

Windows, mirrors, and doors: women seeking opportunities to help

by Vickie Shurelds

John 11:2. It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. (KJV)

One of my favorite movies is *Lilies of the Field* which features Sidney Poitier. It was the first time I can remember believing I may have been called to be a nun. The confidence, determination, and deep faith projected by the actors gave me a sense of the true strength that women can possess when doubt finds no place in their minds.

Coming out of the horrifying grip of Nazi Germany, five nuns worked on their vision for a small town. They were divinely driven to create an environment that would fulfill the needs of the people: a church, school, hospital; in general, a place to care for the community. This was one of the strongest images I can remember of women seeing people in need, choosing a path on their own, then seeing it through to a successful victory.

In churches across the nation, there are underlying rumblings due to the dissention regarding the role of women in the church. In some denominations, women are welcomed in the pulpit, some lead the churches beside their husbands while in others, women are considered strong contributors, but not actual leaders. In some Baptist churches in my community, the thought of a woman preaching the Gospel is considered nothing less than blasphemy.

As we search the Bible for answers regarding this important aspect of our faith, there are mentions of the role women had in bringing others to believe in Christ, offering opportunities for others, welcoming, nurturing; but more often than not, specifics are few and far between.

In Romans 16:1–22 there is a litany of those who are acknowledged for their “labor” in the Lord and in the church. Among the names listed are many women: Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary; all identified as having made great sacrifices and great strides in bringing the word of Jesus Christ to their households, their communities, and among workers. There are stories of women with the gift of prophesy that yielded great profits to those around them who listened to their counsel. It is a testimony to what generally came to be known as “women’s intuition.” In movies, novels and other storytelling settings, men always seem puzzled by the seemingly natural ability of women to put their observations, knowledge and logic together to make concrete decisions or suggestions that solve complex problematic issues or cut to the core of a conundrum to reveal a

simple truth or ideology that benefits the majority of those involved. Offering this coveted type of counsel undoubtedly led to another anonymous quotation: "Behind every great man is a great woman."

Using the King James version of the Bible, I read through story after story searching for scriptures to help with the documentation of this Bible study. The research was a healthy reminder of the role of women in history, in the home, in our schools, in our communities and in our churches. In the early twenties to the mid-fifties American women were taught by their mothers the art of 'gentle persuasion,' the gathering of information, filtering and passing it along to their husbands to create successful outcomes for their families. There have been women, like Eleanor Roosevelt, Mother Theresa, Rose Kennedy, Lady Diana, and others who moved with grace, elegance, and fortitude to bring about change around the world.

PONDER

- 1. Throughout the documented history of the world, women have taken on strong roles in the betterment of their communities. How can you support efforts that are undoubtedly going on in your own area?*
- 2. Which of the women in Romans 16:1-22 do you most identify with? Why?*

Mrs. Roosevelt was friends with Mary McCloud Bethune, a tie that defied decades of ill-treatment of African Americans; most notably: she spoke out vehemently when African American women were not permitted to participate in the national advisory council of the War Department's Women's Interest Section in 1941, going public as well as complaining to the Secretary of War. Bethune worked behind the scenes with Mrs. Roosevelt, to win that battle.

Modern technology grants us the opportunity to see instantly the progressive works being done by the philanthropic efforts of Oprah Winfrey and others on behalf of children and women void of the resources to gain services for themselves.

Working quietly, deliberately, and with conscious effort, women have championed the cause of the common good. Whether endorsed by the disciples or diminished by others, women have gone about doing good works and giving encouragement, counsel and guidance to those in need.

Prayer: Guide me, Lord, to an opportunity to use the gifts you have given me to move our community toward understanding, outreach and the wisdom of lessons learned by past mistakes to bring us to a better place as Sisters in Christ. 🙏