

WHY WOMEN'S ORDINATION MATTERS
Women's Association Thank Offering Sunday –November 18, 2012 –Ephesians 5: 21-33
The Church of the Covenant

"In the beginning..." men and women were present at creation. *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."* (Genesis 1: 27) Male and female created in the image of God and present from the beginning at creation.

Skip to the events of Holy Week. Men and women, his disciples, were present at everything. At the foot of the cross both men and women were present. According to one account, Jesus' Mother, Mary, the wife of Clopas, Mary Magdelene, and the disciple whom Jesus loved, John, were present at the foot of the cross (John 19: 25-26). Men and women present together in the beginning. And at the open tomb on Easter men and women were also present. Mary Magdelene, and in some accounts a few other women as well, approach the tomb to discover Jesus is not there. He is risen from the dead as indeed He said. Peter runs to the tomb. Men and women together discover the truth of the resurrection. (John 20: 1 ff.) In the beginning men and women were present together at the forefront of our faith.

On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit falls on the church, and it is often seen as the beginning of the church, it says simply in the second chapter of Acts, *"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place..."* (Acts 2: 1) The male disciples only? Or ALL together in one place? The great prayer warriors of the church, the women, somehow were not present at Pentecost? No, in the beginning, all were together in one place, praying together, and seeking the Holy Spirit. Men and women together had the Holy Spirit fall on them, equally and abundantly.

As the early church gathers for its Agape meal, the forerunner of communion, who assembles? Men only? Or women also? Included in the Lord's table are all who profess their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. From the beginning women and men were present and active in the church. There is an amazing equality in the church in the beginning. The Apostle Paul writes in Galatians: *"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* (Galatians 3: 27-28) There is neither male nor female in the Kingdom of God; the neat distinctions we place on people have no place here. There is an inherent equality when one is "in Christ" and when Christ dwells within. Men and women of low station according to the world are the same as people of high station according to God; cultural distinctions like those between men and women fall away in the inherent spiritual unity of union in Christ and then through Him union with one another. Ethnicities break down; people are freed of the status conveyed on them by their culture; even distinctions that the culture makes between the sexes merge to mean men and women are equal in the sight of God; slavery is gone in heaven; bondage ceases. The new creation, the Church, which Jesus Christ creates by His own blood, is an amazingly egalitarian entity. When we are in Christ we are equal; when we are equal, we are free indeed. From the beginning that was how God intended it.

At the end of all things that is also how it *will* be. There is a time coming when there will be the marriage feast of the Lamb. (Revelation 19: 9) *"For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready..."* (Revelation 19: 6-7) At the conclusion of all things men and women will sit down at a great banqueting table, a huge wedding reception, where we will celebrate the eternal victory of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, over sin and death and every power in this life which might try to harm us. As in the beginning, male and female are present. As at the end, male and female present. It is a marriage feast,

a time when men and women come together in perfect spiritual union with their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Where we are all perfectly united with one another because we are perfectly united with God. There are no longer things which separate us; no longer worldly distinctions that divide us. No, we are one with Christ and because we are one with Christ we are one with God and because we are one with God we are one with one another. At the end, as at the beginning, men and women are there...only now in perfect union with one another, which God had intended from the very beginning. It is a time as the Apostle Paul writes in the book of Ephesians, *"For he has made known to us...the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."* (Ephesians 1: 9-10) God has a plan. God's plan is to unite all things in HIM through Jesus Christ. When God concludes His creation there will be perfect unity present. It is His plan. It is His purpose. And all of us will be there, united in Him, male and female, all of us present, in the beginning and at the end of time.

The Apostle Paul in our scripture for today from Ephesians uses the image of marriage between a man and a woman to illustrate the relationship between Christ and His Church. He speaks of being *"subject to one another out of reverence for Christ"* (Ephesians 5: 21) Women are to be subject to men and men are to be subject to wives out of reverence for Christ. Men are to love their wives as Christ has loved the church, (HE died for the church, by the way!) and likewise wives are to love their husbands. This mutual subjection and mutual love is a sign, not only in marriage, of God's presence, but it is Paul's sermon illustration, if you will, of what the Kingdom is to be like. We don't "lord it over" others anymore, rather we have Jesus as Lord and so are subject to one another because we are subject to HIM. We dare not love one another rather we are to love one another as Christ has loved us. Then Paul quotes from the Old Testament and says, *"and the two shall become one"*. (v. 31) The one-ness in a spiritual sense in marriage is analogous to the one-ness Paul is speaking about in the Kingdom of God. For he then concludes: *"This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the church."* (Ephesians 5: 32) The mystery the Apostle is pointing to is the mystery of the unity of all things in Christ and at the fullness of time and at the end of all time itself. It is a time when men and women will both be present. It is a time when we will be united one to another, because we have been perfectly united with God through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This is the plan of God –from the beginning...to the end.

There are some churches who do not believe in women's ordination. In the Presbyterian Church (USA) we believe in ordaining women and men equally. We believe it is right to do so because, from scripture, we see an unfolding plan of God, from the beginning to the end. But consider this –in those denominations who do not believe in women's ordination there would be meetings, where decision makers gather, where only men would be present, and where women would be excluded. Women would have no place at the table; no voice in the decisions; no place to pray and discern the leading of God. In light of the unfolding story of God, from beginning to end, from communion to the marriage feast of the Lamb, from marriage as an illustration of the church Christ came into the world to create, from creation itself, everything points to men and women being present, and equal, and fully a participant because their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ says so and gives them that right. In a way I cannot believe there are Presbyterian Churches today seeking dismissal into denominations who do not believe that women have a place at the table. Have we forgotten the vast story writ wide by the hand of God, pointing to a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, male and female????? And that is why on this Women's Association Thank Offering Sunday, I conclude –**That's Why Women's Ordination Matters**. And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*

