

MY SERVANTS, MY BEARERS OF GOOD NEWS

By Ardis Stenbakken

Suggested Call to Worship: Acts 2:17-21

Opening Song: #202, SDA Hymnal, *Tell It to Every Kindred and Nation*

Closing Song:#573, SDA Hymnal, *I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go*

Note: This sermon is formatted differently from the previous ones but this is another form of organizing a sermon that you may want to try. It is patterned after the famous preacher Peter Marshall's format. It makes it easier to find your place and see your ideas without having to read everything.

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Scripture: Acts 2:17 - 21

The disciples were used to Jesus doing unusual things.

They were no longer surprised when he associated
with sinners
with publicans
with Pharisees
when he healed on the Sabbath
when he talked with Samaritans.

But in **John 4:27**, the story of the Samaritan woman at the well,
they were surprised again,
because Jesus was talking with a woman.

You see, in the society of that day, a woman had almost no value.

As a pre-adolescent, she belonged to her father
with no rights of her own.
When she married, she was the property of her husband.
He had the exclusive right to divorce.
In a divorce, the children were always his.
A woman in public had to cover her face with two veils.
They were not allowed to attend school or study religion.
If a woman touched the Torah, it had to be burned.
Women were kept out of the main temple area,
relegated to the Court of the Women.
They had to sit separately in the synagogue--
in fact, they were not even counted as part of the congregation.
Ordinarily men never spoke to them in public;
sometimes even a woman's husband was not
permitted to speak to her in public.

Otherwise the woman's only real status or purpose was to bear children.

They were to be silent,
unseen.

Many equal with slaves,
Their primary purpose/importance was as bearers of children.
The stories of Sara, Rachel, Hannah, and Elizabeth

and others all come from this background.

History records a famous prayer of Rabbi Juda ben Elai (c. AD 150)

"One must utter three doxologies every day:

Praise God that he did not create me a heathen!

Praise God that he did not create me a woman!

Praise God that he did not create me an illiterate person!"

Fortunately, none of this mattered to Jesus.

He had come to love everyone,

He had come to die for everyone,

He had come to save everyone,

and He would speak to anyone,

and use anyone who was willing.

He had come *"to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free*

and break every yoke" Isaiah 58:6.

He had come to make slaves into His willing servants,

the bearers of children

into bearers of His Good News.

As we look at the story of the Samaritan woman in **John 4**,

we see that this unnamed woman had been surprised too

that Jesus would speak to her,

asking her for a drink of water,

but as soon as he had her attention,

He began to open to her eternal life.

In **verse 13**, (NRSV) Jesus says: *"The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."*

A gurgling spring must have been very appealing to anyone

who had to carry water every day

And Jacob's well was very deep.

I have been there myself.

It is deep and cold even today

Then Jesus surprised her again by telling her that He knew

that she had no husband

that she had had five husbands

and that the one she was now living with was not her husband

When the Samaritan woman recognized that Jesus was a prophet

and that He was willing to talk of things eternal with her

she had some questions of her own,

questions that she had no doubt heard the men debate,
such as about where to worship.

But Jesus skipped over the unimportant and brought her "the truth" (**verse 24**).

Then Jesus did the truly unexpected:

He told her that He indeed was the Messiah.

This is the only time before his trial
that he specifically said that he was the Messiah.

To a woman.

To a Samaritan.

To the low and down trodden.

To an almost non-person.

No wonder the disciples were surprised!

And it is no wonder either that in **1 Corinthians 1:27 - 29**, Paul said:

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not -- to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him." (NIV)

This should encourage all of us, men and women,
that we count in God's sight.

We matter.,

And He can and will use any of us who are willing to be used.

The result of the meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman?

The woman went home,
to her family, her neighborhood,
to her entire town, and witnessed.

And many believed.

Jesus stayed in that town two more days,
teaching her converts.

The woman of no status, the bearer of water jars and children had become a bearer of the Good News.

In another story, (**Luke 10:38 - 42**)

Jesus was in the home of Mary and Martha.

Martha was scurrying around, preparing for her special guest.

But Mary was not helping, and Martha was unhappy.

I love this story.

Poor Martha was trying her best to feed guests,
Maybe as many as 13 hungry, outdoors men
And her sister is not there to help.

Finally, she asked Jesus to make Mary help her!

She could have marched in and said to Mary, "Get in here!"
Instead, she took her problem to Jesus.

And just as often happens, she did not get the answer she expected.

Or really wanted.

