

**“Women And The Bible”  
John 14:1-14  
UMW Sunday  
Rev. Steve McCoy  
April 20, 2008  
First United Methodist Church  
Marquette, MI**

“Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. “If you ask in my name I will do it.”

You know women’s Sunday is always an opportunity to recognize one of our important ministries of the church. It is also an opportunity to hear how women have impacted the church over the years as well.

Last year there was a book published by Leon Podles which talked about the feminization of the church. In this book the author described how women dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century slowly took over the church and feminized it. I was appalled as one read how that is how flowers became a regular part of worship on the altar, banners and pretty ribbons were used as decorations, women became those in charge of building looks and programs which were geared toward them. He argued the church never recovered and that is why men really find nothing for them at church. Men need to reclaim their role it was said. There are other books as well on this subject but this one I think was the most striking.

Personally I find that theologically appalling. Clearly does he not only not know his history, he is looking at a very narrow scope of church. What is assumed are common myths and male centered assumptions about the way things used to be. But they never actually were.

When we take a look at the Bible women were always at the forefront as teachers, leaders, and founders of the church.

If we want action and adventure we need look no further than the book of Judges in the Old Testament and find Deborah and Jael who served with distinction. Deborah was a cunning leader who

commanded respect and loyalty, her orders were followed or you were no more. Jael was ruthless.

If we look to the disciples and the Mary's who worked with Jesus and Martha too. We see the integral role of importance they had within Jesus ministry. Even Paul sends his best evangelists and pastors to the Romans in Prisca and Aquilla. They helped teach him in the faith he admits.

God has called and continues to call great women to lead the church. The problem in our churches today is not about who is leading, but rather what we value. Do we value all people as created in the image of God? Do we value the fact that God is continuing to call and gift many people for ministry in the church? Do we value the way we have always done, things, the way things used to be, or do we value a hope filled future with God providing us good leaders women and men to set the example.

I had a co-worker at Greenfield village who held the belief consistent with his denomination that women are not to be in any leadership position. It came up as I was discussing a farewell party for our associate pastor. She was moving and I was asked to put together something for her last worship service.

That's wrong he said. Paul says that's wrong. What? I asked. If that's what your church allows your going against the Bible. Oh really why is that do you say. Then came the words that Paul says women shall not preach and that they are to keep silent in the churches. After a little go around I gave up and said it's good thing it's up to God and not us.

Well if we read closer we see that Paul is saying that in accordance with the custom of the day, that women were not to preach in the church...unless they had their head covered. And that if we really read in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14 about women keeping silent we would see that for the first time, women were allowed in the church where before women were not allowed in the temple, and that they had many questions about the scriptures of the old Testament and they were talking so loud that they were disturbing the worship. So Paul essentially says, there needs to be order, if you don't know

something, keep silent in church and ask your husband later (assuming they knew).

The challenge that God always lays before us is to be in mission and in ministry wherever there is need. In the UMC it was the women's organizations that organized missions around the world and at home in the US. It was the women of Methodism that led the charge for temperance, that led the charge for women's right to vote, that called for the abolishment of child labor, fair labor practices for all, seeking justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with God.

We as United Methodist are who we are because of leaders, women and men who responded to the needs of their day and sought to bring about a better tomorrow. They have followed the biblical example and mandate that God through Christ has laid before us, and we can always learn from their example. "If you ask in my name I will do it."

Not that we should continue to do the same things over and over again. But that we should seek where God is leading us in a new day and a new direction and as women and men follow that call where God is leading us. Not necessarily, clinging to a structure or a form, but following and doing what is necessary to proclaim the good news to all who will here. Women have set the example from the Biblical times onward. What is God calling us to do from this day onward, and how will we respond. Let us follow their example and make Disciples of all nations.

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