

# WELLSPRING

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Sermon Series Devotional

6/20/2021-7/18/2021



"The Family of God," a phrase that is used a lot, sometimes with little thought. When you get past the idealized imagery, the truth of the matter is that in today's world (and yesterday's as well) all members of the family have not been seen or treated with equal value. This was true in the early church as well. In I Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul talks about the Church as a body, but different parts of the body were already claiming superiority over other parts. Paul points out that it isn't the way the Body is supposed to function or value each other. To make matters worse, several scriptures have been used as 'clobber passages' often poorly translated with selective hermeneutics. Over the next several weeks, we'll explore God's vision of women in the Body of Christ and how they have been viewed, treated, and valued while unpacking a thoroughly biblical understanding of the Church.

## **Suggested Use**

Our devotional is designed to be a resource for you and can be used in a variety of ways. Each week, you will be provided a series of questions, reflections, and prompts to engage with. You can complete them all in one setting or divide them up throughout the week. Whether you are using it in a group or for your own personal time, we suggest keeping a journal that can be used to respond to the questions each week and for prayers.

## **Week One -Where it all started**

With any exploration of a phenomenon it is most helpful to go back to the beginning. How were things when everything started? What was God's original intent? What was the interpretation? Where did we go from there? How did things go wrong or right?

### **Read Genesis 1 and 2**

1. How was the story of Adam and Eve first explained to you? What did you think? What did you think it meant?
2. In light of the sermon for this week, does it change the way you look at this story? How does it affect the way you see yourself in your relationships?
3. If you are female, how does this affect the way you see yourself?

### **Read Galatians 3:23-29**

1. In this scripture, Paul talked about a previous "order" of things that existed that everyone was subject to...what was it? How does "this is the way it has always been" hold us in place, resistant to transformation? What keeps you from thinking differently about emotional things?
2. What does Paul say has always been the case in God's Kingdom? Take some time to think through the implications.
3. Does this mean everyone is the same or everyone is of the same value?
4. Our world is very fragmented. Us vs. them. Fear of the Other. Protectiveness and verbal assault. What are the divisions you see and feel? Who are you most afraid of and why? Who do you feel most threatened by?

### **Read II Corinthians 5:16-20**

1. Paul said they were at a turning point on how to view the world. Why? (see vs. 14,15) What changed?
2. Reconciliation is often thought of as "mending fences." What if it is also "seeing differently"?
3. How does seeing other people in a different light bring us closer to God?
4. Can you remember a time in your life when you saw things differently than when you were growing up? Think of a time you saw someone who was different from you in a new light. What happened?

## Week Two - Honest Conversation about Women's value

One of the issues related to women's role in church life has become one of acknowledgement of worth and acceptance or leadership. Sadly, even from the time of Jesus, there was an effort to exclude people that weren't considered acceptable. Begin thinking about times you have seen people (especially women) ignored, excluded, overlooked, or shut out because other people wanted to keep things the same.

### Read Mark 9:33-41

1. What were the disciples proposing? What was Jesus's response? Where do you see the same thing happening today within church life?
2. What does this scripture say about the absolute need to agree on everything or even be a part of the same outreach?
3. What is the general principle that is stated about the posture we need to take toward each other? (see vs. 33-37) Do you find that hard to do?
4. What is a current example of people wanting to preserve their "Insider" privilege?

### Read John 8:1-7

1. Usually we only focus on Jesus's response to the woman and his forgiveness, but think about this...they are about to stone a woman for being caught in adultery. Who gets caught in adultery alone? Where was the man? According to law, the man was supposed to receive the same punishment. What does this say about their view and valuing of the woman?
2. What does this say about the establishment being willing to protect the man?

**Activity:** This week, intentionally have some discussions with people in your life (men, women and youth) about times you have seen this kind of double standard and judgmentalism. What feelings does it prompt within you? Does any of your conversation alter your perception of things?

## Week Three - Should Women Be Silent?

The scripture this week is one of the most divisive in Church life. Denominations and churches have split over their interpretation of this text. Hateful arguments have ensued and complete church cultures formed based on how this is interpreted. This week we'll take a close look at what it really says.

**Read I Corinthians 14:26-36 (in Revised Standard Version if possible...try biblegateway.com)**

1. What is your first impression of what Paul was teaching the Corinthian church about women's place in the Church? How does it make you feel? How does it match up with your previous church background (if you have one)?
2. How do you reconcile the apparent teaching with Paul's instruction for "each one" to bring a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation?
3. How does vs. 36 make sense in light of Paul apparently counseling that women should keep silent? Why do you think an expression at the beginning of vs. 36 in many Bible versions was left out that essentially means, "you have to be kidding!" (See RSV translation)
4. In I Corinthians 12:4,5 Paul talks about women prophesying and praying in public (set aside the cultural customs of head coverings). Both were public speech. How does this square with the teachings that women should keep silent?
5. What are the implications when women find they have spiritual gifts of preaching and teaching?

**Activity:** Spend some time making a list of women you have seen speaking, teaching, leading in worship. How have their lives impacted you? Consider writing a note of gratitude to them.

## Week Four - Hidden Figures

We often assume that the more a name is mentioned in the Bible, the more importance it has. But that's not necessarily true. Sometimes there is not a lot of background available but there can be a lot of impact. We'll look at some of these impactful followers of Christ this week.

### Read Romans 16:1-2

1. What was Phoebe's title?
2. This title has been assumed to be reserved for men alone. What does it mean that Paul considered her to be a deacon? He describes her as a helper and patron. How is this significant?
3. What do you think the significance is that Paul chose her to deliver the letter to the Romans?

### Read Romans 16:3-5a

1. How does Paul define the role of Priscilla (and her husband?) In what esteem did he hold them?
2. It is believed by many scholars that Priscilla may have been the first female preacher and teacher within the Church as well as being a missionary with her husband. Why do we not hear much about that?
3. It is also widely believed that Priscilla may have authored the book of Hebrews in the New Testament. It is the only book that has anonymous authorship. Why would her authorship be suppressed?

### Read Romans 16:7

1. Who was in prison with Paul? What significance does Paul give them? (Apostle means to be a messenger from God, founder of the Church.)
2. What do you think it means that up through today, Junia's name has been changed to a masculine name?
3. There is an article on the internet entitled, "All Apostles Were Men, Sorry Junia." Why do you think that effort continues?

### Read Acts 16:13-15

1. What is Lydia's role in the church? Do you know what the significance of purple cloth is?
2. Why do you think the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox Churches have bestowed sainthood to these women and yet they are barely mentioned in protestant churches?

**Activity:** Write a letter, email, text, to one of the women you listed last week.

## Week Five - Submitting to One Another

This is another misused scripture. It is not uncommon for women who are preparing for marriage to specifically request that this scripture not be read during their ceremony. This is due to a wide misunderstanding. This is a classic example of people picking and choosing what they want to focus on and ignoring other parts of scripture. The command in this scripture is one no one is inclined to follow.

### **Read Ephesians 5:21-33**

1. What does submit mean? Why do you think it is something we try to avoid?
2. What do you think it means to submit to one another?
3. Who is given the bigger directive? Is this significant?

**Activity:** Write down areas of your life that you have trouble giving up control. Then, make a list of what could be gained if you did.