

## Gender with Jesus

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Lk 10:38-42

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My mother grew up without a mother or mother-figure in her life  
and so she never learned what a “proper” woman should be.

Jane Wyatt of *Father Knows Best*  
did housework in slim pretty dresses,  
wore lipstick all the time,  
cooked all the meals  
was ever cheerful.

Mom did not have many dresses,  
inherited generations of obesity genes,  
hated cooking  
and struggled with depression and other issues.

She was never going to be a Margaret Anderson,  
so she never bothered to try.

Mom taught us three boys and my baby sister early how to cook,  
to follow the recipe in the *Betty Crocker Cookbook*,  
and to experiment with spices.

Sometimes the experiments did not turn out so well,  
but sometimes unusual combinations were surprisingly good.

Mom constantly questioned why men had to do some things and women others.  
She did not have experience with gender-specified roles  
and wondered why such traditions had to be.

So us boys did the usual boy-stuff of exploring and Boy Scouts and wrestling,  
but Mom also taught us how to be *nurturing*  
and *creative* in the kitchen and *sensitive* to others.

By the time my baby sister came around  
Mom had built-in sitters and in-house chefs.

Mom did not know the Bible well,  
she did not have parents to teach her,  
but she did teach us well this Martha and Mary story.

Jesus comes to the home of Martha and Mary.

In other places of the gospels,  
Jesus is very close to Martha, Mary and their brother Lazarus,  
even perhaps considered them his family.

Reading this story as *moralism* we can come away with the idea  
that listening to Jesus is more important than caring for others,  
that Christian *education* is more important than Christian *service*,  
discipleship more than ministry.

You sense yourself that something is not quite right with that contrast.

The world needs *Marthas* to hold families and society together.

The world needs *Marys* to keep focus on what is essential and important.  
We need both.

But I think Jesus is teaching something deeper here,  
something more profound and something pertinent today.

Martha is the epitome of hospitality.

Martha is doing exactly and doing very well what women are supposed to do in first century Palestine.

Remember that this is an *ancient* world

where there were no laws or police or courts to protect the common person.

Because common people had no legal rights,  
*social rules* governed interactions instead.

There was an elaborate tradition of expectations between guest and host.  
 Hosts were responsible for the comfort and safety of anyone invited into their home.  
 Hosts provide comfort and rest and safety for visitors  
 in a time of no 911, no police, no locked doors.

Now guests, too, have responsibilities.  
 In ancient times, most people did not go more than a few miles from their home.  
 They had sheep to watch and gardens to tend.  
 There was little time for travel and leisure,  
 and therefore little opportunity to know more than one's village and fields.  
 So, whenever a guest showed up,  
 here was a source of news from lands beyond the farm.  
 Guests had responsibility for telling news they heard in far-off places.  
 Guests were the communication link to the larger world.  
 Guests bring news.  
 Hosts give food and rest.  
 Both share themselves with the other.  
 Ancient ways with ancient rules.

Now, before we get too hard on Martha,  
 let's remember how things worked in those ancient days.

- *Men* owned the home, owned the property, owned the food, owned the women.
- *Men* received guests.
- *Men* gave refreshments and a place to rest.
- *Men* received news from far places.
- Guests made conversation only with *men*.
- *Women* worked for the men of the house.
- *Women* prepared the food, sure, but *they* did not give to guests.
- *Women* cooked food, which *they gave to men of the house to give to guests*.
- *Women* did not talk with men.
- *Women* sat in the back and listened to men talk.

Martha was only doing what women were *supposed* to do.  
 Martha did the cooking.  
 Martha got pillows for the guest to rest.  
 Martha chased children away so guest could speak.  
 Martha opened windows to allow cool breeze.  
 Martha put out cookies and filled glasses with lemonade.  
 Martha was only following ancient, established social tradition.

Yet Jesus says that *Mary* "has chosen the *better* part."  
 Jesus behaves oddly in this scripture.  
 Jesus talks with *Mary* as if she were *a man of the house*.  
 Proper social protocol would be for Jesus to ignore the women and just take their food.  
 But Jesus *talks with the women*.  
 Jesus disregards traditions, social norms, gender differences.  
*Jesus talks with the women as if they were men*.  
 The Apostle Paul will later write to the church in Galatia,  
*There is no longer Jew or Greek,  
 there is no longer slave or free,  
 there is no longer male and female;  
 for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*<sup>1</sup>

The rules and roles imposed by gender are *human* restrictions,

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 3:28

once founded on efficient social functioning, yes,  
 but now entrenched in frequent injustice and common oppression,  
 the rules and roles are called out by Christ and shown insufficient for God's kingdom.  
 Other scripture assigns roles to particular stations of society  
 with the purpose of bringing order out of free-for-all human disregard.  
 But in Christ, specific gender role assignments have no place.  
 In Christ *there is no longer male and female*,  
 and therefore inequities in pay, glass ceilings and gender discrimination  
 violate the kingdom of God.

Jesus comes to a home where there are no men in this story.  
 Of all the homes in that certain village  
 Jesus comes to one with no men.  
 Since women depend on men for money and security,  
 Jesus has chosen to take the hospitality of those who were the poorest,  
 visiting those who could offer little for his comfort,  
 staying with those who are vulnerable and least able to keep him safe.  
 Evidently, success and "growth" and prosperity  
 are not as important to Jesus as *living with one another in grace*.  
 Jesus accepted the hospitality of everyone,  
 whether well-placed Pharisees or lower-class sisters.  
 Jesus is not impressed so much with what people or church do,  
 as he is with people *sharing life with respect and gratitude*.  
 Hospitality is paying attention to the guest who shows up—who often is God himself!  
 Guests bring news from beyond our community.  
 Guests bring perspective and views we otherwise would not know.  
 Guests widen our understanding of how the world really works.

Hospitality is  
 listening to those who show up,  
 paying attention to their news,  
 understanding their point of view,  
 learning new ideas,  
*listening to those who show up—who often is God herself!*

In two weeks we have guests showing up in *Families Moving Forward*.  
 As hosts we may have little interaction with the families  
 because they will have had busy, full days by the time they arrive here.  
 Yet we still have the benefit of learning a little  
 from those whose experience and perspective on our society  
 is far different from anything any of us have experienced.

In this building, for 9 months of the year, we host *Hennepin Middle School*.  
 Unless you have been here during a school day  
 you have not seen the giggling and joy and discipline and learning  
 of that wonderful school for young girls and boys.  
 The sounds I hear in hallways and outdoors  
 is laughter, children reveling in the fun and safety of this place.  
 They are kids who look different from me, dress differently,  
 but whose laugh sounds just like my daughters',  
 whose parents worry and love and are deeply grateful for teachers,  
 just like me and Ann are,  
 whose zest for life are like any other child's in our neighborhood.  
 Hennepin Middle School is a part of *our ministry* to the Nokomis neighborhood,  
 an extension of *our hospitality and grace*,  
 a way we care for families and children.

Some will see distinctions,  
renters and landlord, outsiders and residents, Muslim and Christian,  
unsaid, Black and White.

What the Apostle Paul said is,  
in Christ,  
*there is no longer Jew or Greek,*  
*there is no longer slave or free,*  
*there is no longer male and female...*

Guests who show up are sisters and brothers, family,  
and even Jesus.

Amen.