

Celebration of Women in Ministry Sunday

Luke 18:1-8

“My rights are being violated. Protect me!”

Her rights were being violated and she demanded justice, Jesus tells us. But the judge, he adds to his story, was corrupt, and cared nothing for God or people, especially this woman who was also a widow.

In society’s eye and in her religion, she was powerless on her own without a man to care for her. All she had, Jesus told us, was her voice, and regardless of how corrupt and apathetic this male judge was, and all judges were men, she would not be silenced by him or the societal norms. Day and night, she cried out for justice when her rights were being violated.

This may be a story Jesus told, but it was a familiar one that women throughout history understand all too well.

Take the women who were the first witnesses to the resurrection. Given instructions to go and tell, they faithfully did so, but the male disciples, thought these women were just sharing an “idle tale.”

Another story women throughout history can relate to is having their words discounted by men.

Throughout history, all women have wanted is their voices listened to as a man’s voice would be heard.

In the Declaration of Independence, the Founding “Fathers” wrote these famous words: **“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”**

Of course, we know that what these men really meant by those words, just ask any young female in an American history course, they know. My guess is so do you. Even though Genesis 1:26 says “Let us create humankind in our own image, and so God created them, male and female,” equally I would add, “in God’s own image,” the men who wrote the Declaration of Independence, meant all white, land-owning males were created equal, everyone else wasn’t equal.

This was not lost on Abigail Adams, wife of John Adams, who wrote to her husband, one of the signers of that famous document: **“If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.”**

Women, like Abigail Adams, have been crying for equality and justice ever since.

It took over a hundred years, before women were finally given the right to vote with the passage of the 19th amendment on August 26, 1920. The federal amendment mandates “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”

However, that amendment didn't apply to women of color. It took the courageous voices of women like Sojourner Truth and Rosa Parks crying out for justice for Women of Color to finally gain the right to vote with the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

All she wanted was justice, and her equal rights protected, Jesus tells us. Even in the face of a corrupt judge, she stood up for herself and refused to be silenced.

Many of us love watching women's sports. Watching the UW Women's volleyball team win the national championship was one of the most exciting sporting events I have ever watched.

Some of you love to cheer on our female athletes who compete in high school sports, Judy Pearson, I know is one.

If it wasn't for the courage of women like Billy Jean King, who, like the widow in Jesus's story, demanded justice for women athletes, young girls might not be competing today.

Because of courageous women, like Billy Jean King, who refused to “play like a girl” and be silent, instead, like the widow in Jesus' story, cried out for justice and equality in sports, Title IX, a federal civil rights law which prohibits sex-based discrimination in any school or any other education program, passed, paving the way for girls' sports to grow in participation and popularity.

I think Abigail Adams and so many other women throughout our American history would be celebrating the accomplishments of our young women who are today local community sports stars, professional athletes, engineers, business owners, astronauts, military leaders, lawyers, heads of families and heads of Fortune 500 companies, political leaders serving on all levels of government including finally, and so long overdue, the Vice-President of the United States. And yes, one day soon, we will have a female President. That is a day I look forward to as well.

We celebrate today women like Abigail Adams, Rosa Parks, Billy Jean King, and so many courageous women throughout our history, who like the widow in Jesus story, have refused to be silent, refused to stay on the sidelines, and have refused obey rules created by men, like the corrupt judge in Jesus' story, meant to control them and their bodies have provided more

equal opportunities for females, who just like men, are created equal in God's sacred image.

Jesus understood this very well. Living in a time when women had no voice or power in society, in their faith communities, in government, and in their own household, Jesus broke those unjust rules and laws that governed women and their bodies, welcoming them as disciples, equal to the likes of Peter, James and John.

At recent coffee hour, several of you were talking about going to see the musical comedy "Church Basement Ladies" at the Fireside. We laugh at the humor of this comedy, remembering the many women who have served funeral meals, wedding receptions, church potlucks and strawberry luncheons.

Thanks to Jesus Christ empowering women like Mary Magdalene, Martha and Mary the sisters of Lazarus, the Samaritan Woman at the Well, these female disciples and many others, paved the way for women like you, who once were unable to speak or vote or serve on church boards but allowed to work in the kitchen (or nursery or Sunday school rooms) today to serve equally as church leaders and ministers in the pulpit.

There is much for us to still learn from Jesus' story about a poor, vulnerable widow and the corrupt judge and system that sought to silence her cries justice.

We live in a world where men in power are once again using the guise of "religion" by passing laws to control women's rights to education, equal pay, health care and their bodies.

Rabbi A.Y. Kook said: **"I don't speak because I have the power to speak; I speak because I don't have the power to remain silent."**

Jesus told his story to make a point, about not remaining silent against injustice.

Now is not the time for women to move to the back of the bus or back into the church kitchen.

It is time for women, young and old, mothers, grandmothers, daughters and sisters, single or married, to join their voices with the widow crying out for justice.

And it is time for men to follow their lead as together, as those created equally in God's sacred image, we march in God's light - doing justice, showing compassion and kindness, and walking humbly together.

Amen.