

“Faith Matters” # 26 – enGENDERing JUSTICE – Dec. 10, 2017

Sexuality and gender are much debated in these LGBTQ2 days, even in the Presbyterian Church now. That debate is being widely fueled by the willingness of women to speak out after being harassed, abused or raped.

In the Church, one of the difficulties in the debate about gender is that most languages cannot speak of God without limiting God to being male. Genesis makes it clear that humans, both male and female, were created in God’s image.¹ And even at that, “image” does not mean gender; image can refer to being creative, as God is, loving, longsuffering, angry, forgiving, trustworthy, and much more.

In male-dominated Old Testament times, God spoke through men – men like Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah and the prophets. In the New Testament we catch a glimpse of how the Apostle Paul ranked males and females reflecting his Jewish background. He wrote: “Man... is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man”²

It was Jesus who dared to permit women to speak out in public. Think of the day when his disciples found him conversing with a woman at the well. He encouraged her to spread his word to others. He responded to the cry of the widow of Nain, and commended Mary who assumed the role of a disciple by sitting at his feet.³ Because two women were at Jesus’ tomb, it was they, not men, who were the first to testify to his resurrection. They brought the good news to the men hiding in the Upper Room.

Following Jesus’ example to permit women to be among his followers, Paul sent his greetings to the woman who served as a deaconess in the early church³ and to the women who, as he said, “risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.”⁴

The challenge for the church has been to follow Jesus’ example regarding the role of women. Indeed, the challenge now for society as a whole is to acknowledge how it has turned a deaf ear to the plight of vulnerable women.

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(¹ Genesis 1:26^f; ² I Corinthians 11:7; ³ Luke 10:39; ⁴ Romans 16:1^{ff}; ⁵ vs. 3)