Jesus indicated that what had been the norm was no longer to be so--
the gospel had new urgency and needed everyone's talents.

And Mary had chosen the better part.

Martha was doing what women were supposed to be doing--cooking, cleaning, hostessing.

But Mary was sitting at Jesus feet--
involved in a theological discussion.

And Jesus told Martha that Mary "had chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:42

Was what Martha was doing wrong?

No. It was just a matter of balance.

And relationship

Mary was spending time building a relationship.

Martha was so busy doing what was good
that she had no time to do what was better.

Jesus was empowering the disenfranchised.

Sometimes it was soldiers,
sometimes lepers
sometimes tax collectors

This time it was women

Women who were receptive to Jesus and His teaching.

Women were also the first to believe in
and to tell of the resurrection.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all tell the story,
each with different details.

The angel told the women to tell the disciples and Peter of the resurrection.

And tell it they did.

Luke 24:9 says "*When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the eleven and to all the others.*"

Just like women anytime, anywhere, when they heard good news,
they wanted to share it with everyone.

Telephone. Tell a woman.

The women were with the disciples when they elected Matthias to replace Judas,
and they were there when the tongues of fire fell
and the Holy Spirit filled them at Pentecost right along with the men.

(Acts 1:12 - 2:4)

This should *not* have surprised the disciples,
as it had been predicted by the prophet Joel. **(Joel 2:28-32)**

When Peter had become filled with the Holy Spirit
he remembered and quoted Joel to the crowd.

The scripture is found in **Acts 2:17 - 29**.

(Read it together or have the congregation read it as a responsive reading.)

It is to be a sign of the last days when the Holy Spirit
is poured out on men and women
Old and young

Both men and women were to witness and prophesy in the last days.

Peter and the other disciples
thought they were living in the last days.

We too believe we are.

Are we doing all we can to bear the good news of salvation?

There are plenty of men and women carrying bad news.

Jesus wants us involved in good news!

Jesus was not bound by tradition and culture--

He was guided by the mission--
to tell the world the Good News of
His death,
His resurrection
and our salvation.

To accomplish this He desires the help of everyone today,
including women,
Both men and women,
slaves of sin and of culture
were to become servants of the Most High.

Both men and women,

bearers of burdens and bearers of children,
were to become bearers of the Good News for the last days.

Even Paul, who spoke some things regarding women

that are hard to understand
accepted women as fellow workers.

In **Romans 16** he introduces Phoebe, a servant or deacon,
and asks the church at Rome to support her.

It appears that she was to have some leadership position in the church at Rome.

Then he sends greetings to other workers,
one third of whom are women.

(Priscilla, v. 3; Mary, v. 6; Junias, v. 7; Tryphena and Tryphosa, v. 12; Persis, v. 12; Rufus mother, v. 13; Julia, and Nereus sister, v. 15)

One of the interesting features of the churches that Paul and others established

was that many were "home churches."

You remember the story of the conversion of Lydia

and the other women in Philippi. (**Acts 16:11-15**)

There was no synagogue in Philippi;

(by law there must be ten men in order to form a synagogue)

--once again women did not count.

So the women met by the river and Paul and Luke joined them.

The resulting church met in Lydia's home.

The church at Colossae met in the home of Philemon and "our sister" Apphia. (**Philemon 2**)

The church at Rome met at the home of Priscilla and Aquila. (**Romans 16:5 and 1 Cor. 16:19**)

In the letter to the Colossians Paul refers to Nympha and "the church in her house." (**Col 4:15**)

In the temple or the synagogue, the men and women were separated.

But in the home they were equals.

The women in whose homes they met,

and other women too,

could participate or even lead out.

("The house church, by virtue of its location, provided equal opportunities for women, because traditionally the house was considered women's proper sphere, and women were not excluded from the activities in it.")

Quoted in Caleb Rosados **Women, Church, God, and Socio-Biblical Study**, 1990.)

Interestingly, in Old Testament times,

the sign of belonging to God had been circumcision --

a male only sign.

In the early church and ever since,

the sign of belonging and believing in Jesus Christ

has been baptism,

something that Lydia and many other prominent women,

and many not so prominent,

could participate in. (Acts 16:1; 17:4, 12, 34; 18:8)

In the last days, our days, we too have a huge task before us.

Global Missions has reminded us that there are

entire groups which still don't know the Good News.

One of those groups lives around _____ (name the area where you are):

(Describe these people, such as: Secular, materialistic people who do not know Jesus.

