

**Walking Humbly and Doing Justice**  
**based on Luke 7:44-8:3, David Jahnke, 1/29/17**

My sermon today was inspired by a few days with some very special women in Nicaragua while I was on my mission trip, along with the millions who marched last weekend around the nation to make sure that we do not turn back the clocks regarding minority groups which have been historically oppressed or regarding health care or education; and those who marched with a very different perspective on Friday but who also care about health care, education and the salvation of the weak.

Raising our voice in a public manner is at the heart of American democracy and at the heart of Christianity along with praying with our hands and feet. This carries on the movement of the Spirit to empower women going all the way back to the Old Testament and the prophetess Deborah who becoming a judge-- the leader of Israel at the time. So Israel had a female leader more than 2500 years ago.

But a new way for women really came into life with Jesus and his movement. And Luke takes special care to highlight this. One thing we have to acknowledge is that this spiritual movement in history had to face patriarchal culture which until the last century submitted them. Deborah's power was a one-time thing for women who had to worship behind a separating barrier at the synagogue and temple and were not allowed into the inner circles of the rabbis or political leaders.

This changed with Jesus according to Luke who tells us that as "Jesus went on through cities and villages bearing the good news of the kingdom of God, the twelve disciples were with him, *2 as well as* many women who had been cured." So women were a part of the rabbi Jesus' inner circle.

We see a personal example of this and the scandal of it a couple of chapters later with the story of Mary and Martha who welcomed Jesus and the disciples and probably some women too into their home. Martha is upset that she has to do all of the women's work of cooking and cleaning while her sister Mary sits at Jesus' feet and listens to him. Martha complains to Jesus who tells her that Mary has chosen the right thing and it will not be taken from her.

This inclusion and empowerment of women culminates in Jesus' resurrection with his revealing himself first to women and charging Mary Magdelene to be the first to proclaim his resurrection which was the heart of the church's gospel. Mary was the first evangelist of the resurrection.

So the demonic power of patriarchal rule was broken down by Jesus. And it was broken by the early church as well, through women gathering together with men and prophesying and having a hymn or teaching according to both Acts and 1 Corinthians. At Pentecost, Peter said the Spirit was being poured out upon all flesh, men and women, young and old. And in Corinth, Paul speaks of women being so filled with the Spirit that Paul had to remind them of the importance of doing things in an orderly manner.

I need to stop here and just ask you to think about what this would have meant to women. They would have never seen women like them speaking or interpreting the Word of God in a public setting and now they were. They had not been involved in political, philosophical or religious discussions in an important setting and now they were. Nothing less than the gifts of God within them had been squashed or profoundly limited. And now those gifts were coming alive for the good of the world. They were finally able to live into the calling of God and experience the fulfillment and joy of participating in his Word and his work in the world.

A couple of weeks ago, I saw the Spirit moving to empower women in Nicaragua. First we met Julietta-- a Fedicamp leader who has pretty old and had a disabled hand but that did not keep her from leading her community's farmers into better practices. She also hosts a church service at her home every week!

Next we met Isabella who rides her motorcycle in the mountains to rural villages in order to teach people how to farm better and support them. She told me about her first fiancée who told her that she would have to quit her job once they got married to which she replied that they would not be getting married. I told her how brave this was and that her country needed her doing this work.

A couple nights later, we met the directors of a women's shelter and anti-violence organization at a dinner. When the meal was finished, the ladies introduced themselves with the professionals sharing a little bit about their organization and their clients sharing a part of their story. They were so well-spoken.

One of the clients was 23 and she had an eight-year old . When she went into labor with her second child, her abusive husband refused to take her to the hospital so she got on a bike to ride a few miles, only to have a miscarriage. This was the last straw for her and through the shelter and the ladies' support, she escaped the abuse and learned the skills to become independent.

The three professional women who founded the shelter are a psychologist; the second a lawyer and psychologist and the third is an agronomist. They all could gain much more for themselves in different work but instead they sacrifice all of that for the sake of helping their oppressed sisters. One of them will be in NJ in a couple of months.

Here is just some of what they do: 1. Counseling, support and emergency shelter for abused women. They educate and train them to become independent so that they can get out of abusive relationships. 2. In order to support this, they provide micro-loans of money for urban women and livestock for rural women, along with showing them how to improve their gardens. When their livestock reproduce, they are asked to pay forward the loan by giving one of the offspring to a neighbor to build up their prosperity.

3. They have a radio show which gives voice to the huge problem of violence against women. 4. They hold regular demonstrations and marches not only for their main purpose but also to 5. call women to care for their own health through regular checkups and mammograms. And 6. after the massacre in Orlando, they also started standing up for the basic rights and the prevention of violence against gays and lesbians.

Now to my main point and my charges for you. Luke tells us that the women Jesus was with provided for them out of their resources. Jesus had welcomed and empowered them-- the powerless and the meek-- and they, in turn, gave back, like these women in Nicaragua are doing for those without the same education and intellect as them.

We too have been blessed with strong minds and good educations, so will we bless others? Will we provide for and magnify Jesus' Way in the world? Will we empower the brothers and sisters of Jesus put down by this world through our love and hospitality and mercy; through helping them to know that they were wonderfully and beautifully made for great work in this world?

This is what the marches over the last two weekends were about, when participants were at their best. They stood up for their beliefs and made them known. We must do the same in the years ahead because it is a critical time for the church. So I am asking you to deeply consider your values and your beliefs. And if you believe in what we professed this morning regarding God and His Son, then 2017 is a year to investigate more seriously what that means.

For me at this time, belief in Jesus is going to send me out of this sacred space to walk humbly and march boldly to do justice-- it will mean magnifying his beautiful image in the one now being rejected through coming alongside and supporting them. And it will mean rebuking powers and principalities that seek to demean, divide and destroy.

We have a lot of serious reflection and work before us. So open your heart to the Spirit's leading you both inwardly into a deeper understanding of what you believe and value; and be open to Her leading you outwardly to stand up for those things in the world. To the God of all love and grace be all the power and the glory now and forevermore.

