

PENIEL

My Ministry Minute From The Heart Of The Founder

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Predestined For Service

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

Romans 8:28 (NKJV)

Everybody called him “Clusters” and believe me, his nickname was symbolic of his passion. He was identified by what he consumed. He was known as “Clusters” because basically the only liquid he enjoyed drinking was wine. Very cheap wine! I guess you could say that he was a bona fide drunk that disgraced our community. Some people jokingly swore that he had controlling stock in the *Tiger Rose* and the *Thunderbird* Wineries. Spelly chimed in by saying that he remembers those brands and added with a chuckle, that he definitely drank his fair share of them too. These “Spirits” were bottom shelf, low priced, “rot-gut” that sold for about sixty-nine cents a quart.

It was common to see “Clusters” staggering down the street, sometimes with his pants as wet as they could be, ‘just a singin’ at the top of his lungs: “Everyday, everyday I have the blues. I have the blues baby, because it’s you babe, it’s you I hate to lose!” At some point during his performance, “Clusters” would become so impressed with his own rendition, that he was forced to pause so that he could accompany himself with a barrage of choice cords from his imaginary guitar. But right on cue, he would somehow pick up the song exactly where he left off – singing both solo and background all by himself. You could hear him in the next block.

Excuse me! I’m sorry, but I was distracted by a woman looking at “Clusters” from her window. I was trying to hear what the lady was saying. She was speaking under her breathe, that is the reason that it was difficult to understand her. Outraged by his scandalous behavior, she was wondering aloud why someone did not get this shameless drunk off the streets for good – or at the very least, away from her house. She was peaking at “Clusters” from her perfectly starched, pristine custom made living room drapes. She stood safely behind her locked doors shaking her head in absolute disgust. “Clusters” was always embarrassing himself as well as the good people of our town. And why in all the world, did “Clusters” have to stop at her house? What a grand mess!



“I heard her saying something like “Mmm! Mmm! Mmm! Lord’ve mer-ce’ on his soul. Mmm! Mmm! Mmm!”

But bless her heart, she did whisper a prayer for him! I heard her saying something like “Mmm! Mmm! Mmm! Lord’ve mer-ce’ on his soul. Mmm! Mmm! Mmm!” Then she sighed, “Oh Lord, help ‘em please, cause that man has absolutely no shame.” But wait, rewind! Now let’s be “flat out” honest here. We all know that her request had an obvious ring of sarcasm underlined by self righteousness. Frankly, that prayer was as though she wasn’t really talking to God at all. And was that plea for God to have mercy on his soul even sincere? I submit that she was further exposing “Cluster’s” weaknesses to vent her own frustration. It wasn’t a pretty picture – but let me quickly add that this woman was not alone in her opinions. Sadly enough, she represented a larger segment of our small town. She spoke for many – but she did not speak for everyone.

There was one person who dared to be different. She will forever stand out in my mind. She believed in “Clusters” and held on for his very soul. It was his maternal grandmother. We knew her as Miss Emily, but he simply called her Gramma. She was severely bent over and seemed to be so very, very old to me. I also think of her as being extremely poor.

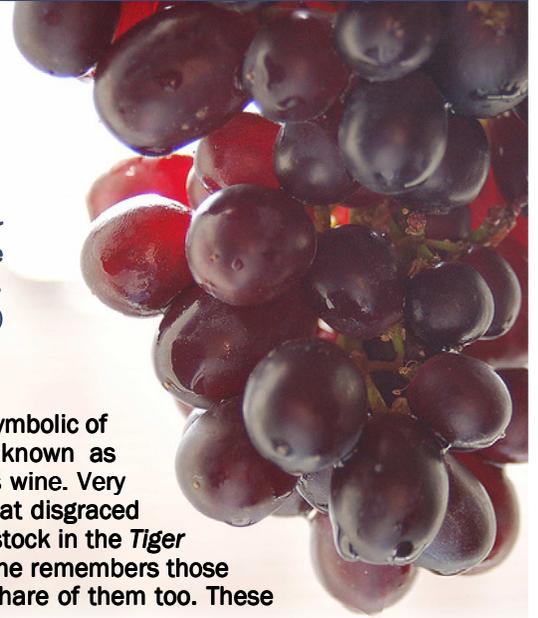
Still, she had a marvelous spirit of dignity which demanded this world’s respect. She had nothing, but possessed everything. She loved the Lord and spoke of him often. She chose her words carefully and lived her life wisely.

She loved “Clusters” and made no “bones” about it. Although the world had given a description of him, she never accepted their label. She “flat out” refused to call him “Clusters.” “His name is Matthew,” she said defiantly, “Always remember that! You need to know that a name means something!” And I later learned, that she was right. Scripturally, his name really did mean something very special.

I only wish that you could have been there to see her in action. Nobody could say his name like Miss Emily. It may have been with kindness or with sternness, but when she said Matthew, she was always communicating something within her heart to him.

No one could say as much with one single word as Matthew’s Gramma. Miss Emily could communicate that he was loved, by saying his name ... Matthew! She would encourage him to believe that he was special, by saying his name ... Matthew! She often told him that there was a better way to live, by saying his name ... Matthew! She would help him cling to tomorrow’s promises which were sure to offer another chance, just by saying his name ... Matthew!

