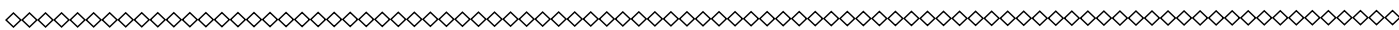




Pastor of the International Baptist Church in Cologne Germany.

Sermon Brief
Text: Luke 8:1-3
Title: God's Church: Affirming Women
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Seeking to faithfully proclaim the whole council of God in scripture!



INTRODUCTION

All around the world, “International Women’s Day”¹ is being celebrated today. Since World War II, the celebration has gradually spread to include most countries in our world. It is distinct from the so-called Women’s Liberation Movement, and focuses on positive affirmations of the contributions of women to society, the family, and other social institutions. Also, it is a time for calling for social justice for women in our world today, which much too often abuses and mistreats women.

Thus today is a good opportunity for our church to focus attention on the significant contribution of women to the life of our church. The simple truth is that without the work of women in our church, IBC Cologne would not exist today. As your pastor, I want to declare at the beginning of the sermon: “Ladies, we need you and what you contribute in time and effort to the life of our church. We therefore affirm you and your preciousness in the eyes of our God!”

The scripture text for today’s message comes from Luke 8:1-3, with a special focus on verses two and three.²

1 Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, *2 as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, 3 and Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.*

This text provides a remarkable insight into the role of women in early Christianity. Luke declares that several women traveled with Jesus and the Twelve through their preaching and teaching all over Galilee. These women played an important role in helping Jesus and the disciples carry out their mission.

The setting for this passage is the opening section of a larger unit of material from 8:1 through 9:20.³ His message was focused on preaching and proclaiming the Kingdom of God (v. 1), and the Twelve disciples were assisting Him in that mission. Throughout Galilee people would hear the message of the power of the Kingdom to change lives (cf. 8:4-21); they saw that power at work healing people from death threatening illnesses (cf. 8:22-56). With the group of men and women traveling around the countryside together, the Galilean population could readily observe both the teaching and example of Jesus in affirming the importance of women in the Kingdom of God.

In unusual manner Luke mentions the leading women of the group by name: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna. But he indicates that many other women were a part of the group. With this mentioning of them here, they “disappear” from the narrative until chapter twenty three:

49 But all his acquaintances, *including the women who had followed him from Galilee*, stood at a distance, watching these things.

¹In German it is called “Weltfrauentag.”

²Greek NT: 8:1 Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ καθεξῆς καὶ αὐτὸς διώδευεν κατὰ πόλιν καὶ κώμην κηρύσσων καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενος τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ οἱ δώδεκα σὺν αὐτῷ, 8:2 καὶ γυναῖκες τινες αἱ ἦσαν τεθεραπευμένοι ἀπὸ πνευμάτων πονηρῶν καὶ ἀσθενειῶν, Μαρία ἢ καλουμένη Μαγδαληνὴ, ἀφ’ ἧς δαιμόνια ἐπτὰ ἐξεληλύθει, 8:3 καὶ Ἰωάννα γυνὴ Χουζᾶ ἐπιτρόπου Ἡρώδου καὶ Σουσάννα καὶ ἕτεραι πολλαί, αἵτινες διηκόνουν αὐτοῖς ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς.

³Itinerant Preaching with the Twelve and the Women (8:1–9:20)

The material of this section (a little teaching, but mostly miraculous deeds: calming a storm, exorcism, healing, raising the dead, feeding) is set by means of an opening framework pericope into the context of Jesus’ itinerant preaching of the kingdom of God. This happens in the company of the Twelve, who participate in the mission (9:1–6) and come to see that Jesus is the Christ of God (9:20), and in the company of a body of women who take care of the needs of the traveling group out of their own means and thus contribute to the mission, and whose presence with Jesus from early days plays its own special role in the apostolic function of guaranteeing the total transfer into the life of the church of the significance of the ministry of Jesus.

[Source: John Nolland, vol. 35A, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1:1-9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 363.]

