Sermon – Celebration of Women
Sunday May 14, 2022

Today we celebrate the women in our lives. We honour you for your courage, your compassion and your strength. We acknowledge the many ways you have blessed so many people including us.

Can we show our appreciation to all the women now?

If you're watching online, type into the chat, THANK YOU!

I also want to say, Happy Mother's Day to all your moms. Thank you for the sacrifices you make and for your love and care.

I also want to recognize that today is a difficult day for many women. Maybe your mother is no longer here, maybe you have a complicated relationship, maybe you want to have children but you can't. We want to acknowledge your pain and let you know that we stand with you.

Now I get that it's a little strange that a man is preaching for our Celebration of Women service. So to prepare for this message, I've been talking to different women to get their perspective. One question I asked them all was, What's it like for you to be a woman in this world?

Interestingly, every woman mentioned the same word – hard. It's just hard to be a woman.

One woman talked about how relationships can be hard. If you're single, she said, there's pressure to be in a relationship. If you're married, there's pressure to have children. So if you're a woman who's single or doesn't have children, even if you're content, it's hard dealing with the all the pressure and expectations. It's hard to be a woman.

Another woman talked about how managing home and work life is hard. She said, At home, my tasks are never done! There are meals to cook, laundry to fold, programs to drive my kids to. It feels like my brain is going to explode!

And then there's work. Because I'm a woman, I feel like I work twice as hard but get only half the recognition. And then there's the guilt that I spend so much time at work when I wish I was with my family.

Another woman talked about how hard it is to know how she should act. She said, I feel like because I'm a woman, people treat me differently. People will say that I'm too strong, then the same people will say that I'm too weak. I'm too emotional or I'm too cold. I just can't win their respect. It's hard to be a woman.

As a man, hearing this was an eye-opening experience. Because all these women are strong, capable leaders whom I deeply respect. And yet they face challenges every day:

- Feeling inadequate juggling their responsibilities.
- Feeling insecure about their body and their looks.
- Feeling overlooked, overwhelmed and unappreciated.

Today, women have more rights and opportunities than ever before but this hasn't always been the case. Throughout history, women have been treated as second-class citizens.

Even the great philosopher Aristotle once said: "The male is by nature superior, the female inferior; the one rules, the other is ruled."

Josephus, the Jewish historian said, "The woman is in all things inferior to man."

How's that for an inspiring Celebration of Women service?

The truth is, throughout history, women have been considered inferior to men and treated like second-class citizens. But something happened along the way that changed that. An idea emerged that women share a common humanity with men.

Now where did this idea come from? It didn't come from a feminist leader or a women's rights group. In fact, it didn't come from a woman at all. It came from a man.

A man who lived in a time when women were treated as inferiors. A man who stood up to the male-dominated culture. A man who refused to dismiss women but instead treated them with dignity.

In fact, where do you think the idea that men and women have equal worth comes from? It comes from Jesus.

Yes, Jesus was a man but as two female authors write, **"Jesus came to earth not primarily as a male but as a person. He treated women not primarily as females but as human beings."**

You see, Jesus came to represent God's heart. And the truth is, he's done more to elevate women than any movement in human history. His attitude toward women was revolutionary back then and it still is today.

For the remainder of our time, I want to look at three stories that illustrate how Jesus revolutionized the way we treat women.

My hope for the women today is that you would know that Jesus loves you. He wants you to use your gifts and leadership to make a difference in the world.

My hope for us men is that we would treat women the way Jesus did. Honouring them, lifting them up and cheering them on to become their best selves.

Does that sound like a plan?

So how did Jesus revolutionize the way we treat women?

The first way he did this is by affirming their dignity and worth. (**Jesus affirms the dignity of all women**.)

In the gospel of John, Jesus has an encounter with a woman at the well. Jesus is on his way to Galilee and he stops in a town called Samaria. He's tired from his long journey so he sits down to rest.

[7] Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food. (John 4:7-8, *NLT*)

Now, when you and I read this, there's nothing unusual about this encounter. Jesus is just talking to a woman.

But in that culture, his actions were scandalous! Notice how the other people respond.