Ah yes, Miss Emily would make this old world ashamed by demonstrating unconditional and undefiled faith in what God is able to do. She was operating from a fervent and determined spirit. She was unashamed and immovable in her quest to win Matthew. From his crib to her grave, Miss Emily’s devotion for him remained constant. Miss Emily loved Matthew with all of her heart and he loved his Gramma right back!





“He would often tell us kids to go straight home - ‘Git movin,’ he would say ‘before ‘them’ street lights ‘com’on’.” And he was so funny! He would often make us laugh, but make no mistake, we were not laughing at him.”

Early in my life, I felt a connection to Matthew. He never crossed boundaries with any of the children. He would often tell us kids to go straight home – “Git movin,” he would say “before ‘them’ street lights ‘com’on’.” And he was so funny! He would often make us laugh, but make no mistake, we were not laughing at him. In my eyes, he was basically a good person who I have since discovered was clearly in dire need of intense residential Christian drug/alcohol treatment. Yes indeed, Miss Emily loved him, but some of us kids loved Matthew too!

But let me speak for myself – I loved Matthew. Now it certainly was not because I was nobler or more charitable than others. No, I loved him because Matthew literally saved my life. It is etched in my mind as if it happened yesterday. I was eleven or twelve years old when I was permitted to go with a bunch of kids to the public pool located in South Park. My parents had trusted me with a chaperone. It was a great event, because it was my first time to go swimming without Momma.

Now picture this: I couldn’t swim a lick. I had not even learned to float, but I sure liked wading in the three feet “baby pool’s” warm shallow water. But that day I miscalculated big time. Instead of getting into the “baby pool,” I jumped into the “big pool.” Guess how deep it was? – twelve feet! I was immediately overtaken by fear as my feet frantically searched for the bottom of the pool – to no avail. I was flat out drowning!

Though partially blinded by the water, I still could see that the Life Guard hadn’t even budged. I tried to scream, but my voice was deafened by the noise of the children playing in the pool. And even if someone did see me thrashing around, they would think that I was probably just having fun.

Much like the sinners around us today, who appear to be having a great time in the midst of their carnal pleasures, but in reality, some are really beckoning for us, yes crying out for our help. But too often our attention is focused in another direction.

“I am going to die, I am surely going to die.” I thought “and if by some miracle I survive, my mother is definitely going to kill me.” My mouth quickly filled with the horrible taste of chlorinated water. I began to choke. The last thing that I remember was violently flailing about, trying to get someone’s attention to save me. But to my horror – no one came. Finally, I just passed out.

When I became conscious, I found myself lying at the side of the pool with almost everyone in the park staring down at me. But guess what? Here is the part that I can hardly wait to tell you! Give up? Well, I was being resuscitated by Matthew. Can you believe that? As soon as he saw me in distress, without hesitation Matthew jumped into the water, pulled me out and literally saved my life.

He was sober enough to save me. He did what the Life Guards did not do ... he saved my life. He saw what “responsible people” did not see ... he saved my life. Yes Matthew, not “Clusters” saved my life.

I wish that I could say that my ministry is a conscious result of my encounter with Matthew, but unfortunately I can not. I was too young to realize the magnitude of Matthew’s heroic act toward me. The truth of the matter is, I was so happy that I didn’t have to face Momma ... “being dead” – that I chose to forget the whole thing as though it had never happened. The fact is, at the time, I did not realize what a monumental deed that this was and the sheer impact that Matthew was making in my life.

It wasn’t until years later when I found myself recounting this incident with Spelly that I realized how Matthew’s life, as problematic as it was, was in fact God’s gift for me. God could have used anyone, or He could have allowed me to die, but He chose Matthew to save my life. This whole experience has been burning within my spirit since I shared it with Spelly. As a result, he encouraged me to write about Miss Emily’s Matthew. I really feel that I owe Matthew a very special thank you. Sadly, he passed away much too young and as far as I know, he was still struggling with alcohol.

Is my life ironic or what?! My entire Christian pursuit has been spent salvaging men and women with drug and alcohol addictions. All these years, I have attributed my ministry to the drug problems of my brother, when in fact, Matthew was the seed and my brother was the water for that seed.

More than ever, I appreciate the fact that my life is a miracle and that my ministry is only my reasonable service. Now I realize that it was an alcoholic who saved my life – how could I do anything less. Yes indeed, this whole life of mine was pre-planned. Think about it! At twelve years old, God was putting the pieces of my life – each one in their perfect place, to bring about His perfect will for me.



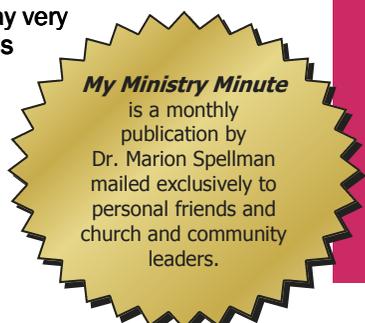
“... don’t resist the life raft that the Lord sends to deliver you.”

When you wonder, what in the world is happening in your life and you find yourself going down for the third time, don’t resist the life raft that the Lord sends to deliver you. Your destiny may very well be connected to it. God knows the plans that He has for us and everything is working together. It will all make sense in the end.

This account is absolutely true, however, the names have been changed and the woman in the window is fictitious for obvious reasons.



“... that day I miscalculated big time. Instead of getting into the “baby pool,” I jumped into the “big pool.”



My Ministry Minute is a monthly publication by Dr. Marion Spellman mailed exclusively to personal friends and church and community leaders.