55 *The women who had come with him from Galilee* followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. 56 Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

In both references the women are referred to as *those who had followed him* (γυναῖκες αἱ συνακολουθοῦσαι αὐτῷ ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας) / *come with* (αἱ γυναῖκες, αἵτινες ἦσαν συνεληλυθυῖαι ἐκ τῆς Γαλιλαίας αὐτῷ) Jesus from Galilee. The nature of the verbal expressions indicates their having traveled extensively with Jesus not just in Galilee, but all the way south to Judea and Jerusalem. In chapter twenty four, they are an important part of those at the tomb of Jesus on Easter Sunday morning:

24 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, *they* came to the tomb, taking the spices that *they* had prepared. 2 *They* found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when *they* went in, *they* did not find the body. 4 While *they* were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside *them*. 5 The *women* were terrified and bowed *their* faces to the ground, but the men said to *them*, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. 6 Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, 7 that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.” 8 Then *they* remembered his words, 9 and returning from the tomb, *they* told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now it was *Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them* who told this to the apostles. 11 But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. 12 But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Jesus’ mother is the new name to the list of women. Mark 15:40-41 provides some additional insight here, and may be one of the sources that Luke drew upon in his narrative:

40 There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. 41 *These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.*

With Mark’s narrative we learn the names of two more of the women: another Mary and Salome. From Mark’s and Luke’s accounts it becomes clear that women played a significant role in Jesus’ public ministry. They helped Him in His ministry and supported His work financially. They bravely stood with Jesus during His crucifixion and then sought to take care of His body in the tomb. They were rewarded by being the first people who saw the resurrected Jesus.⁴ All through Luke’s Gospel account, women play an important role and are highlighted more prominently by Luke than by the other gospel writers.



Of those mentioned by name in our text, we only know a little about Mary Magdalene, as is described in *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*:

Mary Magdalene, i.e., Mary of Magdala, a town on the western shore of the Lake of Tiberias. She is for the first time noticed in Luke 8:3 as one of the women who “ministered to Christ of their substance.” Their motive was that of gratitude for deliverances he had wrought for them. Out of Mary were cast seven demons. Gratitude to her great Deliverer prompted her to become his follower. These women accompanied him also on his last journey to Jerusalem (Matthew 27:55; Mark 15:41; Luke 23:55). They stood near the cross. There

⁴Luke establishes a deliberate parallel between the apostles and the women (his gospel is marked by such paralleling of men and women: Zechariah and Mary in Luke 1–2; the woman of Zarephath and Naaman in 4:25–27; perhaps the demoniac and Simon’s mother-in-law in 4:31–39; the centurion and the widow of Nain in 7:1–17; the man with sheep and the woman with coins in 15:3–10; perhaps the vindicated widow and the justified tax-collector in 18:1–14). Like the apostles (cf. Acts 1:21–22) these women were with Jesus during his ministry and were part of the group of those to whom the resurrected Jesus appeared (Luke 24:22, 33, 36–49). They saw Jesus’ execution (23:49), were the first to encounter the empty tomb (24:3), and were sole recipients of the message that Jesus was alive once more (24:4–8). In fact the women are Luke’s only witnesses to the burial of Jesus (23:55), and thus only they are brought into connection with all four stages of the traditional confession preserved in 1 Cor 15:3–5 (death, burial, resurrection [=empty tomb], and resurrection appearance). No doubt it is an impulse going back to the historical Jesus which allows the women to have such a prominent role (cf. Hengel, “Maria Magdalena,” 243; the more usual place for women in Judaism is reflected in John 4:27; Pirke Abot 1:5 and cf. Str-B, 2:438, though a more complex state of affairs is demonstrated in recent studies such as that of B. J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue* [BJS 36; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1982]). Nevertheless, it is an exaggeration to suggest that the women appear on the same level as the men (as Grundmann, 174; Marshall, 316): the women are drawn into and support the apostolic witnessing function; but their only independent attempt at bearing witness is received as an idle tale (24:11). [Source: John Nolland, vol. 35A, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1:1-9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 365.]

Mary remained till all was over, and the body was taken down and laid in Joseph's tomb. Again, in the earliest dawn of the first day of the week she, with Salome and Mary the mother of James (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2), came to the sepulchre, bringing with them sweet spices, that they might anoint the body of Jesus. They found the sepulchre empty, but saw the "vision of angels" (Matthew 28:5). She hastens to tell Peter and John, who were probably living together at this time (John 20:1,2), and again immediately returns to the sepulchre. There she lingers thoughtfully, weeping at the door of the tomb. The risen Lord appears to her, but at first she knows him not. His utterance of her name "Mary" recalls her to consciousness, and she utters the joyful, reverent cry, "Rabboni." She would fain cling to him, but he forbids her, saying, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father." This is the last record regarding Mary of Magdala, who now returned to Jerusalem. The idea that this Mary was "the woman who was a sinner," or that she was unchaste, is altogether groundless.

