, just like the woman at the well. God always stands at the easel looking at our life's canvas. His Hand is never unsteady. With compassion and love He offers us living water to clean up our mess.

Often when I see lots of beautiful flowers, I think of Mary and what talent God gave her to paint His creations. She loved the flowers so much, even when her sight failed, she could still paint from what she had seen. That's how it is with Jesus; the more we visit at the well with Him the more our heart sees Him and we know the One speaking to us. It's there we find that we don't create the Masterpiece...He does.

Instruction Manual

Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.” John 4:26