

March 17, 1994  
Kathryn J. Johnson  
Boston, Massachusetts

*While in the flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and was heard for his godly fear. Although the Child of God, Jesus learned obedience through suffering, and being made perfect, became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Jesus Christ, having been designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.*

Hebrews 5:7-10

An article in the *Washington Post* this week makes me think of today's Scripture lessons, particularly the lesson from Hebrews. The article tells of a neighborhood in Washington, D.C. which is being evacuated for the second time this year after unexploded World War I munitions were discovered. Evidently a construction worker, digging a trench with a backhoe last January, found an artillery round. Upon further digging, army engineers found 141 artillery rounds, some containing chemical weapons. And so, this week a second round of excavations began in an effort to clear all of the munitions and ensure the safety of the residents.

Today's lesson from Hebrews talks, among other things, of godly fear, learning obedience through suffering and being made perfect. Looks to me like a field absolutely full of artillery shells and land mines! In fact, it's not unreasonable to ask whether we should

venture into this field at all. I decided to give it a try and have discovered that it isn't for the faint of heart. But I did find what I think is some fertile soil.

Before we begin digging together, I'd suggest that for safety's sake, we familiarize ourselves with the location of some of those land mines.

To begin with, Hebrews, a book of unknown authorship, uses imagery and language which is almost entirely masculine reflecting the patriarchal culture in which it was written. This isn't anything new when it comes to the Scriptures but the letter to the Hebrews is more exclusive than most in this regard.

Current-day Biblical scholars are now more accurately translating many masculine Biblical references to make them more inclusive. It would appear, however, that in the Letter to the Hebrews, when the author says sons, or men, or brothers, the author means sons, or men or brothers.

Women are also excluded from Hebrews in the use of the image of Jesus as a high priest. For example, the author of Hebrews uses the temple liturgy of the day to describe salvation. All well and good except for the fact that this description focuses on the deed of the high priest on the day of atonement - a deed reserved not only for a man, but a single man at that.

All is not as bleak however. Even though Jesus is repeatedly referred to as son or as priest, this is at least in part to stress the humanity of Jesus. And an understanding of Jesus as fully human is in fact helpful to all of humanity as we seek to understand God.

Likewise, when we dig a little deeper into the image of Jesus as priest we discover that priesthood as understood in Hebrews bears some closer examination. Melchizedek is the

priest mentioned in today's passage. And it seems that the priesthood of Melchizedek is used as the model of the priesthood for Jesus precisely because he does not fit the criteria for legitimate priesthood in the line of Levi and Aaron. That is to say, that the priesthood of Melchizedek is not based on such criteria as race, gender and class. May be that those who are choosing to leave the Anglican church over this week's ordination of women priests should be encouraged to give this aspect of Hebrews another look.

Another, and perhaps more dangerous, land mine in the Letter to the Hebrews, is the use of the concept of suffering. We are given an image of Christ as the son and pioneer who was perfected in suffering and of God the father, the one who does the perfecting. In today's lesson, we have a son who learns obedience through what he suffered.

There is much material here for those who powerfully point out the danger of giving theological sanction to child abuse. Indeed, this and many other passages on suffering throughout the Scriptures have been used to glorify, justify and perpetuate suffering, perverting the message of the Gospel in hurtful and destructive ways. We must be vigilant in our efforts to avoid any Biblical interpretations which lend themselves to something which is so clearly contrary to God's will.

And so...with these cautions...I'd suggest we venture out in search of that fertile soil.

The first thing we encounter in the lesson is a very human Jesus, a person "in the flesh" who offers up prayers and entreaties with loud cries and tears. We are reminded of the descriptions of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and the accounts of Jesus on the cross, crying out to God in pain and anguish. This is a Jesus compassionate enough to weep as he looks out over the city of Jerusalem, to cry out in anger when he sees the money-changers

in the temple. This is a Jesus who leads us to know a God who understands and feels our suffering. One who listens to our loud cries and accepts the tears we shed over our own pain and the pain we feel at encountering the suffering of others.

This initial verse goes on to say that Jesus was *heard* for his godly fear, or as another translation reads, Jesus was *heard* for his piety. This idea of a piety which can include loud cries and tears is an attractive one. Even more attractive is the assurance that not only does Jesus cry out but that he is heard. Another rendering of this same verse which I found very helpful in understanding the rest of the passage reads..."and being heard, Jesus was set free from fear." How very powerful it is to know that one's voice is heard. How crucial it is for those who cry out with a loud voice to know that someone hears those cries, and that when one sheds tears, those tears are tenderly received.

With all these comforting images in mind, it is disconcerting to then read that "Jesus learned obedience through suffering, and being made perfect, became the source of eternal salvation." Obedience through suffering...perfection...eternal salvation...we've come upon the doctrines which surround the event of the crucifixion of Jesus, doctrines which while clearly central to the Christian faith, are to my mind, among the most confusing.

The death of Jesus has been interpreted in many different ways over the centuries. I'd guess that those of us here today have any number of those interpretations floating around in our cerebral fluid or lurking behind this or that corner of our gray matter.

As I reflect on this, I find that it is the messages received through traditional Christian teaching that have made their way deepest into my bones, those understandings absorbed through prayers, hymns, Sunday School lessons and sermons. These would include

the notion that Jesus died for our sins, and that his death somehow saves us; that suffering and death were part of God's plan and that Jesus dying on the cross illustrates God's love for humanity. These traditional interpretations never have and still don't make sense to me. I find myself playing the contortionist, twisting this way and that, trying somehow to "get it." In fact, now only do I not "get it," I am increasingly aware of the very destructive and perverse ways these understandings have been used.

I am reminded of a practice at this time of year in the Philippines, a country where I lived for a short time, which makes my blood run cold every time I encounter it or even think about it. It is not at all uncommon, in fact, I'm sure people are preparing for it throughout the Philippines this week, to reenact the crucifixion of Christ. By "reenact" I do not mean standing with ones hands tied to a cross but undergoing the actual experience, the excruciating pain of carrying a cross, being stripped, beaten, and nailed to the cross.