Her being mentioned first is probably due to the prominent role she played at the tomb of Jesus.⁵ She had been cured of a serve case of demon possession by Jesus.

Joanna is mentioned by Luke in two places and is identified as the wife of Chuza, a steward in the palace of Herod. As John Nolland describes,⁶

Joanna is mentioned because as wife of Herod's steward she is a person of substance. Luke is quick to mention the fact that Christian influence has penetrated to high places (cf. Acts 13:26–39; 13:1, 7, 12; 18:8; 19:31; etc). This may be partly responsible for Luke's preference for the list he uses over that available to him in Mark 15:40–41. The mention of Herod's steward also fits well with the role of Herod later in the section (9:7–8). Though a married woman, Joanna is apparently traveling with Jesus' group away from her husband (cf. 18:29?). Chuza is otherwise unknown, but the name occurs in Aramaic inscriptions.

Her husband Chuza as a "steward" occupied an important leadership place in Herod's government.⁷ The ministry of Jesus had penetrated into Herod's very own household with powerful impact.

The third named individual, Susanna, is not mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, and thus little is known about her today. But her being mentioned without any explanation suggests that she was known in first century Christian circles.⁸ Luke's "many others" (ἕτεροι πολλὰ) suggests a rather large group of women who accompanied Jesus and the disciples.

From this text I want to affirm three points today in affirmation of the women in our church on this International Women's Day. These insights both affirm you as women and offer a challenging example of service for you to follow.

BODY

I. Jesus valued the ministry of women

From this text and from related texts in the four gospels, one can understand that Jesus valued women in ways that went beyond the traditional Judaism that he grew up in. Craig Blomberg effectively summarizes the Gospel accounts:

The first-century Jewish world shared many of the cultural assumptions of the Old Testament concerning women. In the Hellenistic world, women at times gained greater wealth, freedom, or privilege. Against these prevailing cultures, **Jesus' own teachings and practices stand**



⁵The place of Mary Magdalene at the head of the list (cf. Mark 15:40, 47; 16:1) is probably due to her prominent place as first (?) witness of the resurrection/John 20:11–18; cf. Matt 28:1, 9–10; cf. Hengel, "Maria Magdalena," 248–56). Magdalene = from Magdala. The location of Magdala is unknown, unless it is to be identified with Tarichaeae, a town on the west coast of the Sea of Galilee whose name in later rabbinic writings appears as Migdāl nūinayyā. (איגור לדגג). The number "seven" points to the severity of the demonized state (cf. 11:24–26). [John Nolland, vol. 35A, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1:1-9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 366.]

⁶John Nolland, vol. 35A, *Word Biblical Commentary : Luke 1:1-9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 366.

⁷37.86 ἐπίτροπος a, ου m: a person in charge of supervising workers — 'foreman.' λέγει ὁ κύριος τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος τῷ ἐπιτρόπῳ αὐτοῦ, Κάλεσον τοὺς ἐργάτας 'the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, Call the workers' Mt 20.8. The term 'foreman' may be rendered as 'one who commands the workers' or 'one who assigns work to the workers.' [Source: Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996, c1989), 1:481.]

⁸Susanna does not surface elsewhere in the NT, but must have been of some importance in the early church. Hengel ("Maria Magdalena", 248–51) has demonstrated that NT lists normally imply a ranking, but offers no adequate basis for setting this within the context of alleged competing claims to authority and prestige in the early Christian community. In the present setting, the addition of an unspecified number of additional women who shared the same experience (also at 24:10) has a leveling effect and suggests that the naming has to do, not with privilege, but with the existence of definite specifiable witnesses (cf. Deut 19:15; Acts 1:21–22). Grammatically it is not clear whether the "many others" had necessarily experienced healing from Jesus or not, nor whether the support group consisted of all the women or only of the "many others." [Source= John Nolland, vol. 35A, *Word Biblical Commentary : Luke 1:1-9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 366.]

