

# Reflections on the Celebration of Women

List of (many) Women in the Scriptures  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman  
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**“Toxic masculinity** refers to the notion that some people's idea of “manliness” – a social construct – perpetuates domination and aggression. Toxic masculinity involves cultural pressures for men to behave in a certain way. And it's likely this affects all boys and men in some fashion.” (“Toxic Masculinity” at [verywellmind.com](http://verywellmind.com)) “Toxic masculinity refers to those aspects that are socially destructive, such as **misogyny** [contempt for or prejudice against women, homophobia, and violent domination. [And for some, an element contributing to Christian Nationalism.] These traits are considered “toxic” due in part to their promotion of violence, including sexual assault and domestic violence.” (Wikipedia)

**Tony Porter**, and educator and activist who is internationally recognized for his efforts to end violence against women, provides a list in what he calls the **“Man Box”** in his TEDWomen Talk presented to several hundred women. He lists the following contributors in the collective **socialization and definition of what it means to be a man**:

- Don't cry or openly express emotions *with the exception of anger*
- Do not show weakness or fear
- Demonstrate power/control *especially over women*
- Aggression-Dominance
- Protector
- Do not be “like a woman”
- Heterosexual
- Do not be “like a gay man”
- Tough-Athletic-Strength-Courage
- Makes decisions-Does not need help
- Views women as property/objects

**Now, you may be wondering why start this sermon this way when the intention is to focus and reflect on the celebration of women? Because in most all cultures and societies throughout time and place, women had been subjected to attitudes and actions that do not affirm their self-sufficiency and equity in the eyes of God, as equally valuable to God as every other child of God. And yes, the entire Bible was written in the context of patriarchy and male superiority.**

What did you think about the list of women in our Scripture Readings today? Sadly, very few of their stories are ever told or preached about in sermons, or studied in church school classes. And I'm sure you noticed that the list of 53 women (or categories of women) mentioned in **Genesis** alone, that **most of the women don't even merit the dignity of being mentioned by name**. Interestingly, in the Gospel of Matthew he lists in his genealogy of Jesus four women, all of whom were considered marginal in their own way,

**Tamar** (assertive daughter-in-law to Judah), **Rahab** (the Jericho prostitute), **Ruth** (the non-Israelite Moabite), and **Bathsheba** (the woman unlawfully taken by King David). **Yes, we (and specifically myself as pastor) need to work harder to tell their stories.**

I did a lot of research on this topic this week to become better educated as a man – yes, even one of “those” men – on how to better understand not only women, but the struggle and courage needed to overcome and deal with toxic masculinity, or in all honesty, masculinity in general. One organization I came across is the **Global Women’s Project**, rooted in the interestingly named Church of the Brethren, otherwise known as **Mennonites**. They seek to educate about wealth, power and oppression, encouraging one another to live more simply, being mindful of our luxuries, and join in empowerment with women around the world, sharing resources with women’s initiatives. The Global Women’s Project, as stated on their website, **“seeks to educate ourselves (as variously privileged people) about the global poverty, oppression and injustice that women suffer, and how our own overconsumption and misuse of resources directly contributes to their suffering.** Global Women’s Project invites all women to live in solidarity with women around the world seeking to empower women and girls in their own communities in living a life of dignity and respect.”

In one of their posts, they even encourage celebrating Mother’s Day by honoring women who have nurtured you through their **Gratitude Project**, to support women’s empowerment throughout the world. **Carrie Eikler**, former Steering Committee Member of the Global Women’s Project, and Pastor of the Mennonite church in Morgantown, West Virginia, shares an important reflection. **Charlotte Burton, our liturgist this Sunday will now share that with us.**

It is true, that we seldomly hear the voices of women in the far reaches of the world... Giving them voice in some way in order to share their stories is needed.

Listening and hearing are very difficult things to do. In many ways, our culture is not very good at sitting, and taking in the stories of another, and letting them guide our actions showing us the best way to help.

And it is difficult to hear stories, when we know they will nudge us to somehow act in ways that are different from our everyday motions, or give in ways that are extravagant, or confront the stereotypes and assumptions we have in our own minds.

In another quote by Carrie Eikler, she powerfully states, “We don’t need to be a voice for the voiceless, as the saying often goes. Everybody in need has a voice—Jesus’ healings gave witness to this. They all vocalized their needs. The difference is, that **Jesus listened. May God empower each of us to be better listeners. And, in extension, better doers in response.** As a congregations, working through JustHope here in Tulsa, we sponsored two microlending banks in Nicaragua, loans to help women open their own business. The stole I’m wearing today, and the stoles worn by are acolytes, are from a different group of women associated with JustHope.