To my knowledge, persons thus "crucified" are removed from the cross before they actually die. But the suffering is immense. Often the traditional doctrines of Christ's passion so glorify suffering that people come to believe that the very act of suffering, in this case literally being nailed to a cross, somehow makes them more like Christ.

We need not look far to see examples of oppression held up by theological girders: the structures of Apartheid in South Africa, of slavery in the United States; the silencing of women; the abuse of children. Even though we know better, most of us still have that nagging feeling that it really is that totally self-sacrificing person, the one who never thinks of himself or herself, that exemplifies the true Christian. Or if we've recovered from that one, perhaps we still have the vestiges of the "if I'm not suffering a little bit - neglecting

myself or my family - over-working to the point of being ill - if I'm not suffering at least to that extent, I'm not really fully Christian."

Of course, Jesus did suffer and Jesus was crucified, and we need to make some sense of this if our own Christian faith is to mean anything.

I'd suggest we keep plowing.

As we continue in our passage from Hebrews, we read, "although the Child (or Son of God), Jesus learned obedience through suffering, and being made perfect, became the source of eternal salvation."

"Although the Child of God, Jesus learned obedience." Once again we find emphasis being placed on the humanity of Jesus. Even Jesus needed to learn to follow God's will. It is not something which just happened automatically. Jesus, like us, was a person who needed to learn to obey God, that is to do God's will.

But to say that Jesus learned obedience through suffering is not to say that suffering was God's will for Jesus, or for us. If we wish to understand God's will we have a wealth of material in the Bible to help us. Indeed, the entire ministry of Jesus illuminates the subject. Never do we hear Jesus say that it is God's will that people suffer. Quite the opposite. Jesus tells us that it is God's will that the captives be released, that the blind receive sight, that the oppressed be liberated. The ministry of Jesus is about healing and wholeness, about justice and reconciliation. It is good news for those who suffer, not bad.

So what does it mean to say that Jesus learned obedience through suffering? Jesus did learn to obey God, that is to follow God's will. And in so doing Jesus did suffer. It does not necessarily follow, however, that it was God's will that Jesus should suffer. It is very

important I believe to understand that the suffering of Jesus was not inevitable. Jesus could have chosen to thwart God's will. Jesus could have run away from the suffering. Likewise the authorities could have chosen to release Jesus. They could have accepted the teachings of Jesus and changed their ways.

Jesus chose to continue to preach and live the powerful good news of the Gospel. And because the authorities were frightened and disturbed by this Gospel which threatened the established order, they chose to persecute and kill Jesus. Jesus was crucified not because it was God's will that he die but because he threatened the empire. Similarly, it was because the authorities chose to ignore God's will that Jesus suffered.

We are saved through Christ not because Christ chose death. We are saved through Christ because Christ chose life. Jesus, a human being like you and me, chose to follow God's will. In so doing, he showed us that it is possible to choose good over evil. It is possible to live as God would have us live.

We need not be reminded of the presence and power of evil in the world. It is abundantly and overwhelmingly clear. What we do sometimes need to be reminded of, I think, is the presence and power of God's goodness in the world. God, in Jesus, reminds us that we, like Jesus, have the power to choose, and to do, that which is good.

Admittedly, there are no guarantees that enough of us will choose good over evil such that good will triumph. That is a matter of faith.

But our faith is strengthened in the knowledge that God understands our humanness and listens with loving attentiveness to our cries and tears. This knowledge that we are

heard, that we are not alone, gives us courage to follow God's will and to encourage others to do likewise. This may lead to suffering, not because suffering is God's will but because we have claimed the power of good, a power which is threatening to those who would thwart God's will.

What is just as likely, however, in fact I would say certain, is that we will experience an awesome joy. It is the joy of knowing that even death holds no power over us. It is the joy of glimpsing life eternal.

Amen.



K. Reed 1

Women and the Word Preaching Workshop  
Boston University, March 17, 1994  
"THE NECESSITY OF EXTRAVAGANCE"  
LUKE 10: 38-42

Women and the Word:  
Sisters  
**Emmersed in the Word,**  
**Doing the Word.**

There is a pair of ancient stories that were created for people just like you and me.

It would be my pleasure to share them with you now.

The first comes from a Native American community. The second comes from the tenth chapter of the Good News according to Luke.

This first story came to me from Leslie Marmon Silko, a Laguna Pueblo writer. She says that she heard the story from the Acoma poet, Simon Ortiz.

[Adapted from Storyteller, by Silko. Arcade Publishing, New York, 1981, pp 158-159.]

Mine is yet another re-telling, and it goes like this:

It was summertime  
and there were two sisters.  
One was called Iktoa' ak o' ya Reed Woman  
....isn't that a luxurious sounding name?  
Iktoa' ak o' ya Reed Woman.  
The other sister was called  
Corn Woman. Period.  
Corn Woman.

K. Reed 2

It was summertime, you see,  
and Iktoa' ak o' ya Reed Woman was always taking a bath.  
All day long, there she would sit in the river  
splashing down the summer rain.  
And when I say splash, I mean  
splash.

Iktoa' ak o' ya Reed Woman  
would kick her beautiful legs in the water  
making great water fans that looked like the tailfeathers of peacocks.  
With her cupped hands, she would splash the water  
so high in the air  
it came down in waterfalls,  
filled with rainbows.

Meanwhile,  
not too far off,  
was Corn Woman  
and she worked hard all day  
sweating in the sun  
getting sore hands  
toiling in the cornfield.

Finally, Corn woman got tired of that.  
She got angry.  
She scolded her sister  
for bathing and splashing all day long.

Iktoa 'ak o' ya Reed Woman  
went away then.  
She went back to the original place  
down below.

And there was no more rain then.