out as radically liberating. God highly favored Mary with the privilege of bearing and rearing his Son; the most detailed accounts of Christ's birth seem to reflect Mary's (and Elizabeth's) perspective and may well have been transmitted by her (Luke 1-2). Several of the recipients of Jesus' healing were women (Jairus's daughter — Matt 9:23-26; and the crippled woman — Luke 13:10-17). In two instances their faith is particularly praised (the hemorrhaging woman — Matt 9:22), even when one is not a Jew but a Syrophenician (Matt 15:21-28 anticipating the church's ministry to Gentiles). In another episode, the woman healed was Jewish but still illustrates Jesus' ministry of compassion to the outcasts of society (Simon's mother-in-law [Matt 8:14-15]), as the third in a series of such miracles (cf. Matt 8:1-4, 5-13). In the same spirit, Jesus forgives a notoriously sinful woman who demonstrates her repentance through her love, even when she expresses it in culturally suspect ways (Luke 7:36-50). The later, similar actions of Mary of Bethany elicit Jesus' praise in language evocative of the memorializing of Jesus himself in the Lord's Supper (Mark 14:9)!

Women play an important role among Jesus' followers. An unspecified number forms part of the larger company of disciples that regularly follows him on the road and forms his "support team" (Luke 8:1-3; cf. Acts 1:14-15). Jesus specifically praises Mary of Bethany for choosing to "sit at his feet" and learn from him (Luke 10:38-42) — a quasi-technical reference to a disciple being trained by a rabbi and a practice usually denied to women in Jewish circles. Martha's traditional preoccupation for domestic chores receives only censure! Jesus chooses women as the first witnesses to his resurrection (Luke 24:1-12), even though their testimony would have been thrown out of a legal court, and Mary Magdalene becomes the "apostle to the (male) apostles" (John 20:1-2, 18). No woman appears among the company of the Twelve; but it is not clear if this reflects any timeless principle besides a commitment to present the gospel to a given culture in ways which will most likely speed its acceptance.

Jesus' ethics preserve and intensify the strong Old Testament emphasis on sexual propriety (Matt 5:27-30; 19:1-12), but for the first time make clear that women and men will be judged by identical standards (Matt 5:32; Mark 10:11-12). Luke frequently pairs episodes in which men and women function in identical ways. Both Elizabeth and Zechariah praise under the Spirit's inspiration (Luke 1:41-45, 67-79). Both Simeon and Anna prophesy that in Christ they have seen Israel's salvation (2:25-38). Male and female cripples receive identical healings (13:10-17; 14:1-6). The parables of the mustard seed and leaven (like the lost sheep and coin), each make the same point but alternate between male and female protagonists (13:18-21; 15:1-10). Clearly Luke wants to highlight God's care for both genders and Jesus' concern to relate to both. The story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman perhaps epitomizes his commitment to revolutionizing the lot of the disenfranchised of his day. Despite strong cultural taboos against any social exchange between a Jewish holy man and a sexually promiscuous Samaritan woman, Jesus speaks to this woman in private, affirms her personhood and leads her to faith in himself and to service as an evangelist (John 4:1-42).

The group of women in our text traveled with Jesus and the disciples as valued members of the 'team.' They received respect and were given freedom to participate and contribute to the spreading of the good news of the Kingdom of God.

This valuing of women and their contribution to the gospel continued in apostolic Christianity of the first century. Blomberg provides a generally helpful survey of this material in the New Testament:

Acts. With the arrival of Pentecost comes the fulfillment of Joel's prediction about the egalitarian outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2:17-21). Women as well as men prophesy. Apart from the ministry of the New Testament writers, Christian prophecy does not supplement or contradict the canon but applies spiritual truth to specific contexts in the lives of God's people. To the extent that contemporary preaching involves this spiritual gift, gifted women must be encouraged to preach. Acts also describes a significant Christian woman teacher, Priscilla, who with her husband Aquila enabled Apollos to learn and disseminate correct doctrine (18:26). Inasmuch as her name more often than not appears before her husband's (cf. vv. 18, 19), she may well have been the more prominent.

