



LINEN AND SPICES: CELEBRATING THE GIFTS OF WOMEN

MONIKA RHODES, MARGE SNATER, REV. KATE CLAYTON

Wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world,
what she has done will be told in memory of her. Mark 14:9

Scripture:

Mark 15:42

42. When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath,
43. Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.
44. Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time.
45. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph.
46. Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.
47. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where the body was laid.

Mark 16: 1-11

1. When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.
2. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.
3. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?"
4. When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.
5. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed.
6. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him.
7. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."
8. So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.
9. Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons.
10. She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping.
11. but when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.



CELEBRATION OF WOMEN

Meditation by Monika Rhodes

Hello. My name is Monika Rhodes and I'm a senior at Santa Rosa High School, graduating this year.

I have always viewed women in the church in a traditional motherly way. They help unify the congregation with their leadership skills and big hearts. I most commonly see the leadership of the

women in decorating and cooking. Their delicious food warms our hearts and our bellies. Their excellent sewing skills add an extra element to the costumes in every play. The women are always behind the scenes making special events go smoothly by addressing every detail ahead of time.

On the Worship and Arts Committee, I see the women (and men) organize everything from the Easter decorations to the flowers for Sunday mornings. I admire the organization skills of these

women that they have adopted. They address every need of the congregation beforehand so events will go smoothly.

The women also take initiative in the Sunday School programs by interacting with the children and creating fun, hands-on activities.

As a youth in the church, I look up to these talented women. I hope to emulate their organization skills and creativity. I view these women as influential role models, and hope to carry the memories of them with me for the rest of my life.

The women are an important part of our church family. They are one of the many reasons that our church feels like a home.

Meditation by Marge Snater

It seems fitting that this event is scheduled in the midst of the Lenten Season. When we pause to take stock of the full significance of this season, then we may better understand why the celebration of the gifts of women fits the scenario – the background – of Jesus’ persecution and crucifixion.

For today, we recognize that women played an important role in the life of Christ. Let’s turn back the clock momentarily and recall what an important link to the past that we’re celebrating. We need to adjust our eyes to visualize what occurred in the short life span of Jesus. Let’s say we’ll use our trifocals to see the “Three-In-One!!” Whom do you see?

Right; we see the women who worked in support of Christ’s ministry, who worked side-by-side with Jesus and even supported His ministry with their own resources. For example: there were Lydia, Phoebe, and Mary.

Paul spoke most eloquently in Romans, chapter 16 of the support of women (and men) in his own ministry. His list is long, but he includes: Phoebe, Presca, Aquila, and Mary.

From these examples, just what do we gain as an insight into the legacy of these women?

A VARIETY OF MINISTRIES

In 1 Corinthians, chapter 12, Paul speaks of the variety of gifts but the same spirit, the varieties of ministries and the same Lord, the same efforts, but

the same God who works all things in all people. Yes, that’s what we as women of the church offer!!

So, as in Scriptures, we see the roots of our faith revealed; we more clearly understand how that same faith has struggled to progress through the ages.

Let me cite just one biblical example of that faith. Martha came to acknowledge Jesus’ power as it was revealed to her in the raising up of her brother, Lazurus. Jesus was at last accepted as the Messiah, God’s Son, God’s manifestation of Himself in the world. He came to be to her all that had any meaning. She accepted Him.

This seems to be for all of us the key to true faith: confidence in Christ supersedes any creed. And that is the faith that is evidenced in our pioneer women down through the ages!

Let’s return now to the present. Today we have the distinct privilege of honoring the dedication of all women of the church who work in support roles and in leadership positions, in partnership with our Church of the Roses, serving with faith the mission of Christ!

We recognize that we are not alone today in this special recognition; for the church world-wide is united in this day of celebration. Women throughout the world have had the faith we’ve mentioned to serve Christ in most difficult circumstances.

CHUNG JAESOOK OF KOREA

The Minute for Mission for today that is featured in the *Mission Yearbook of Prayer* is an inspirational story of the life of Ye Chung Jaesook of Korea. Please listen to her story.

My *woe-halmoni's* (maternal grandmother) name was Chung, Jaesook. The first child born to a Confucian scholar father who valued propriety over anything else, she was not allowed to leave the house compound after age seven and was denied the privilege of education because she was a girl. She, however, was raised by her grandmother, who was the first convert to *sae-doh* (new way) in her family, and my *woe-halmoni* became her own grandmother’s most beloved disciple in faith.

After the Korean War, my *woe-halmoni* had nothing except five children and a paralyzed husband. She had to do whatever she could to make a living. Time and again she won the best evangelist award in her church. She said

to me, "I never told them that they had to become Christian." The people who followed her to the church were her neighbors, whom she served.

All of her neighbors were also poor. She collected secondhand clothes from her congregation and gave them to families in need. She served as a midwife in her neighborhood. For more than twenty years she took care of all funeral-related services for her church, including washing and clothing the body and making mourning clothes. She was a poet. Those of us who heard her prayers felt our pain washed away and our spirits lifted, and we saw glimpses of the beauty of God's goodness. I am a follower of Jesus because of her powerful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God for this gifted woman! (Rev. Unzu Lee, program associate, Presbyterian Women's Program, General Assembly Council)

PERSEVERENCE

As a personal example from our present age, it took many years to allow women a vote in the workings of the Presbyteries and Synods throughout our church. As Moderator of Women of the Des Moines Presbytery several years ago, I, adamantly, championed our cause for the Moderator to sit with equal voice on Presbytery Council. I persevered until the time came when my voice was heard!