K. Reed 3

Everything dried up  
and started blowing away in the wind.

And then people and the animals were thirsty.  
They were starving.

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As it turned out,  
what had seemed to Corn Woman like  
a wasteful, unproductive extravagance  
was not that at all.

Oh yes, the bathing and the splashing  
of Iktoa 'ak o'ya Reed Woman was extravagant,

but it was also *necessary*,

for without her bathing and splashing there could be no more rain.

Hers  
had been a very necessary extravagance.

\*\*\*

As I see it, the story of Mary and Martha from Luke's gospel  
is also about what is necessary  
and what is extravagant.

Martha is a Corn Woman  
and she knows it.

She has earned her standing in the community.  
She can do what few women of her day could do.  
She can call the house where she lives  
her house,  
and as the head of the household,  
she can invite  
the

very important traveling teacher,  
Jesus of Nazareth  
into her house.

And naturally there is a lot of work  
when you have houseguests.  
A lot of work.

But what does Mary, Martha's sister, do about that?

She sits.

She sits at the feet  
of this very important houseguest  
She sits and lets his words wash over her.  
She sits and splashes in his teachings

She sits  
and  
she *listens*.

Well, it wasn't long  
before Martha got tired of that.

She got angry  
and instead of scolding her sister,  
Martha went right to the top,

to Jesus,  
and she said,  
"Lord, do you not care  
that my sister has left me  
to serve  
alone?

Tell her, then,  
to help me."

But the Lord answered her,

"Martha, Martha,  
you are anxious.

You are troubled about many things.

K. Reed 5

One thing is needful;  
Mary has chosen  
the good portion  
which  
shall not  
be taken away from her."

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Notice how this story from Luke's Gospel has an ending  
which is different  
from the story about Corn Woman and Iktoa 'ak o' ya Reed Woman.

Thankfully, one sister does not drive off the other.  
Mary does not need to go away,  
and things do not get all dried up,  
and no one needs to go thirsty,  
and no one needs to starve.

That's because Jesus understood  
the necessity of extravagance.

*It was something that his Mother had taught him ages ago.*

Jesus understood that  
unless  
obligations are balanced by love  
unless  
duty is balanced by thanksgiving  
unless  
law is balanced by grace  
*unless teaching is balanced by imagination*  
then  
no matter how hard you work  
everything will still get all dried up.

and people and animals will go thirsty and starve.

Jesus also understood that this was not just a problem  
in the household of Mary and Martha.

He knew that he would have to tell others about  
the necessity of of extravagance,  
just as his Mother had told him.

Jesus also knew that  
if word was really going to get around  
he would have to use  
some **very *extravagant*** means to tell about it.

So he did:

*In the night  
in which Jesus was betrayed  
he took bread and gave thanks,  
broke it,  
and gave it to his friends  
saying,  
Take and eat.  
This  
is my body  
given for you.*

*Do this  
for  
the remembrance of me.*

K. Reed 7

*Again, after supper,  
he took the cup, gave thanks  
and  
gave it for  
all  
to drink, saying,  
This cup  
is  
the new covenant in my blood  
poured out for you  
and  
for all people  
for the forgiveness of sin.*

*Do this*

*Do this  
extravagantly*

*for  
the remembrance of me.*

AMEN.

March 17, 1994

"Give me the Water!"  
(John 4:5-42)

Preached by Yong Ja Kim

Every noon time, I go out for a walk with my neighbor's dog. I have watched the trees begin to bud, after winter rains. As we know, this winter has been too cold, too much snow. But the buds on the trees reveal lives. As we all know, water is a necessary to all living things for growth and nourishment. In the same way, we, as human beings who have spirits, are not able to maintain our lives without water, especially life-giving water.

Today I would like to share my sermon, focusing on the Samaritan woman's awakening of faith and testimony to what happened in her life when she encountered Jesus at the well.

In today's Scripture, Jesus had a dialogue which was very important and serious with an unnamed Samaritan woman, who had had five husbands. Their conversation was about life-giving water which is a universal symbol for life and true worship as a religious practice, rooted in the Jewish tradition.

Before we look at this living water in more details, let us look at Scripture. The verse 4 tells us, "Jesus had to go through Samaria." The historian Josephus stated that "it was absolutely necessary for those who would go quickly to pass through that Samaria, for by that road you may, in three days, go from Galilee to Jerusalem." In this Gospel, however, Jesus went through Samaria not only for convenience, but to accomplish the work assigned to him by God. The mission to the Samaritans was unplanned by Jesus but willed by God.

Jesus came to a town named Sychar, and was tired out by the trip. So he wanted to take rest and to drink some water while his disciples went to the town to buy food. It was about noon which is the hottest time of the day to feel thirsty. Jesus asked a Samaritan woman who came to draw some water, "give me a drink of water." At first the woman ignored Jesus. She must have been very surprised by his request. The dislike between Jews and Samaritans was deeply rooted because the Samaritans were a mixed race through intermarriage, and they worshiped in the temple on Mt. Gerizim, not in Jerusalem. Also man and woman were prohibited from speaking to each other in public place.



In spite of this cultural prohibition, Jesus continued this conversation. When the woman understood what Jesus meant about life-giving water, she asked to Jesus "give me that water. Then I will never be thirsty again, nor will I have to come here to draw."

At this point, the conversation raised a complicated theological question. The woman was confused to where was the proper place for worship between the Samaritan's tradition and the Jewish tradition. Jesus said, "the time will come when people will not worship God either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. Only by the power of God's spirit can people worship God as God really is." She confessed about her expectation of the Messiah. At this point, Jesus revealed himself "I am the One, who am talking with you." At once she left her water jar and went to her town and said, "come and see the one who told me everything I have done. Could this one be the Messiah?" So the people of the town believed in Jesus because of her testimony and Jesus' message.