Women in Acts continue to receive other spiritual blessings. As in the Gospels, they benefit from miraculous healings (the slave girl — 16:16-18) and resurrections (slave Tabitha — 9:36-42). Lydia is the first-mentioned European convert (17:11-15); Paul's willingness to preach to a group of God-fearing women without any men present itself carries on Jesus' tradition of boundary breaking. Damaris, a woman, is among the few to respond favorably to Paul's Areopagus address (17:34).

The Epistles. Just as in the Old Testament women enjoyed many prominent roles save one, the rest of the New Testament reveals women in all positions of spiritual leadership save that of elder or overseer. But their participation in these roles was much more common and accepted than in Old Testament times. Paul calls Phoebe a *diakonos* [*diakono*] (probably "deacon") and *prostatis* [*prostati*] (most likely "patron") of the church in Cenchreae. First Timothy 3:11 is best understood as containing injunctions for women deacons rather than deacons' wives (it would be incongruous for Paul to be concerned about deacons' wives but not overseers' wives!). Junia(s) in Romans 16:7 is most likely a woman, and she is called "an apostle." This will be in Paul's broader sense of the term as a missionary or church planter.

Chloe in Corinth (1 Cor 1:11) and Nympha in Colossae (Col 4:15) are women whose households figure prominently (and the fact that the households are attributed to these women suggest that no male heads are present). The elect ladies of 2 John 1, 13 almost certainly refer to house-churches, although quite possibly hosted by individual Christian women (as more clearly with Nympha). Paul calls Euodia and Syntyche his fellow workers (Php 4:2-3) and frequently praises women as co-laborers in ministry (Rom 16:6,12). First Timothy 5:2 commands respect for older Christian women. The term used here, *presbytera*, is the feminine form of "elder" (*presbyteros* [*presbutero*]), but the context and parallel passage in Tit 2:3, which uses a more unambiguous term for "old woman" (*presbytis* [*pres-*

buti]), suggests a nontechnical sense. tit 2:4-5 also insists that older women train younger women in godliness, which includes being good “home-workers.”

In the domestic sphere, wives must remain submissive to their husbands, who are the heads of the family (Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:18). Attempts to interpret “head” (*kephale* [kefalh]) and “submit” (*hypotasso* [ujotassw]) so as to remove all vestiges of hierarchy or authority (as, e.g., with the respective translations “source” and “defer” prove unconvincing on both lexical and contextual grounds⁹). The command to mutual submission of Ephesians 5:21 becomes incoherent if it is assumed that all Christians must subject themselves to all other believers; this verse is best taken as an introduction to all three examples of submission in 5:22-6:9. But Paul’s commands to husbands in 5:25-33 radically redefine their authority particularly in light of similar “domestic codes” of antiquity. The man’s headship is now one of greater responsibility rather than privilege. And given the voluntary nature of entering into marriage, individuals not prepared to accept the responsibilities of submission and headship need not marry at all. Indeed the best interpretation of a woman as the “weaker vessel” (1 Peter 3:7) probably has nothing to do with physical or emotional weakness but rather refers to a voluntarily adopted position of greater “vulnerability.”

Two passages in the epistles that do not directly refer to women doing anything nevertheless have far-reaching implications. First Corinthians 12:7, 11, makes clear that **God’s Spirit dispenses his spiritual gifts as he wills, which surely implies “irrespective of gender.”** This means that Paul envisioned women not only as apostles, prophets, and teachers but speaking in tongues, working miracles, ministering as evangelists, and pastors/shepherds (11:5; 12:8-10; Eph 4:11), indeed, exercising every other spiritual gift that God may choose to give them. **Galatians 3:28 proves even more programmatic**, declaring that in Christ, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female.” It cannot be demonstrated from this statement that Paul thereby imagined no timeless role differentiation among women and men; clearly patriarchal rabbinic sources could nevertheless make quite similar claims. But the baptismal context (v. 27) does suggest that Paul had more in mind than merely equal access to salvation. As an initiation rite that included women (unlike Jewish circumcision), baptism publicly affirmed the equal value of women and men in a way that suggests that the church should continue to seek outward, visible forms for demonstrating this equality.

What can we conclude from all this? Jesus and the apostles valued the contribution of women to the spread of the Gospel. They affirmed the positive contribution that women could make, even in a patriarchal culture that tended to marginalize women. Going strongly against prevailing cultural norms, early Christianity said to the women of that day, “Come to Christ. In the church you can serve God and find His love and affirmation as a person of worth. You count to God and to us.”

