

Sermon - October 24, 2021
The Rev'd Canon Dr. Lorne Mitchell

Loving God,
May our reflections this day, inspire us to be strong followers of Jesus in both word and deed. Amen.

History is written... by those who can write.

That may sound at first like a rather obvious statement. But I believe it is a profound truth that deserves a bit of reflection.

The stories and experiences of people down through the ages could only be recorded by those who knew how to write. And therefore they were the ones to decide what was worth writing down and remembering and what was not.

What this means is that for the last few thousand years of civilization – except for the last 100 years or so... that which was written down was written almost entirely by men. In all the ancient civilizations – almost without exception – laws, historical events and religious experiences were all written by men – even if it was about events concerning women.

Men were the ones who were allowed to become educated. Men were the ones who learned how to read and write. Men were the ones to decide what stories and experiences were worth writing down and passing on to the generations to come.

Unfortunately what this means is that the events and experiences of women, and therefore the voices of women have not been well recorded for centuries.

Throughout the Church's history, with a handful of exceptions, the Church has actively and intentionally disempowered and silenced the voices of women. It has done this through its theological teachings, which in the middle ages held that women were created as lesser beings, not fully in the image of God. Now St. Paul said very clearly to the Galatians that "there is no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free, no longer male and female, you are all one in Christ... but somehow the meaning of this seemed to elude even the most astute theologians of the middle ages. It's a bit of a mystery.

Because of this, for centuries, the church excluded women from positions of leadership, both lay and ordained. Furthermore, it even diminished the stories of biblical women.....so that here we find ourselves in the 21st century with but a limited knowledge of this particular and rich part of our Judeo-Christian heritage.

But let's be clear here. This is not just an issue that the church has needed to deal with. This is an issue that human civilization all over the world needs to address... And we have a long way to go.

Here in Canada, men and women have equal opportunity to education and equal opportunity to participate in politics and the governing of our country. We have lived with this in Canada for long enough to actually take it for granted. I am personally delighted to see that all our daughters take this as the norm for humanity.

Sadly, we are often reminded that this is not the norm for vast numbers of countries in the world. There is not equal opportunity for women. Some extremists feel that it is actually an evil idea from the West that women should become educated. The stories that we hear coming from other places like Afghanistan and Africa are deeply disturbing.

I do have to say that it is not appropriate for us in Canada to feel too righteous. The movement toward equal opportunity for women in education and government is something that did not come easily. It took decades of lobbying and arguing, and ultimately it even took the First World War before women in Canada were granted the right to vote in a federal election. The year was 1918. So let's not be overly righteous...

And think about this: In the Anglican Church, Women were not allowed to be Church Wardens until the 1960s. And the ordination of women to be priests in the Church did not happen until 1976. It's important for our daughters to know that this equality took hard work to secure.

So it's Canada in the 21st century and I give thanks to God that more and more of our history, more of our stories, more of our laws and more of our religious experiences are being written by women. This is important - because there are forces at work in all human societies that seek to diminish, oppress, control or ignore the experiences of women...even right here in Canada.

This morning I would like to give thanks to God for all the stories and experiences of women. And I'd like to do so by sharing something written by a woman Christian Theologian. This was not written recently. Thankfully, if you look hard, there are exceptions... Hildegard of Bingen was a woman in charge of a monastery in Germany 900 years ago. At the age of 77, she wrote:

From my early childhood, before my bones, nerves, and veins were fully strengthened, I have always seen this vision in my soul, even to the present time when I am more than seventy years old. In this vision my soul, as God would have it, rises up high into the vault of heaven and into the changing sky and spreads itself out among different peoples, although they are far away from me in distant lands and places. And because I see them this way in my soul, I observe them in accord with the shifting of clouds and other created things. I do not hear them with my outward ears, nor do I perceive them by the thoughts of my own heart or by any combination of my five senses, but in my soul alone, while my outward eyes are open. So I have never fallen prey to ecstasy in the visions, but I see them wide awake, day and night.

And I am constantly fettered by sickness, and often in the grip of pain so intense that it threatens to kill me, but God has sustained me until now. The light which I see thus is not

spatial, but it is far, far brighter than a cloud which carries the sun. I can measure neither height, nor length, nor breadth in it; and I call it "the reflection of the living Light." And as the sun, the moon, and the stars appear in water, so writings, sermons, virtues, and certain human actions take form for me and gleam.

Amen.