Many commentators raise questions about the woman's suspicious moral character in terms of immoral sexual behavior. But no one knows who she was for sure. I just imagine that the woman was very thirsty in her life. Perhaps her life lacked meanings. Perhaps she had conflicts in her relationships. Perhaps she was in agony or anguish over difficulties in her life. Perhaps she had unsolved questions about her life. Also I can imagine that she was isolated from her community. This was why she tried to avoid seeing and meeting people in the town. That was why she came to the well around noon when none of the other women were there.

But we need to pay attention to what was happening in her mind, especially in her faith through the whole dialogue with Jesus. Let me talk about the ways that she addressed Jesus. At the very beginning, she called Jesus "You" which meant he was just one of Jewish men whom she disdained. However, Jesus mentioned life-giving water, not just drinking water, she called Jesus "Sir." When Jesus pointed out her shameful personal life, she, then, called Jesus "Prophet." Eventually she confessed Jesus could be the "Messiah" whom she was seeking. Through this titles we see her faith in Jesus was growing so fast. She became awakened with her new eyes and new faith in every step of the conversation with Jesus. At once she determined to go back to her own people who would look down on her and her own place where she was isolated in order to deliver the good news which gave

her new life. People in the town believed in Jesus because of her testimony and because of Jesus' messages. This is an appropriate process of becoming a disciple. The boundaries were broken between Jews and Samaritans, between man and woman, between the woman and her community. Jesus did not care about her immoral reputation, but cared about her thirsty: what she wanted to know, what she wanted to be. In the same way, Jesus does not care who we are, what we have done, but Jesus is watching us how thirsty we are and who we will be.

My life journey has made me thirsty. I have been feeling thirsty through all of my life. I have been like the Samaritan woman who has had many desires. I could not be satisfied with anything. As a result, I entered a seminary in Korea. There I wrestled with God, asking questions which were serious, complicated, and even silly. But God didn't answer me at all. I was persistent, asking who I am, and what my life meant, and how I should live. I really was thirsty for God. In the middle of the darkness, I encountered God who gave me life-giving water. I made sure that God called me for carrying on God's will. In my senior year, I became involved in ministry in the parish church as an intern. As soon as I graduated from the seminary I had various ministry experiences inside and outside the church. However, I was frustrated by many obstacles and problems in the churches. The churches did not want to open their door to new ideas and new ways. Rather, they were stuck in old traditional faith, creeds and dogmas. The churches proclaimed the Gospel, but did nothing about it. The hierarchy of the church was male-dominated and men were over women. The churches did not recognize women's potentialities. The churches discriminated against women, and the poor in the name of God, and isolated them from important decision makings.

I was disappointed and got angry. The more I spoke up about these things, the more I was oppressed and humiliated by male pastors. I could not find any hope for change in the churches; instead the church was moving backward. So I decided to leave the church and went to the Philippines, which was like a wilderness in my life. What I found there was how miserable lives in the Third World was, especially the poor women's lives. The poor women who were the majority struggled for their own and their children's survival against poverty, discrimination, oppression, and exploitation economically, physically, emotionally and spiritually. There I was a privileged woman. I was an object of envy to the Filipino women. I felt shame, and I felt powerless.

So I wanted to be a missionary to work with them. But the church rejected me. I was deeply disappointed in their decision. Around that time I got information about the Women's Theological Center in Boston through a friend of my mine. In 1993, I met sixteen women at WTC who were thirsty in their lives for peace and justice. I was so glad that I was not alone in feeling thirsty and seeking life-giving water. I often cried with pity for my womanness, as I experienced discrimination. I often cried with anger, as I was awakened to what is going on in our society and in the world as well. I often cried with joy, as I affirmed my life which has had a spirit of resistance. To me, WTC was the Jacob's well where the Samaritan woman encountered Jesus. I decided to continue my study at Episcopal Divinity School, and determined to be ordained minister so that I can go back to the church which continually betrayed me as a missionary in the future.

Through the story of the Samaritan woman and my lived-experiences, I have realized that I, as woman, have the great mission that Jesus entrusted to his disciples at his ascension.

As Christians and women, we have responsibility as well as the great mission. In order to do this, first of all, we need to drink life-giving water. We must renew our eyes and faith. Our naming of Jesus should change day by day in accordance with our growing faith so that we can break down various walls which block out our lives such as hatred, segregation between white and people of color, between female and male, between the poor and the rich. We are called by God to these missions.

To conclude, I, as an Asian woman, want to challenge all of you, as women of faith and communities of faith. First, let us talk about women. We need to feel thirsty in our life; thirsty for struggle for peace, justice and equality in our family, communities, countries and world. Secondly, we need to renew our perspectives, faith, lives and relationships. Thirdly, we need to mature so that people believe in God because of us.

Now let us talk about our communities of faith. Our churches need to open their narrow perspective and mind, maintaining good traditions, but changing wrong dogmas which can oppress people's lives in the name of God. Our churches need to be places in equal, inviting all persons. Our churches need to recognize and cultivate people's, particularly women's, potentialities, because everyone has their own gifts from God.

We are the women who are called by God, to be witnesses, to be Jesus' disciples for our family, friends, communities and world. In this call, we need to share our tears, struggles, joys, faith and missions, to thirst for life-giving water, to seek living water, and together to find the living water.

O God,

Thank you for our lives as women who have a mission.