In light of this, I want to say today to the women of our church: You are precious to our God, and to us. Your contributions in time and effort to the cause of Christ in our church are enormous and make a huge difference in what God is able to accomplish through our church. Our music would be impoverished without your singing. Our children would have no opportunity to study God’s Word without your teaching them in Sunday School. Your wisdom and insight provided in leadership meetings, and in personal conversations, have been invaluable to both me as pastor and to the church as a whole. Your praying in the worship services lifts us as a church to the very throne of God. In so many different ways you make a huge difference in this church. Thank you for all that you do.

Folks, we must be a church that says to the women of Cologne, “Come join us and find a place to serve our God! We respect you and value the gifts that God has given you. We strive to be a congregation where you can use those gifts to the glory of God.”

We must also be a congregation that stands for the rights and protection of women in our world. Our God is a God of justice and righteousness. He demands that all people be treated with respect and fairness, no matter their gender. Abuse of women, so common in some parts of our world, and even by some religious groups, must be condemned and reversed. The women of our world deserve justice and respect by all levels of society and by governmental authorities. Our cry as a church must be that of the prophet Amos, “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (5:24).

II. Women served out of gratitude

Why do you serve God? What motivates you? Over many years of ministry I have observed many different motivations used by people to serve God. Most of them aren’t spiritually healthy, and usually miss the mark in comparison to the standards set by Jesus and taught by the apostles.

Often times people serve out of fear. They want to be certain to have done enough good deeds to guarantee that on Judgment Day they will go to Heaven rather than Hell. So fear of Hell motivates them to service. Is that an adequate motivation for serving God? ABSOLUTELY NOT!



⁹Here Craig misses the point and ignores some obvious contextual signals favoring the idea of ‘source’ over against ‘authority’ for the figurative use of ‘head.’

To be sure, God is going to hold all of us accountable for how we live and serve. Jesus in Matthew 12 indicated that on Judgement Day each of us will have to cough up every idle word we have ever said and try to justify to God our having said it. We are accountable for our living down to the endth degree! But should this be the basic reason we serve God? No! Not at all! Fear is no worthy motivation.

What then is that standard set by Jesus and the apostles? Our text points to it indirectly from the example of the women. Luke says of these women that some of them had been healed of evil spirits and diseases (γυναῖκές τινες αἱ ἦσαν τεθεραπευμένοι ἀπὸ πνευμάτων πονηρῶν καὶ ἀσθενειῶν.) They left home and family to serve with Jesus because God had blessed their lives with healing. Gratitude and thanksgiving to God motivated them to serve. In Mary's case, Luke says she had been delivered from 'seven demons' thus indicated a severe case of demon possession on her part.

Now these ladies made some real sacrifices in order to serve God. Luke indicates here that they were traveling with Jesus all over Galilee. Then at the end of his gospel account in chapters 23 and 24, these same women have accompanied Jesus all the way from Galilee in northern Palestine to Jerusalem in southern Palestine. For a period of at least a couple of years they spent more time helping Jesus in His public ministry than they spent with their families. In following Jesus around the countryside they stepped across the line culturally and socially. The Jewish Mishnah indicates that for a woman to travel with a Jewish man who was not her husband was scandalous in the first century world. At least in Joanna's case, and probably with several others in the group as well, she was married to Chuza. So she was traveling over the countryside with a group of Jewish men who were not related to her and her husband wasn't going along with her. So she faced, along with the other women, the social disapproval from some of the people they met in the different towns and villages of Galilee. But these women weren't deterred from serving by what other people thought, and perhaps disapproved of.

They had a passionate love for Christ and wanted to express their profound gratitude for what He had done in their lives. And so they made sacrifices to serve God by following Jesus and assisting Him in His preaching of the Gospel.

Service to God stems out of God's love for us and our love expressed to Him. These ladies had learned the principle of authentic love that John would assert years later in his first letter (1 John 3:16): "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us — and we ought to lay down our lives for one another." In Jesus already they had seen love at its best; in His coming death they would discover the ultimate definition of sacrificial love. Love is not basically a good feeling. Fundamentally it is sacrifice ministry to God through witnessing to and helping others, as John admonished, "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." (1 John 3:18). These women were devoting the bulk of their time during these days to helping the Lord bring the good news of the Kingdom of God to the people of Galilee.