> The woman was surprised… (John 4:9, NLT)
> [The disciples] were shocked… (John 4:27, NLT)

So what's so shocking about this?

In that culture, because women were considered inferior, it wasn't appropriate for men to talk to someone beneath them. Just by talking to this woman, Jesus is violating three cultural traditions.

- First, Jesus is a male. In Jewish culture, men rarely spoke to women in public, even if it was their own wife.
- Second, Jesus is a single man. Married men *rarely* spoke with women in public, but single men were *never* supposed to do that!
- Third, Jesus is a rabbi. Rabbinic law states that: "A rabbi who talks with a woman in public brings evil upon himself. One is not so much as to greet a woman."

And yet here is Jesus. Who is not only a single male but he's a rabbi. And along comes a woman who's not only a foreigner, she's a "sinner."

So what does Jesus do? He throws tradition out the window and he talks with her.

And for this woman, it's the first time anyone, let alone a man has ever shown interest without wanting something in return.

- This woman has never known a man who didn't judge her sordid lifestyle.
- She's never known a man who listened to her with genuine interest.
- She's never known a man who stuck his neck out for her and made her feel human.

That is, until she meets Jesus.

Here's a bit of trivia. How many of you know the longest recorded conversation Jesus has with anyone in the Bible? Answer: it's with the woman at the well.

In talking with this woman, Jesus is saying:

- You matter to me.
- I see you and I notice you.
- I know who you are and I know your story.

I wonder, how many women here need to hear that right now. When you feel overworked and unappreciated. When you feel overlooked and unnoticed. When you're hurting, struggling and lonely.

Jesus says to you, you matter to me. I see you and I notice you. I know who you are and I know your story.

Jesus revolutionizes the way we treat women by affirming their dignity.

The second way Jesus revolutionizes the way we treat women is by inviting them to follow him and join his mission. (**Jesus invites women to follow him and join his mission**.)

This story takes place in the gospel of Luke. And it involves two sisters, Mary and Martha. These two women are close friends of Jesus and on one occasion, they host Jesus in their home.

Luke tells us, **Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught. But Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing. (Luke 10:39-40, *NLT*)**

This is a familiar story for many of us. We know that Martha is a Type A who just wants to get things done. We know that Mary is more contemplative. She slows down to spend time with Jesus.

So what's the point of this story? It's to be like Mary. Slow down to be *with* Jesus and not just do *for* Jesus, right?

Well, while that's certainly true, it's actually not the point.

You see, the people hearing this story weren't wondering, Am I a Mary or am I a Martha? Am I too busy or should I slow down?

Do you know what the obvious question everyone was wondering? What are two women even doing here? Why are they even sitting at Jesus' feet?

You see, to sit at someone's feet is the traditional position of a disciple. But here's the problem. Women aren't supposed to be disciples. Learning is for men.

So when Martha's cooking, cleaning and preparing dinner, what's she doing? She's doing what women are supposed to do. And when Mary's sitting there learning from Jesus, what's she doing? She's doing what only the men are allowed to do.

Question: Who does Jesus say got it right?

Mary did. And this is revolutionary!

One rabbi says that, "A woman's wisdom is solely in her spindle. The words of the Torah [or the first five books of the Bible] should be burned rather than entrusted to a woman."

But here's Jesus – not telling women that their place is in the kitchen but instead inviting them to be his disciples. What does this mean?

It means that women are invited to grow in their knowledge of God. Through scripture, prayer and spending time with him, Jesus invites women to know his heart and be transformed by his love.

It means that women are invited to fully participate in the life of the church. Engaging through their worship and prayers. Connecting in group life. Using their gifts to build up the church and serve the community.

Now in some churches, women are encouraged to serve but they're not allowed to lead. At Cornerstone, here are a few things we believe the Bible teaches.

We believe that men and women both reflect the image of God.
in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27)

We believe that in Jesus, we are all equal.
There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28)

And we believe that God has given men and women spiritual gifts, including the gift of leadership to use for the sake of God's mission.
Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. (Acts 2:18)

Cornerstone has been blessed with many strong women leaders.