Give us the life-giving water in our struggling lives and spirits so that we can be renewal in our lives, communities and world.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

March 17, 1994

"Give me the Water!"  
(John 4:5-42)

Preached by Yong Ja Kim

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But we need to pay attention to what was happening in her mind, especially in her faith through the whole dialogue with Jesus. Let me talk about the ways that she addressed Jesus. At the very beginning, she called Jesus "You" which meant he was just one of Jewish men whom she disdained. However, Jesus mentioned life-giving water, not just drinking water, she called Jesus "Sir." When Jesus pointed out her shameful personal life, she, then, called Jesus "Prophet." Eventually she confessed Jesus could be the "Messiah" whom she was seeking. Through this titles we see her faith in Jesus was growing so fast. She became awakened with her new eyes and new faith in every step of the conversation with Jesus. At once she determined to go back to her own people who would look down on her and her own place where she was isolated in order to deliver the good news which gave

her new life. People in the town believed in Jesus because of her testimony and because of Jesus' messages. This is an appropriate process of becoming a disciple. The boundaries were broken between Jews and Samaritans, between man and woman, between the woman and her community. Jesus did not care about her immoral reputation, but cared about her thirsty: what she wanted to know, what she wanted to be. In the same way, Jesus does not care who we are, what we have done, but Jesus is watching us how thirsty we are and who we will be.

My life journey has made me thirsty. I have been feeling thirsty through all of my life. I have been like the Samaritan woman who has had many desires. I could not be satisfied with anything. As a result, I entered a seminary in Korea. There I wrestled with God, asking questions which were serious, complicated, and even silly. But God didn't answer me at all. I was persistent, asking who I am, and what my life meant, and how I should live. I really was thirsty for God. In the middle of the darkness, I encountered God who gave me life-giving water. I made sure that God called me for carrying on God's will. In my senior year, I became involved in ministry in the parish church as an intern. As soon as I graduated from the seminary I had various ministry experiences inside and outside the church. However, I was frustrated by many obstacles and problems in the churches. The churches did not want to open their door to new ideas and new ways. Rather, they were stuck in old traditional faith, creeds and dogmas. The churches proclaimed the Gospel, but did nothing about it. The hierarchy of the church was male-dominated and men were over women. The churches did not recognize women's potentialities. The churches discriminated against women, and the poor in the name of God, and isolated them from important decision makings.

I was disappointed and got angry. The more I spoke up about these things, the more I was oppressed and humiliated by male pastors. I could not find any hope for change in the churches; instead the church was moving backward. So I decided to leave the church and went to the Philippines, which was like a wilderness in my life. What I found there was how miserable lives in the Third World was, especially the poor women's lives. The poor women who were the majority struggled for their own and their children's survival against poverty, discrimination, oppression, and exploitation economically, physically, emotionally and spiritually. There I was a privileged woman. I was an object of envy to the Filipino women. I felt shame, and I felt powerless.

So I wanted to be a missionary to work with them. But the church rejected me. I was deeply disappointed in their decision. Around that time I got information about the Women's Theological Center in Boston through a friend of my mine. In 1993, I met sixteen women at WTC who were thirsty in their lives for peace and justice. I was so glad that I was not alone in feeling thirsty and seeking life-giving water. I often cried with pity for my womanness, as I experienced discrimination. I often cried with anger, as I was awakened to what is going on in our society and in the world as well. I often cried with joy, as I affirmed my life which has had a spirit of resistance. To me, WTC was the Jacob's well where the Samaritan woman encountered Jesus. I decided to continue my study at Episcopal Divinity School, and determined to be ordained minister so that I can go back to the church which continually betrayed me as a missionary in the future.

Through the story of the Samaritan woman and my lived-experiences, I have realized that I, as woman, have the great mission that Jesus entrusted to his disciples at his ascension.

As Christians and women, we have responsibility as well as the great mission. In order to do this, first of all, we need to drink life-giving water. We must renew our eyes and faith. Our naming of Jesus should change day by day in accordance with our growing faith so that we can break down various walls which block out our lives such as hatred, segregation between white and people of color, between female and male, between the poor and the rich. We are called by God to these missions.

To conclude, I, as an Asian woman, want to challenge all of you, as women of faith and communities of faith. First, let us talk about women. We need to feel thirsty in our life; thirsty for struggle for peace, justice and equality in our family, communities, countries and world. Secondly, we need to renew our perspectives, faith, lives and relationships. Thirdly, we need to mature so that people believe in God because of us.

Now let us talk about our communities of faith. Our churches need to open their narrow perspective and mind, maintaining good traditions, but changing wrong dogmas which can oppress people's lives in the name of God. Our churches need to be places in equal, inviting all persons. Our churches need to recognize and cultivate people's, particularly women's, potentialities, because everyone has their own gifts from God.



We are the women who are called by God, to be witnesses, to be Jesus' disciples for our family, friends, communities and world. In this call, we need to share our tears, struggles, joys, faith and missions, to thirst for life-giving water, to seek living water, and together to find the living water.

O God,

Thank you for our lives as women who have a mission.

Give us the life-giving water in our struggling lives and spirits so that we can be renewal in our lives, communities and world.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

"To Be, Or Not To Be"  
Luke 7:36-50  
Miriam Therese Winter translation

Sharon L. Link  
Women & The Word 1994

When I began my ministry as an ordained person I carried within myself two role models. One was Ezekiel because of what God said to him when he was called to prophesy, "Ezekiel, I need you to go and preach, to carry my words. I know that will not be easy. But, listen to this. I do not hold you responsible for what everyone thinks about what I want you to say, and I do not hold you responsible for what everyone does in response. If you go and prophesy and they ignore your words, then I hold the hearers of your words responsible and they will be held accountable. But, if you fail to bring my word to them, then I hold you responsible and you will be held accountable." Ezekiel is still part of me. He's part of me when I wonder if people will like and want to hear what I think the Word of the Lord may be for the day. He's part of me when sometimes I feel like its just too hard. And he's part of me when I see a valley of dry bones in the same place where some would see a fertile plain and would expect that I would say, "Yes, I see that plain very clearly and isn't it a wonderful plain," even when I can't see it at all -- like, for example, our view of the nation sometimes, or the Church sometimes.

The second role model I carried in the beginning was Esther who found herself to be an outsider on the inside, and, in that position, had to choose which identity she would take as her own. She could not avoid the choice, and in both challenge and encouragement the question was put to her, "Who knows if you have been chosen for just such a time as this?" And so I have carried her within me as one who is ordained and who in some ways is on

the inside but sometimes feels like an outsider and who wrestles with where is my place -- on the inside, or the outside, or balanced on the edge?