Love is the only motivation that will keep us serving. Legalism quickly turns service into self centered keeping score to be sure we've done just enough to make it to Heaven. And most often we're more concerned by the required minimum amount of good works than by anything else. When the apostle Paul met the risen Christ on the Damascus road he discovered the utter uselessness of such an approach to serving God. Out of the life changing commitment he made to Jesus came a life long commitment to serve God faithfully wherever God would lead him. From the story of these women in Luke and in Mark we can conclude that this was what motivated them as well.

Love makes our service genuine. Service and servanthood are inseparable, as Jesus taught in Mk. 10:42-46:

42 So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Jesus set the example. We must follow it. Servanthood focuses on others, not on self. It leads us to reach out beyond ourselves to minister to other people. That was exactly what these women were doing.

They have set a challenging example for us to follow.

III. Women ministered to Jesus and the Twelve

What did they women do as they traveled around the countryside with Jesus and the disciples? Our modern thinking probably leads us to conclude that they fixed all the meals for the men. But the Lukan text never even hints at this, and in fact says something very different.

Their ministry moved in two areas from what Luke says.

First, they fully participated in the preaching of the good news of the Kingdom of God. At first glance at an English translation this may not seem clear. This is in large part due to the English translators handling of the ellipsis in the syntax of the Greek text. They insert the verb "were," as is reflected in the NRSV:

“The twelve *were* with him, as well as some women...” The original writing of Luke didn’t contain this. Instead, by his creative use of ellipsis, Luke clearly indicates that both the disciples and the women “went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God” just as did Jesus. In other words, they were full participants in the preaching ministry of Jesus with opportunity and responsibility to share the good news of the Kingdom of God to the Galileans as well. To be sure, Jesus was the main preacher as they came into the villages, but they didn’t set back and just listen. There were opportunities for them to share personally what they had experienced. I fully expect that, given the unusual entourage of a group of men and women coming together into the villages, they had extra opportunity to explain what was going on and why they were traveling around with Jesus and the Twelve.

This understanding certainly corresponds to their ministry later on as described by Luke in chapters 23 and 24. The twelve disciples fled when Jesus was arrested, and most didn’t show up to watch Jesus being crucified. But these women were there. In the face of danger, they stood by the Lord as He died. They watched closely to see where He was buried. Then before sunup on Sunday morning they were at the tomb to make sure that He received a proper burial. They faithfully served God in the face of danger and with great personal sacrifice. They had a witness to give. In fact, God enhanced that witness by making them the first to encounter the resurrected Lord on Easter Sunday morning. And they faithfully shared the news with Peter and the other disciples gathered in the Upper Room that morning.

Dear people, I deeply want our church to be a place where women who love Christ can come and find a place of service to God. Ladies, God has gifted each of you with ministry capabilities. We invite you to use them here to serve. We need your contribution to the life of our church. If you’re not yet a member of the church, we invite you to come join us. God is in the midst of doing some remarkable things in our church. We want you to share in that and through service to Christ to contribute to that.

Second, some of them at least served as patrons giving financial support to the work of Jesus.

The language of Luke in the last relative clause of verse three Luke says, “many others, who provided for them out of their resources” (ἕτεροι πολλοί, αἵτινες διηκόνουν αὐτοῖς ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς). The Greek verb that Luke uses here is *diakoneo* (διηκόνουν), “to serve.” But in its technical meaning in an usage such as here, it specifies patronage¹⁰ given to an individual or a group.¹¹ But unlike traditional Roman patronage where the recipient was expected to show gratitude and loyalty to the donor, the donor -- here the women -- contributed financially to Jesus’ work and the support of the traveling group in a show of gratitude and loyalty to Jesus as the recipient. Christian principles again turned ‘upside down’ the cultural values and customs of the time.

What can we learn from this? *First*, what the world around us considers appropriate isn’t necessarily what God considers appropriate. The patronage of these women reversed the cultural proprieties of the time with the ‘patron’ giving financial support to the ‘recipient’ in a show of loyal and gratitude. Serving Christ will at times put us crossways with the world and with society. But as did these women, we must put God first and follow His leadership no matter what. *Second*, these women demonstrated great financial generosity toward Jesus. They were not ‘stingy’ in their contributions to the work of Christ. The use of the Greek imperfect tense verb here, *διηκόνουν*, stresses ongoing financial contribution. Generosity in giving always befits a believer. As we give, we are blessed in so many different ways. In coming to Christ these ladies had realized that all they possessed (τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς) belonged to God and was to be used for His glory. And so with the need of food etc. for the traveling group, they arranged to cover the costs of buying the food etc.