Or Bhuddists or Muslims or illiterates)

In our society there are some religions who still

do not allow men to speak to women outside their own homes.

Many women in our large cities do not dare to allow a man into their homes,

or who are afraid to go out to public meetings.

Women can once again become bearers of good news to these women,

and to men too.

In her book **Evangelism** p. 469, Ellen White says,

"When a great and decisive work is to be done, God chooses men and women to do this work,

and it will feel the loss if the talents of both are not combined.

Mrs. White says further in **Welfare Ministry** that:

"The Lord has a work for women as well as for men. They may take their places in His work at this crises, and He will work through them....They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their labor is needed." (Page 145)

Right now, women are successfully reaching out,
bearing the Good News in many parts of the world.

(Tell current news about women doing ministry, evangelism, witnessing in your area or get current stories from *Mosaic*.)

Women are engaged in many forms of ministry.

And that is the bottom line goal of Women's Ministries

To help women grow spiritually

And for each one then to have some sort of ministry.

But women are involved in many other areas of outreach

Prison ministries

small group Bible studies and prayer groups

helping abuse victims and educating to prevent abuse

evangelism here and abroad

On the Island of Madagascar, women are going door-to-door
teaching young mothers how to avoid sickness
and these women are bringing them the gospel.

In Russia women are being invited to teach the Bible in public schools.

When parents learn that Bible lessons are taught,

using colorful felts sent by brothers and sisters from around the world,

they wait outside the school for the women Bible teachers.

"Don't just teach our children about Jesus,

we need to know too.

Won't you come and teach us?"

Policemen, other teachers, and former communist leaders all seek to know what they have been missing.

In Russia too, women have built up entire congregations,

making several long and expensive trips a week to nurture and guide new converts.

Literacy is an area where women are doing wonderful things

all around the world

I attended a graduation in Brazil.

To see a middle aged woman read her own

Graduation speech was beyond wonderful

We are excited about new literacy programs beginning
in the Central America,
a partnership between North American ingathering
And the church members, especially the women

Women are doing public evangelism

In Indonesia they have had evangelistic meetings with just young women preaching

In India women have held evangelistic meetings:

10 churches were established

1119 people were baptized at the end of the meetings.

7 church buildings have since been built.

In India there are exciting things happening with literacy.

One graduate of our program wrote a thank you story.

She is from a very poor family.

She worked from time to time in construction.

She worked recently on a school building project.

She writes:

It was pay day....I was there with many other labourers. All were putting their thumb impression and taking their money. But one thing I noticed was that he was paying them less. He wrote Rs. 50.00 per day but paid only Rs. 30.00. Since I knew how to read and write I could not control myself. When he called my name to come and put thumb impression and take the money, I said ASir, bring your pen I will sign. I am no more illiterate and I can read and write.@So saying, I signed my name and asked for the full amount. When others saw this they also demanded for the full amount. All these days the contractors were cheating us. Now, they cannot cheat us anymore.

Thousands around the world are leading out
in Children's Sabbath School programs
in Vacation Bible Schools
in Community Service Centers
in intercessory prayer groups
in neighborhood Bible study groups.
and International Women's Day of Prayer programs.

There is more than enough work for all.

When Robert Folkenberg was president of the GC he said:

"For years many of the talents of women have been hidden behind church walls. But when we contemplate the magnitude of our global challenge to witness to 900 million Moslems, 350-400 million Buddhists, and millions of others who need to know Christ, the church simply has no other choice! We need to maximize the talents of every member who the Holy Spirit has uniquely prepared.... Eternal consequences are at stake and time is running out!"

Selected Messages, Book 1, p. 266 has a challenging statement:

"High and low, rich and poor; all have a work to do for the Master. Everyone is called into action."

It is time once again to turn the world upside down.

Just as Jesus Christ set aside tradition and culture when it hampered the mission
of telling the world of His first coming,

we must use every one and every way possible to share with the world the Good News of His second coming.

It is time for male and female,
slaves of sin and bearers of burdens
to become bearers of the Gospel.

"Go ye therefore," men and women,
"and teach all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Ghost,...
and lo, I am with you always,
even unto the end of the world. Amen."
Matthew 28:19, 20.

As Joel, under inspiration, had predicted:

In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy....

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." **Acts 2:17, 18, 21. NIV.**

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ON THE SERMON WRITER: Ardis Stenbakken is the Director of Women's Ministries at the General Conference. She loves to study the Bible as literature and to see what it says about women then and now.