And somewhere along the line, the gallery has grown to at least three role models with this un-named, uninvited woman with a bad name who crashes the dinner party at the Pharisees house and initiates maybe the first sacramental foot washing and anoints Jesus' body. So far, as I converse with this passage, picking it apart and analyzing the threads, or just letting it wrap around me as a blanket and nestling down inside of it, I have a growing list of questions and a shorter growing list of answers to those questions. These are some of the things I wonder: Who is this woman and why is she here? Who is this woman and where does she go? Who is this woman; is she you, is she me? (I must issue a disclaimer here -- I have not intended at all to present a three point sermon -- I've come down to the number three only because I think these make up the essential short list of questions for today.)

Who is this woman and why is she here? The story begins: "One of the pharisees, Simon by name, invites Jesus to a meal. When he arrived at his house and was seated at table, a woman who had a bad name in the town came into the house carrying an alabaster jar of ointment." What is her name and why is it bad? Maybe she has done bad things in her life and she wants to atone for her sin. Maybe she hasn't done anything bad in her own mind, but her bad name comes from the opinion of others. Clearly in this story, which is all we have to go on, she is someone who goes to places where she is not invited and does what others should have been doing themselves. As Jesus is being tried and tested at every turn, as he is being judged as whether he is appropriate or inappropriate she clearly takes a position and refuses to let him remain alone. She goes into a situation which

probably was exclusive by custom as one who would have been intentionally excluded. She does not ask for permission to be there. She does not apologize for being there. Probably this is enough on its own to give anyone a bad name, and if she acts this way here, maybe she's done it before and she is known for this kind of behavior.

The story goes, "She came up behind Jesus, weeping, and bent down to anoint his feet." Why is she weeping? Is she weeping because it seems as though this embodiment of God in their midst who is Jesus is not welcome and she weeps for all the times that God is not welcome. How does God react when Jesus is not welcome? Would God be so moved as to weep? Is she a manifestation of God in their midst? Is she weeping because by virtue of her bad name she has not been included in the community of faith -- and are those tears of grief, or are they tears of relief from having claimed a rightful place? Who is this woman and why is she here?

Who is this woman and where does she go? What happens after this? Does Simon, the Pharisee think anything differently of her after this encounter? Is her life totally changed? Maybe Simon goes out and tells everybody what a sacred thing she did for Jesus, right in his very house. Maybe he tries to help create a new name and a new understanding and a new reality for her. Maybe Simon becomes a disciple. Maybe not. Maybe this woman goes out into the town and tries to tell of what she did and what Jesus said about her so that maybe now people will think differently of her. Maybe she continues to be a crasher of private events. Maybe as she leaves she wipes the dust from her feet at the doorway of Simon's house and she never looks back. Maybe she moves on with Jesus and is one of the faithful few who remains with him even at the cross? Who is this woman and where does she go?

Who is this woman; is she you, is she me? The reason that she has become a role model for me is that as an ordained person I have become part of an institution and in that institution I have had different kinds of roles. I have fought the battle to become part of it and I have cast votes which have helped to decide whether others should be allowed in. I have been a participant in creating local church structures and district structures and conference structures and national movements within the United Methodist Church. And in the middle of it all I try to remain aware of a sense of calling. As my work as a clergyperson would become more and more complicated I would long for the simplicity of this unnamed woman's ministry who simply without any outside authority ministers to Jesus and does what needs to be done. She embodies grace.

She is a role model for me in the times when other people's opinions of me and other people's agendas for me are not those of my hearts and soul. There are many Pharisees around. Now I don't think that Pharisees are by nature bad people necessarily. I know that I have been a Pharisee to others. I would say that a Pharisee is someone who loves and wants to protect tradition and a way of being people of faith. I have been a Pharisee. I have been on the inside and I help to exclude, as much as I don't like to admit it, people whose ways are different than mine -- thoughts, cultures, realities, agendas. But, I still know very well who the Pharisees have been in my life.

Let me give a simple example from a long list of possibilities. Who I am as a person is not separate as who I am as a pastor. And so I sometimes struggle with how I am able to give expression to myself and how to present myself authentically when others have different desires and expectations of who I am and will be. Let me contrast two situations from a church that I have served. In a very formal kind of worship setting with dress codes for

participants in the worship service I would wear earrings and pants, not all of the time, but some of the time. There was a person for whom this kind of formality and dress code was very important and rather than telling me that he thought that I was inappropriate he used to comment on my ankles and whether or not they were showing, because they were very attractive. This was his way of saying, "You should be wearing a dress or a skirt." On the Sundays that I would wear a dress or skirt I would go home as soon as I could and change my clothes and maybe even go back to the church to do some other work.

On the other hand, there was a man in the church who wrote a good-bye message to me and in it he said that he always had this sense that I was a farm girl at heart. Since he had been a farmer in his life he had recognized something familiar in me. Now, I wasn't trying to consciously project that image. But I thought--isn't this interesting? When I wrote my autobiographical statement to be ordained an elder in the United Methodist Church I wrote this: "I have heard the saying, 'When the world wearies and ceases to satisfy, there is always the garden.' I was born into a family which cherished the rituals of planting and harvesting. My sisters and I were raised in the wisdom of the garden. Life is the garden's purpose -- there is always something that will grow no matter the quality of soil or location, and if the weeds are the only plants to blossom, then their color is life's gift for the moment." And I realized in what Lowell had said that I had not totally forsaken myself as much as I thought I had in the struggle to mold myself appropriately into a sometimes unnatural situation.

For me these examples are the tip of the iceberg. But I mention because I think we all must be engaged to some extent in the struggle of whether to be

or not to be ourselves, of whether to take on a role or to refuse it. Who is this woman; is she you, is she me?