In the past, women have been so bound by the customs of their day. Now we fully realize the struggle which has ensued over the years to achieve the acceptance of all, young and old. All ethnic groups are a part of the fellowship of believers, no one is of more or less importance, for Christ hears the voices of all! As John mentioned last Sunday in his sermon and I am sure you will agree, **"JESUS DID NOT CALL US TO BE ANONYMOUS!"**

We, as servants of Christ, give thanks for the acceptance of our efforts of service to Christ and His Church.

In closing, I would like to share a gift which my mother shared with me early in my life and subsequently I have shared with our three children.

My mother was a woman of spirit (Welsh, you know!) and she endured many hardships and struggles in her life, but she held fast to her faith and tried to instill in us the faith she lived by.

This bit of verse that she gave me has helped to bolster me up in many difficult circumstances. It is titled: **BE STRONG** by Maltbie Davenport

Babcock. Perhaps it could be a motto for Presbyterian Women!

BE STRONG!

Be strong!

We are not here to play, to dream, to drift.

We have hard work to do, and loads to lift.

Shun not the struggle; face it. 'Tis God's gift.

Be strong!

Say not the days are evil---who's to blame?

And fold the hands and acquiesce – O shame!

Stand up, speak out, and bravely, in God's name.

Be strong!

It matters not how deep entrenched the wrong,

How hard the battle goes, the day how long.

Faint not, fight on! Tomorrow comes the song.

Maltbie Davenport Babcock (1858 – 1901)

From *Thoughts for Every-Day Living*

Meditation by Rev. Kate Clayton

I am going to begin by reading today's third Scripture passage, Mark 15:42-16:11, a story about the passion and death of Jesus.

I should explain that, properly speaking, the gospel according to Mark ends at verse 8. I am including three verses from an ending that was added later, but they are probably not part of the original. It could be that the original ending was lost, because verse 8 ends so abruptly: the young man sitting there tells the three frightened women: "Don't be afraid. (A sure sign he was an angel; this is their signature line!) You're looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He's been raised, he's not here. Look, see for yourself; you know they laid him right there. But now go and tell his disciples and Peter, that Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee, and you will see him there, just as he predicted." Then the women flee, gripped by terror and amazement. But they don't tell anyone anything, out of fear. Such an ending could fit with Mark, the odd gospel where folks are always experiencing wondrous things and told to keep them secret, though they usually can't. In this case however, the women are asked to tell about it and they don't.

I chose to include the next three verses because they tell something important about the gifts of women, which I think we can accept even if these verses are not part of the original manuscript. Including these verses takes the story from the actual death of Jesus, through his burial,

resurrection and first risen appearance. At each event, these women were present and accounted for by name, except that Salome did not witness the burial, and only Mary of Magdala saw the risen Christ.

THE WOMEN STAYED

What this says is that the women stuck it out. All the other disciples fled much earlier. When the women finally run, it is from the incredible words of the angel, and it is both in fear and amazement. They do not abandon their faith. It's safe to say that fear hovered over the whole weekend for all the disciples. But the women didn't try to deny what was happening, or reject it, they stayed and witnessed, they stayed and kept Jesus company. If Golgotha hadn't been cordoned off, they would've been closer. The gifts of women I want to lift up are two: presence, both emotional and physical, and tenderness.

LINENS AND SPICES

The objects that are connected to Jesus' death this week are linen and spices, which I have put by the cross in our display. The story shows that the one who wrapped Jesus in linen cloth was Joseph of Arimathea, the wealthy and respected member of the Sanhedrin religious council that had just condemned Jesus, but who was also expecting the kingdom of God and was therefore a disciple. Joseph of Arimathea actually owned a tomb that could be used for Jesus' body. He took the trouble to seek permission from Pilate and to obtain the body, no small gesture. The women could probably not have accomplished such a thing in that place and time. Yet Mark is careful to say that even as Joseph hurried to provide this makeshift burial before the Sabbath began, two women were watching the linen-wrapped body laid to rest and the heavy stone rolled into place.

So it was that when the Sabbath was over, they could return to the spot and perform their acts of tenderness. Undaunted by the heavy stone, they set out, wondering on the way how they could reach Jesus' body. They were following their sorrowful hearts to continue serving him in death, as they had been throughout his ministry (though we only hear about their lengthy service here at the end). Thus the women are shown to be his disciples in deed. While Jesus was continually misunderstood by the men around him, the women grasped the heart of

the message: when brothers argued about who would be greatest, Jesus said the one who would be greatest was the one who became a servant. When the twelve were fixed on worldly measures of success, the women accepted that God's way was suffering and sacrifice.

PRESENCE AND TENDERNESS

Nowhere are these two gifts of presence and tenderness seen more poignantly than in the unnamed woman who anointed Jesus' head shortly before these events. She, like these women in the story, identified with the whole person and message of Jesus, acting out her devotion with the tender offering of touch and ointment, just as these women hoped to express their love at the tomb. She effectively anointed Jesus King, as prophets had always done, and gave herself to his mission in his darkest hour.

When I think of linen and spices, my first thought is of housework, laundry and cooking. In this case, however, they represent the uncomfortable business of a dead savior and those who loved him. Whatever else we might want to say about the gifts women bring to the table, we must affirm that, in the work of the church as in so many other spheres, women show up against the odds, and they stick to it. Our dear PW women are this kind: they are always present, praying, cooking, smiling, answering phones, serving in all kinds of ways with tenderness. Our challenge, as women, is to open ourselves to the task of continuing to *show up* in the places and ministries to which God calls us, in spite of the conventions and distractions that threaten to prevent us, and to show up with the tenderness that characterizes truly loving behavior. May the Spirit of God in Christ breathe into us all the grace to become such servants. Amen.



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