

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Tenth Sunday of Pentecost/Ordinary Time – July 17, 2016
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Luke 10:38-42

For Reflection

“Equality is not a concept. It's not something we should be striving for. It's a necessity. Equality is like gravity. We need it to stand on this earth as men and women, and the misogyny that is in every culture is not a true part of the human condition. It is life out of balance, and that imbalance is sucking something out of the soul of every man and woman who's confronted with it. We need equality. Kinda now.”

- Joss Whedon (b.1964) Writer: Fantasy, Graphic Novels, Humor and Comedy

Choices

... Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me."

41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; 42 there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

You've heard this story a zillion times in church. You tell ME what this story communicates. What is this about?

- Quit being distracted and worried about the details...
- Hang out with Jesus – especially if he's in your house...
- Don't worry so much about hospitality when it comes to welcoming G-d...
- Don't complain when your sister makes a better choice...
- Don't expect Jesus to take your side in a sibling argument...
- Be a Mary not a Martha (pejorative term)...
- Xx
- Xx
- Xx
- Xx

Taken at literal face value – this story is a massive dismissal of all the “Church Ladies” – “Women’s Fellowships” – “Hospitality Committees” of all the churches of the world for the last 2000 years. All of the fellowship hours, coffees, wedding receptions, funeral receptions, potlucks, church picnics, dinners and pancake whatevers are NOTHING compared to sitting at the feet of Jesus aka the minister and listening to holy teachings.

And that is why we don’t take the Bible literally in this congregation. There is no way Jesus would have meant something like that – especially since we KNOW he loved eating and drinking and partying – and was accused of being a glutton and drunkard in his time. He would have held in high esteem those who prepared a meal or a feast or a snack – whoever they were.

The real message here – the one that the church hierarchy has invested thousands of years in obfuscating – the real message is that in G-d’s Beloved Community – women actually have CHOICES. Women are no longer second or third class citizens. Martha – like Mary – for the first time in her life – has a choice about her role in her own home. She is equal to the men, equal to the other disciples, equal to her male guests – and has a right to take off her apron, sit down and listen to what G-d has to say.

That WAS and IS mind-blowing. That’s like saying:

28There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28

That’s earth-shattering, an assault on the global male hierarchy, unheard of, subversive – that’s just not right. Which is why the Vatican hid and downplayed those ancient frescoes until a few years ago and continues to be in denial about what they mean. As the BBC reported:

The reopening of a labyrinth of catacombs in Rome has reignited a debate over women priests in early Christianity. Women's groups say frescoes on the walls at the Catacombs of Priscilla are evidence that women occupied the role of priests in ancient times. A major clean-up operation that took five years has revealed the images in greater clarity.

But the Vatican has dismissed them as pure "fable, a legend".

The catacombs - discovered in the 16th Century - are famous for housing the oldest known image of the Madonna and Child dating from around AD230-240. They were originally built as Christian burial sites between the Second and Fifth Centuries and stretch 13km (8 miles) over several levels.

But two rooms in particular have been a source of lively debate for years. In one, known as the Cubiculum of the Veiled Woman, there is an image of a woman with arms outstretched as if saying Mass. She is wearing what some say are garments worn by priests. In another room, known as the Greek Chapel, a group of women sit at a table with arms outstretched and celebrating a banquet. Organisations promoting a female priesthood, such as the Women's Ordination Conference and the Association of Roman Catholic Woman Priests, say these scenes are evidence of a female priesthood in the early Church.

Fabrizio Bisconti of the Vatican's archaeology commission said the fresco of the woman was "a depiction of a deceased person now in paradise", and that the women sitting at the table were taking part in a "funeral banquet". The Vatican has restricted the priesthood for men and teaches that women cannot become priests because Jesus willingly chose only men as his apostles.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25021623>

Well – according to the Gospel of Mary “an apocryphal book discovered in 1896 in a 5th-century papyrus codex” – Mary Magdalene was an apostle – and a favorite one at that. It is also believed by many scholars that one of the disciples who chatted with the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus was a woman – and that disciples were sent out in pairs – one woman, one man – to protect the women from the perils of the road. And then there were the many women who participated as equals in the early church – some of whom were named – some of whom (like Lydia) offered their homes for meetings – some of whom were told to sit down and shut up because they were dominating the conversation – like the women in the church in Corinth:

...women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law [meaning ancient Jewish texts] also says.

1 Corinthians 14:34

So what Martha has been dealing with all these years is the entrenchment of misogyny – the complete dismissal of Jesus’ claim that women in the eyes of G-d are equal and have a place at the table or in the discussion.

Misogyny (/miˈsɒdʒɪni/) is the hatred of, contempt for, or prejudice against women or girls. Misogyny can be manifested in numerous ways, including social exclusion, sex discrimination, hostility, androcentrism, patriarchy, and male privilege ideas, belittling of women, violence against women, and sexual objectification of women. **Misogyny can be found occasionally within ancient texts relating to various mythologies.**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misogyny>

Surprise surprise!