- Women who teach Sunday school and youth group
- Women who lead worship teams and small groups
- Women who oversee ministries and teams
- Women who serve on the church board

I have two daughters myself, a teenager and a pre-teen. Last year, one of them was playing in a co-ed basketball program. In one practice, she outworked the boys and when the instructor saw that, he berated them for letting a girl beat them.

Now girls hear a lot of messages about what they can't do. So I just want to take a moment to speak to all the girls, teenagers and young adult women.

Don't let people tell you that you can't do something just because you're a girl. Because you know what? Your Heavenly Father made you unique and special. He's given you gifts and abilities that he wants you to bless others with. I tell my girls all the time that God has big plans for them. And he has big plans for you too. He's put you on this earth to love others and to make an impact for his kingdom.

Not to prove that you're better than the boys, but because Jesus died for you and his love compels us to give our lives away for others.

Cornerstone needs your leadership. We need you to be our future leaders. We need you to be our today leaders. Who knows - maybe one of you will be our first woman pastor – wouldn't that be amazing?

All these opportunities are now available because Jesus revolutionized the role of women by inviting them to use their gifts and leadership.

The third way Jesus revolutionizes the way we treat women is by protecting them from exploitation. (**Jesus protects women from exploitation**.)

On one occasion, some men bring out a woman caught in adultery. They ask Jesus what they should do.

According to Leviticus 20, if a man commits adultery with another man's wife, both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.

So if that's the case, why was only the woman brought out? Why wasn't the man brought out too?

You see, this was a trap. Throughout history, women have been easy targets. They have fewer legal rights and often no income of their own making them vulnerable.

Such is the case with this woman. She's been set-up. She's being used by men to serve their agenda.

But Jesus won't have it. He stands up for her and says, **Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her. (John 8:7)**

All of a sudden, it gets quiet. Then one by one, the men drop their stones and walk away. Jesus is now alone with this woman.

Maybe she now expects Jesus to condemn her. Maybe she thinks he wants something in return. But to her utter amazement, he gives her grace. He shows compassion, he offers forgiveness.

In a world where men used women for their own purposes, Jesus protects them from exploitation.

In his three years of ministry, Jesus does more to elevate women and promote equal rights more than any other movement in history. He:

- Affirms their dignity and worth.
- Invites them to follow him and join his mission.
- Protects them from exploitation.

Is it any wonder that women were so drawn to him. Author Dorothy Sayers marvels that:

"Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man – there never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or patronized… who took their questions and arguments seriously; never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no axe to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unselfconscious." Dorothy Sayers

I'd like to close with one final story.

One time Jesus was teaching. And a woman was there who had been crippled for 18 years. Upon seeing her, Jesus has compassion and calls her over. He puts his hand on her and heals her.

It's an amazing moment! She's filled with joy, she wants to celebrate but instead the religious leaders condemn her because it happens to be the Sabbath.

Imagine you were that woman. You've suffered 18 years of physical, emotional and spiritual pain. You've suffered 18 years of loneliness and despair. And the moment you're set free, instead of being celebrated, you're condemned.

But one man defends her. **Should not this woman, *a daughter of Abraham…* be set free? (Luke 13:16)**

In this moment, Jesus does another revolutionary thing.

The term *son of Abraham* was a common term that identified members of God's family. But it only applied to men. So what does Jesus do? He creates a new term: *daughter of Abraham*.

Women, you are part of God's family. You are dearly loved by your Heavenly Father and also by your brothers in Christ.

The world needs the best YOU. We need your strength, your leadership, your courage. In Jesus, you have a new identity, a great calling.

So dream big dreams for God. Pray big prayers. Do big things for Him. And hold on to Jesus even when it's hard, even when the world seems set against you. Not because you have something to prove. But because the One who loves you, went to the cross and died for you so that you can have Life, so that you can have a purpose, so that you can be called a Beloved daughter of God.

Men, it's hard to be a woman. Women go through so much we'll never understand. So can we do our best to empathize and support the women in our lives? Can we encourage them and be their biggest cheerleaders?

Deal?