

Sermon for 12 March 2023 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Third Sunday in Lent

Scriptures: Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95 (UMH 814:Response 1) ; Romans 5 :1-11 ; John 4 :5-42

« **Women** »

Throughout each year of the three-year Common Lectionary that we and many other denominations follow, selections from the Gospel of John from time to time replace the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, or Luke that is standard for a particular year.

So today we have “the woman at the well,” which our commentary says is the longest speech made by Jesus to anyone in the New Testament.

That gave me my title. Then the week started to roll, beginning with International Women’s Day on Wednesday, and then the news, to me at least, that March is International Women’s Month ... and suddenly I have more facts and quotes than we can possibly consider this Sunday!

I’d planned to point out how significant women were in Jesus’ entire ministry. Even in a time and culture when women were rarely in positions of power, Jesus turned to them, was sponsored by them, made them important ... Something we are still learning to do and to allow.

Western civilization has much still to learn along this line ... and other societies, whether Asian or African or indigenous, all have as well. The male ego is bad news to issues of justice and peace everywhere we look.

If we’re considering Lent to be a review of Christianity and a time of improving our own application of it, it is high time we talk about the feminine approach to everything from power to poverty, everything from ideas to action, from things physical to spiritual and everything in between.

Specifically, who keeps the church going? Who attends regularly? Who, literally, pays the bills?

Women!

Stop right here and say, God, bend us your way, by making us more womanlike! We know you said we must all become as little children to fulfill your purpose for us; but it seems like even little children need more of what little girls have than little boys, a lot of the time. Right now, at least in the Baltimore area, it seems like the Roman Catholics have the worst image of unequal power between male and female, and we Protestants pray for them even as we say, “Lord, have mercy upon us as well.” We want to expand on our progress, and work on our weakness and failure, even as we thank you for the growth we’ve been able to experience with your assistance.

I say all this ... and then, as I’ve often discovered, along comes another book... and I have to edit my points and point out incompleteness in the view I’ve presented. The book, “The Last Slave

Ship," is a fresh report of the Black experience in our country and beyond. It not only documents the horrific experience of American slavery, but goes to Africa and documents the capture and selling of Africans by Africans ... and women were right there in the middle of that, starting with a woman who shared power with her male twin and disguised herself to take his place after he died, and launched a whole era of enslaving in a part of Africa, catering to the Western countries who still allowed slavery far into the nineteenth century. It's horrible ... and revealing, in a way that comes home to us not only in our history, but in how we get along now.

My friends in Christ, we will only progress in charity and justice as we learn to love and forgive and outgrow and expand upon what we are in God's view. The fascination of being human is only sustainable through service to those who need what we have. That seems like foolishness until we start enjoying being kind. Not competing. Not even getting ahead. Only in listening, and arguing until we understand, what other people really need, and then working to see that they get it.

If, in our society, that looks more feminine than masculine, then let's work on femininity. If God shows us it's more about nature than business right now, which it pretty clearly is, then go after healing nature for awhile. It has to be cooperative. It has to be a joint effort. We're too big and too old as a human race to use nature for profit, like we in the West have so well taught the rest of the world to do. Now it's up to us to head elsewhere. We'd better learn who needs what we have, and start attracting them to share it with us. No more just living until we die. We're not living unless we're sharing, and attracting, and serving where there's need. This next year, there are apt to be some folks who don't fit in a church that says LGBT folks can't marry, or preach, or raise families. Some of them are in this community. We need to attract them, welcome them, move over for them. It's our lifeblood right now. Same goes for people in prison, or who, like the Fury family, have someone in prison. They need us. We've a little bit of a start on serving them. Same goes for people overseas we learn about ... I just sent around an article telling of a church in Africa that's building a center for young women who don't want to marry at 12 or fourteen, and don't want to undergo female circumcision. A hundred-dollar gift to them from us may be a life-saver, and it may empower us to give and raise money ourselves.

I'll close by saying our Wesleyan history has lots of women doing things like this. We're not strangers to this way of being church. Women and men together, boys and girls, have been doing this in the name of Jesus for generations. Listen to the scripture teach us how to keep going. Through the Holy Spirit of Jesus, in the name of Almighty God, I declare, Amen.