Are there any women in this room who have been on the receiving end of prejudice against women? Anyone who had a mechanic lie about repairs to the car thinking they can cheat you because women aren't supposed to know about cars? Anyone dismiss your opinion because you're a woman? Anyone experienced physical or verbal harassment or abuse or claims of being owned because you are a woman? Are there any men here who have witnessed any of this?

Eight years ago when the Democrats were fighting over the nomination for president – and our choices were Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama – I wondered if America was more racist or sexist – and said so out loud. When Obama won the nomination I figured we were more sexist. And in the wake of the resurgence of racial bigotry over the last eight years I will say that we are in for a sickeningly violent resurgence of gender bigotry in the coming months and years. And we've seen it surge in this election season – with no small portion coming in the language and behavior of the Republican candidates – the worst of which looks like the chosen one.

As Hillary Clinton battles her way to the Democrat nomination this season – you can believe that she is battling misogyny with a vengeance – as she has for her entire life. I commend to you an article that lays it out with clarity:

... if we look at Hillary's career, and the negative attacks so often aimed at her, it seems clear that more than just political machinations are at play. My current conviction is that the main fuel that powers the anti-Hillary crowd is sexism...I think the evidence supports my view, and I've seen no other plausible explanation. And just to be clear, I don't think it's ONLY sexism. But I do think that this is the primary force that has generated and maintained most of the negative narratives about Hillary.

Of course accusations of sexism always bump up against several serious impediments:

1) Almost nobody will admit to it. Conservatives decided long ago that all such accusations (sexism, racism, homophobia, etc) are standard liberal bullshit whose only real intent is to shut down debate, and liberals tend to possess a sense of moral entitlement which leads them to consider themselves automatically exempt from all such accusations...

2) Overt sexism is significantly more likely to be tolerated in our society than overt racism. It is a low-risk form of bigotry and discrimination that rarely damages professional or political careers. Because of this, far fewer people worry about crossing that line.

3) We have formed a sort of collective blindness to sexism that allows us to pretend that we are on top of the issue while simultaneously ignoring the many ways in which it actually permeates our society. (Side note 2: There's a reason it's called a "glass" ceiling.)

4) Unlike men, women who make demands are still often seen as unfeminine and inappropriately aggressive, bordering on deviant. And if the people most aggressively pushing against the glass ceiling are "broken" or "deviant", it's easier to justify dismissing both them and their concerns....

...the one thing that seems to most negatively and consistently affect public perception of Hillary is any attempt by her to seek power. Once she actually has that power her polls go up again. But whenever she asks for it her numbers drop like a manhole cover.

And in fact I started thinking more about this after reading an article that Sady Doyle wrote for Quartz back in February. The title of the piece was, **"America loves women like Hillary Clinton - as long as they're not asking for a promotion."** In the article Ms. Doyle asserted that, "The wild difference between the way we talk about Clinton when she campaigns and the way we talk about her when she's in office can't be explained as ordinary political mud-slinging. **Rather, the predictable swings of public opinion reveal Americans' continued prejudice against women caught in the act of asking for power..."**

<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2016/6/11/1537582/-The-most-thorough-profound-and-moving-defense-of-Hillary-Clinton-I-have-ever-seen>

As we have come to the defense and aid of our LGBTQ2 fellow citizens – which, by the way, suffer from much of the same misogyny under different packaging – we will need to come to the defense and aid of women in the coming months and years of backlash.

In the Beloved Community that Jesus not only talked about but enacted – in as perilous times as these – women were considered equal in the movement. As I was growing up I watched my mother and her "sisters" in the women's movement demand that same equality – from their own husbands and ministers and communities. That's where her stance on eschewing housework and claiming equal pay for equal work and demanding a voice in the social justice movements of her time came from. And it was their work that allowed me to attend a seminary where inclusive language for G-d was demanded in scholarly papers – where my ordination was not questioned (by most in the UCC anyway) on the basis of my gender – and I've become your minister and colleague with barely a ripple in the waters of Silver Lake.

Just as racial tensions have risen – gender tensions have risen. My anxiety and self-protective antennae are up. If you want to know what issue is going to rise to the top of the pile in 2016 – check out the sexist language and behaviors that are becoming more visible, more common, unchecked and unapologetically displayed in public discourse.

And think about what Jesus might have said about that.....

“Martha – come on out of the kitchen – you have choices now.

Come, sit next to me – and join the conversation.

Your voice is necessary as we become the change we want to see in the world....”

Scripture Reading for Sunday July 17, 2016 – Pentecost 10 – Year C

Luke 10:38-42

38 Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. 39 She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. 40 But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." 41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; 42 there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

<http://thinkprogress.org/lgbt/2016/07/16/3799042/methodist-church-elects-openly-gay-bishop/>

The United Methodist Church (UMC) elected its first openly gay bishop Friday evening, a major step towards LGBT equality for America's largest mainline Protestant denomination. But equality advocates point out that the vote is only a partial victory, as it directly violates the church's ongoing ban on pastors who are "practicing homosexuals."