¹⁰Patronage networks were cemented by the exchange of gifts between persons of unequal status (Saller: 1, 27, 70; see Gellner: 4; Boissevain, 1977: 81). The patron, who acted as anchor, offered *beneficia* such as material support, influence, and protection. In return the client displayed *gratia* in the form of honor, loyalty, gifts or whatever favors the patron might require (Saller: 8–21, 69–72, 121–24, 126–29; MacMullen: 1974, 113–14, 124–25). In some cases brokers played important roles as mediators. They provided access to or influence with those who controlled first-order benefits (Saller: 74–78). The exchange of tangible and intangible goods affected the social status of each participant (: 35, 127, 134). Patronage networks were a fundamental structure of Roman society under the empire (: 69, 193–94, 205–08). Such networks were especially important in the provinces (: 134, 145, 154–56, 165–66, 169–70, 180–87, 189; Bund: 559–60; Hausmaninger: 1254–55). The protection and support offered by patrons was crucial to associations as well as individuals (MacMullen, 1974:74–76). It should not be surprising that patronage could play important roles in religious propaganda (Boissevain, 1977: 90–94). [ed L. Michael White, ed L. Michael White and Society of Biblical Literature, vol. 56, *Semeia*. 56, “An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism.”, *Semeia* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1991 [1992], 146.)

¹¹“Provided for” (rsv) is too impersonal for *διηκόνουν*, but the restricted sense of “serving at table” is too narrow, especially with the following “out of their own means.” “Took care of their needs” is perhaps best. ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς, “out of their own means,” may be Luke’s own touch, since Mark 15:41 lacks this expansion and in the NT only Luke (12:15; Acts 4:32) uses the dative with *ὑπάρχοντα*, “means”/“possessions”/“property.” Luke has a recurring interest in the utilization of one’s “means” (12:15–21, 33–34; 14:33; 16:9; 19:8; etc). There are good Jewish parallels for women supporting rabbis and their disciples out of their own money, property, or foodstuffs (cf. Witherington, ZNW 70 [1979] 244), but these women are far more intimately caught up in the enterprise in which Jesus is engaged. [source= John Nolland, vol. 35A, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1:1-9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 367.]

One textual uncertainty is whether these who gave financially were just the “many other” women, or whether it included all the women. The syntax of the Greek text leaves some ambiguity here and could be properly understood either way. The prominent status of Chuza as most likely the business manager for Herod Antipas suggests that Joanna, his wife, was a patron as well. And this would favor understanding the patronage of the women to include both the named and unnamed groups.

In either case, the women serve as challenging examples of generous giving to the cause of Christ. Most scholars are convinced that Luke added this detail as a way to hold these women up as an example of generosity to early Christianity. They certainly continue to challenge us even today.

CONCLUSION

With today’s celebration of the “International Women’s Day” around our world, we want to join that celebration but add a distinctive Christian touch to it. We gladly affirm the marvelous contribution of women to our church and to the cause of Christ. We commit ourselves, yea recommit ourselves, to being a church that esteems and values the contributions of women to the cause of Christ now and always.



Ladies, I want to do something a little different today. Would you please stand up and remain standing in place.

As pastor, speaking in behalf of the entire congregation, I want to say to you, “Thank you for loving Christ. And for serving Him in our church. We honor you today as precious individuals in God’s sight. God loves you and seeks to bless you in your commitment to Him. We thank God for you!” Do I hear an Amen from you fellows? Yes, a hearty Amen and Amen.

The ladies who followed Jesus in our text set us an example. And not just for the women in our church. For all of us. They remind us that Jesus loves us and values us as precious in His sight. They challenge us to always reach out in loving service prompted by gratitude and thanksgiving. They inspire us to spread the good news of God’s rule and reign in the human heart. They lead us to generously give of all we possess to the work of Christ.

Come, let us take their example and put it to work in our church.