Miriam Therese Winter wrote, "An Outcast's Psalm" (WomanWord, p.74) in response to this scripture passage. Here is most of it:

I live on the margins of meaning,  
an outcast, forced to choose,  
above all else, survival.  
I have nothing left to lose.

I hurry through public places,  
hardpressed to outrun my shame,  
fearing the pointed gossip  
that pierces me with blame.

Those who would call me sinner  
fail to understand  
the burden of life I carry,  
and never lend a hand.

My nights are filled with weeping,  
my days approach despair.  
How shall I sing the song I know  
is unwelcome everywhere?

I lift my voice to Your justice,  
I lift my love to Your own,  
and wait on your word,  
like a lingering bird  
when all its flock have flown.

Let me touch the feet of Your mercy,  
let me wash them with my tears.  
Let me hear Your word of comfort  
dispelling all my fears.

Then my soul will sing of Your goodness,  
and the earth will repeat the song,  
'til the sweet-smelling oil of gladness  
anoints me and makes me strong.

So may it be. Amen.

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#### WORSHIP CONTEXT

Centering Music :       The 23rd Psalm, Bobby McFerrin

Scripture Reading:       Luke 7: 36-50  
                              (Miriam Therese Winter translation)

Anointing:               (Experiencing what it may feel like  
                              to be anointed or to anoint another)

Personal Reflection and Prayer: WomanWord, p.72&73

Sermon:                  "To Be, Or Not To Be"

Music for Reflection:    "Common Threads", Bobby McFerrin



**WOMEN AND THE WORD, 1994**  
***THE GOOD NEWS ACCORDING TO WOMEN:***  
***SHAKING THE FOUNDATIONS, RECLAIMING THE HOPE***  
Boston University School of Theology  
March 17-18, 1994

**"An Encounter at the Well "**

by Rev. Gwendolyn S. King

No-body knows the trouble I see,

No-body knows but Jesus;

No-body knows the trouble I see, (sung)

Glory Hallelujah!

No-body knows the trouble I see,

No-body knows my sorrow;

No-body knows the trouble I see, (sung)

Glory Hallelujah!

It was a long trip up that hill to fetch water -- once a day, sometimes twice. The jars were heavy when full, but it had to be done. I started going at that hour, when the sun was high overhead and very hot, because it was just easier. Of course, it would be cooler in the morning or the evening, but when I go at noon I don't have to deal with them -- the women in the village -- the ones who resented me, who had stopped talking to me because of who I am, my background, my sin. Admittedly, I have made mistakes in the past, but being an outcast among your own people is a hard thing to bear. I just couldn't take their whispers anymore, their scornful looks, the harsh comments. Oh, how I wished for a place of acceptance, a space to share my thoughts, for someone to listen -- really listen. A place to receive as well as give care and comfort, a place to satisfy this longing for love that I felt deep inside, this thirst, this unquenchable thirst, hidden within. Oh, how I long for a place, a sense of home, a place to be who I fully am.

Yes, I am the Samaritan, for I am also woman. She was considered a second class citizen in her time, no matter what her heritage. As woman, she was to be silent. Her thoughts and feelings were to remain unarticulated, buried within her, a none-person, a property, her value determined only by the worth others might impose or just as arbitrarily take away. Yes, I am the woman of Samaria, for even today many of my sisters still earn only \$.60 to every dollar made by a man of the dominant culture. Yes, I am the Samaritan women. My sisters are called all manner of disparaging, demeaning names in places set up to help the poor among them, such as welfare offices. They are demeaned in other areas as well: on MTV, on street corners, in offices, aboard Naval vessels, in Senate chambers. I feel their pain, for it is mine as well. Violent words are used against us, words which discredit my personhood as a woman and my wholeness as an individual -- violent words, far too often matched with violent actions: assault, abuse, rape and even death.

No-body knows the trouble I see, (spoken)

No-body knows my sorrow.

But I am the woman of Samaria in an even more profound way, for there in the text is the me that is bound by my own inadequacies, my own insecurities, my own sense of being unimportant. Yes, the Samaritan woman reveals a me that would like to avoid some of the serious subjects and issues of life present today (AIDS, racism, domestic violence, heterosexism, militarism, homelessness), and remain outside, non-engaged, comfortable. She reveals a me that is resistant to changes in my daily life or to having my traditional props and roles removed -- a me whose life at times is caught or taken up with routine chores and tasks -- a me who would rather retreat and hide-out than confront and challenge. It would make my life so much easier to remain silent, hidden in the background. Yes, she reveals a me who avoids the gaze of another, because it's inconvenient or

embarrassing -- the me that evades some human interactions because they don't seem quite proper -- the me that avoids the outstretched hand because it's just too close, too personal a contact . She reveals a me who, despite a desperate yearning for a place of belonging, of love, of home, of self-definition, fails to make the simplest of human gestures: a greeting of welcome to a stranger, offering water to a thirsty traveler, giving a kinder response to "Can you spare some change ma'am". Reluctantly, I can see myself, as the Samaritan woman who comes again and again alone to a stagnant well where water does not flow, rather than risk becoming a well-spring myself.

No-body knows the trouble I see, (sung)

No-body knows but Jesus;

No-body knows but Jesus. (spoken)

I was surprised to see Him there. As I approached, I didn't speak. Women and men don't address one another, especially in public, and besides, he was a Jew, and of course Samaritans and Jews never speak to each other because of our history of hatred, our past misunderstandings. We Samaritans are labeled outcasts, not "pure" like the Jews, because we've intermarried.