After two days of split votes and 17 ballots, the Western Jurisdiction of the UMC — a regional collection of churches — voted unanimously to elect the Rev. Dr. Karen Oliveto as a bishop. Although choosing clerics is standard practice in the UMC, this election was different: Oliveto, who currently serves as pastor of Glide Memorial UMC in San Francisco, California, came out to her congregation and the denomination as a lesbian in a same-sex relationship this past year, signing her name to a public list of LGBT Methodist clergy.

Up until the vote, the UMC — whose Book of Discipline still officially prohibits the ordination of "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" — has never had openly gay bishop, making Oliveto the first.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2510473/Vatican-unveils-frescoes-Catacombs-Priscilla-paintings-FEMALE-PRIESTS.html>

<http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/06/04/480624491/seizing-on-popes-remarks-women-meet-in-rome-to-discuss-female-priesthood>

Seizing On Pope's Remarks, Women Meet In Rome To Discuss Female Priesthood

June 4, 2016 8:05 AM ET * SYLVIA POGGIOLI

Pope Francis hugs Sister Carmen Sammut, a missionary sister of Our Lady of Africa, at the Vatican on May 12. The pope said he was willing to create a commission to study whether women can be deacons in the Catholic Church, signaling an openness to letting women serve in ordained ministry currently reserved to men.

All across the Mediterranean, early Christian frescoes and bas reliefs carry the names of women deacons and even bishops — such as Phoebe, Helaria, Ausonia, Euphemia and Theodora.

Yet in 1994, Pope John Paul II not only decreed that women are definitively excluded from the priesthood, he even banned all discussion of the topic.

Pope Francis broke that taboo last month when he announced he would create a commission to study whether women can serve as deacons as they did in early Christianity.

RELIGION

Pilgrims Trace Women's Role in Early Church

Seizing this new sign of openness, supporters of a female priesthood converged on Rome this week, to coincide with the Vatican's Jubilee for the all-male clergy.

Marinella Perroni, a theologian and New Testament scholar who teaches at a Pontifical College in Rome, was one of the participants on a panel. She recalled that John Paul's 1994 edict even urged students to report errant teachers.

"In Rome, several professors were denounced to the congregation of the doctrine of the faith," she said. "This had immediate consequences on their right to teach and it led to paralysis."

Father Tony Flannery, whose support for women priests was one reason the Vatican suspended him from public ministry, also took part in this week's discussion. He rejected the claim that since Jesus' disciples were male, only men can minister the sacraments in persona Christi, or "in the person of Christ."

"Now that is such a ridiculous argument," he said. "In fact, that argument has its rightful place back at the time of the flat earth and the persecution of Galileo."

Panelist Jamie Manson, columnist and book editor at the National Catholic Reporter, said a female priesthood would be an important signal in a world where women suffer disproportionately from violence, poverty, lack of education and trafficking.

"Imagine if a church of one billion people, with this charismatic, rock star pope, suddenly said to the world, that women are equal to men," Manson said. "Imagine the power that would have over cultures across the world, where this patriarchal idea of women's subservience to men is at the root of all that women suffer globally."

The next day, the organizers of the unofficial jubilee of women priests gathered in the shadow of St. Peter's dome in their first official public demonstration in this city.

There are some 150 women worldwide who function as priests, in defiance of the Catholic Church. They perform baptisms and weddings and celebrate mass in house churches.

But after Pope Benedict issued a decree in 2010, all those women were automatically excommunicated from the church.

Some of those pioneering women priests also came to Rome this week, and they scored another first.

Janice Sevré-Duszynska, who was ordained by a bishop in Kentucky in 2008, says she and another woman were received by an official in the Secretariat of State, one of the Vatican's top departments.

"We talked to a wonderful priest, we were able to give our letter to Pope Francis, our petition to lift our excommunications and stop all punishments against our supporters as well as begin a dialogue with women priests," she said.

While we spoke, police officers approached. A policewoman in civilian clothes asked, "You're here to promote the role of women in the church? To let women become priests like men? Put them on an equal footing?"

When asked what she thought about this, she laughed and said, "Oh, I'm just a police officer."

But it does seem the policewoman went out of her way for this group. She and her men escorted the protesting women all the way into St. Peter's Square, where Pope Francis was preparing to celebrate mass for thousands of ordained male priests.

But while conservative propaganda and lies are a constant in "Hillaryland", if we look at Hillary's career, and the negative attacks so often aimed at her, it seems clear that more than just political machinations are at play. My current conviction is that the main fuel that powers the anti-Hillary crowd is sexism. And yes I'm serious. So go ahead and roll your eyes. Get it over with. But I think the evidence supports my view, and I've seen no other plausible explanation. And just to be clear, I don't think it's ONLY sexism. But I do think that this is the primary force that has generated and maintained most of the negative narratives about Hillary.

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- 2) Overt sexism is significantly more likely to be tolerated in our society than overt racism. It is a low-risk form of bigotry and discrimination that rarely damages professional or political careers. Because of this, far fewer people worry about crossing that line.
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mi-sog-y-ny * mə'säjənē * noun
dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women.
"she felt she was struggling against thinly disguised misogyny

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<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misogyny>