So why was he there, at the well of my ancestors? He appeared tired. It was very hot. But I kept to myself, not looking at him, as I lowered the bucket into the well. And then, he spoke to me. "Give me a drink." I have to admit that I was in shock. A stranger, a Jew nonetheless, speaking to a Samaritan, to a women, speaking to me . Unheard of, and I told him so! Perhaps the heat of the sun had really affected him. He smiled at me, and said, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is who is saying to you 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

Living water? What? I had no time for riddles; besides, he had no bucket from which to draw this living water of which he spoke. But, something about him held my attention. Maybe it was the sound of hope, of possibility, in his voice -- something that was foreign to my ears. Perhaps it was the fact that He didn't seem to mind that we were of different sexes, came from different cultures or were of different religious traditions. He engaged me further, gesturing toward the water in the well. "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst." Now that had possibilities. Now you know, I don't like coming to the well everyday to draw water for household chores and cooking. If this stranger could perform a little magic and relieve me of this daily chore, then this gift would be worth a great deal. So I said, "Give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw this water."

But then he asked me a peculiar question, as if he already knew the answer: "Go, get your husband and come back". I choose not to lie, and assumed my usual low-risk manner, thinking my response would end the conversation. "I don't have a husband now, I replied". I had actually had five, but that wasn't important.

He continued, however, and acknowledged that I had answered him truthfully. Then He proceeded to tell about my five former husbands. Who would know this? Who would know about the difficulties of my past, or about my troubling present circumstances? This man was so different from any other I had encountered. He made me feel as though I had value. He didn't condemn me like others had, He just told me the truth. He knew my background, yet accepted me. When I had failed to offer him a drink, He nevertheless offered water to me. While I sought plain water for routine yet repeated cleansing and quenching, He stood willing to share eternal comfort and refreshment. Something inside of me was stirred and touched. Then, he absolutely turns my life inside out, revealing my carefully constructed avoidances, revealing myself to myself. "Get your husband". Those words left me with no retreats, no hiding places. I am compelled to acknowledge Him as fully human, perhaps fully..... "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet".

From there our conversation went much deeper. We discussed worship traditions, we debated the sacredness of worship sites, we explored the nature of salvation. How bold I was to pose such a theological challenge! But he seemed to enjoy the challenge. He told me of the transformations of traditions, practices, and faiths that were coming. He spoke of the union of all believers, who would worship God in spirit and truth. He spoke to me in words of comfort and affirmation. He embraced me as a sister in the faith and as an equal. I wouldn't have believed it possible if I hadn't been there myself. I was changing. In this spirit and truth, I was being accepted. I felt very much at home for the first time in my life. My inner thirst was dissipating. Who was this man who would risked so much, who defied so many rules?

Fill my cup let it overflow,                   (sung)  
Fill my cup let it overflow,  
Fill my cup let it overflow,  
Let it overflow with love.

I told him, "I know the Messiah is coming, the one who is called the Christ. When He comes He will show us all things." He smiled, as if he wanted to say more, paused, then continued. "I who speak to you now am He." I couldn't believe my ears!

This was the Messiah speaking to me, revealing himself to me -- a woman! I can not express the transformative power of that revelation in my life. Even the approach of his companions, who stood in shock, seeing us together in conversation, yet not speaking, could not rattle me. I didn't fully understand, but could he really be the Messiah? I got so excited, I had to tell someone -- everyone. I had more courage now. I wasn't afraid. The water pots could wait. This was more important. I felt free. I had to speak. I had to shout, "Come and see the man who told me

everything I ever did, yet accepted me." I ran through the streets of the town, telling them of this man I had met out by Jacob's well. Some came and listened to him, and then they, too, believed as I did. Ah, it was a glorious day -- a day that changed my life forever!

Glory Hallelujah!

(sung)

Since I laid my Burdens down. (repeat )

Yes, I can be the Samaritan woman before an encounter with Jesus. Spending my days doling out bucket after bucket from a lifeless well. Submerged under stagnant waters at the bottom of the well, I could give in to the destructive forces of religion, race, gender, class, or nation. In vain efforts to survive, protect and defend myself, I could also deny water to others (this is, deny their humanity) and in so doing dehydrate myself. But, like the Samaritan woman, I choose to drink of the living waters offered me, to save myself from lying dormant under still waters, to let these waters flow through me as a wellspring of hope -- giving me life! Living life! Strengthening me to challenge injustice and the destructive forces of community. To challenge those things that deny the humanity of others, whether within the institutions of higher education, the local government, the military, support organizations, or the church. I must go and tell. I can not be silent. I must speak out, for not to do so is to deny the living water that wells up from deep within me.

Jesus, in the simplest of human gestures, through acknowledging our shared humanity, surges over the barricades of the routine in our lives, washes away the masked identities we have clung to and reclaims isolated shores within us. Ironically, Jesus was also seen as an outcast, a maverick in his time. At Jacob's Well, one outcast offers another outcast refreshment -- refreshment for her soul! "Woman, if you only knew how much God has to give and how much God wants to give it

and just who I am, all you would have to do is to ask and I would give you water to make you alive. If you have it you will be satisfied forever because this water wells up from inside you, a never ending source of power, of strength, of refreshment, of life." And so it is offered to me today, to all of us.

The encounter at the well presents not just a promise of individual redemption, of a home where one may feel a part and beloved, it is a demonstration of a power lying dormant within us to transform our lives and those of others. It counsels us against permitting ceremony or tradition, perceptions or regulations, fear and misunderstanding, bigotries and oppressions to become impediments to the spirit. At Jacob's well, Jesus becomes personal and intimate, both fully human and fully divine in relationship with the woman of Samaria, revealing to all that God is a God of relationships, and that the transformative power of the Gospel is found in the simplest yet the most profound of human gestures: a word of kindness, a listening ear, a knowing nod, a simple touch of comfort, a piece of food for a hungry heart, an offer of drink for a thirsty soul. In the midst of our various troubles and sorrows, those gestures bring others and us into relationship with one another, but they also liberate the Spirit for the healing and restoration of our own identities and that of humanity. Brought into right relationships with others and thus with God, we -- like Jesus and the Samaritan woman -- become a life-affirming well-spring of hope and power that quenches thirsty souls.

Glory Hallelujah!

(sung)

Since I laid my burdens down. (repeat )

Be filled! Amen.