I also learned this week more about **International Women’s Day**, which is March 8 every year. No surprise that few know of this specially-designated day, which, by the way, is noted on our Presbyterian Calendar each year. Their website has several poignant stories of women’s experiences. One is entitled **Life is Not Fair: A Reflection on International Women’s Day 2024, by May Kay Ogden.** Again, Charlotte Burton will now share this reflection.

**Life is not fair.**

**As a woman of privilege, I only hope I never take for granted the many advantages I have** living in a democratic country, with an education, medical care, clean water, a safe place to live, and access to food. In fact, I hope I continue to share with others who are not as fortunate, but who love and care just as much as I do for children, grandchildren, friends, their faith, and this earth.

I don't know if I could survive in an environment in which clean water is five miles away, where food is only available if you grow, harvest, and prepare it, and where all clothing is made by hand. It is humbling to think about such a contrast to my reality.

Regardless of the circumstances that cause such disparity, I do continue to work for equity that empowers women to earn a living, care for their families, and contribute to peace in this world.

Life is not fair. And whether sharing my time, talent, and resources through my church, organizations like the American Association of University Women, and Global Women's Project makes a difference to women, it makes a difference to me that I am part of a cloud of witnesses who reach out every day to others who need a helping hand.

I am the product of circumstances and many guides, mentors, teachers, and leaders.

**Life is not fair. May we each, in our own way, reflect the love and support we have received by sharing our gifts. All of us are God's children, and all God's children have a place in the choir!**

It's important to remember this call to action. Mary Kay Ogden would be a good resource to our "Let's Just Do It" initiative here at College Hill. Speaking of College Hill, I'd like to draw all this in a bit closer to home. How many stories have been shared and heard concerning the women in our community of faith? In my opinion, not nearly enough. And I believe we all need to hear more about navigating life from a woman's perspective.

**Acknowledging that this enters the realm of vulnerability, but never to the point of being unsafe, I believe all of us would be blessed if you who are women would be willing to write down and share some aspect or specific incident of your journey in life as a woman.**

(Guys, you can do this too about your life journey, but that's not the point today.) We can put together either a special service of worship, or program after worship, perhaps even a book or any other format.

**Here are a few possible ideas for reflections.** And yes, I realize the irony as a man making suggestions such as these to women.

- What has been, and/or is, your overall experience of life as a woman – as a child, as an adolescent, as an adult?
- Share something about the times when you have discovered your true self, your voice, your courage, your fear, your empowerment.
- Share how you understand and experience the nature and character of God.

- Share something about the times when you have had to deal with toxic masculinity.
- Share times when you didn't fit into the social construct "Woman Box" of socialization of what it means to be a girl or woman.

Then **how can each and every one of us learn to engage more sympathetically, empathetically, and honestly with one another? Perhaps the only real way is to learn more about each other's stories of life.** This was an intentional, and one of the most life-changing experiences for me during seminary.

After our Hymn of Response, *Like a Mother Who Has Borne Us*, we will read, responsively, a **Litany in Celebration of Women**. I encourage you to save this bulletin insert and refer to it often. We celebrate YOU this day!

Amen.

Resources: <https://globalwomensproject.org>; <https://www.internationalwomensday.com>

## A Litany in Celebration of Women

Leader: Today we give thanks to God for all women,  
 Women who live in all places and throughout all time.  
 For women who are mothers of children.  
 For women who choose not to have children,  
 For women who are unable to have children,  
 For women who have lost a child.  
 For women whose right to make their own decisions concerning their bodies  
 and health is being threatened or denied.

People: **For women who create, who bring to birth art and ideas,  
 For women who have blazed trails for others to follow,  
 For women of music and dance, arts and the sciences,  
 For women in leadership positions,  
 For women who work in the market place,  
 For women who work in the home.**

Leader: For women who are ill or abandoned or who grieve,  
 For women who are surrounded by love and comfort,  
 For women in poverty or abuse,  
 For women who are respected and heard.  
 For women whose voices have gone unheard.

People: **For women who reach out to other people,  
 For women who nurture God's creation.  
 For women who love and are loved by others,  
     regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity,  
 For women of faith,  
 For women of fortitude.**

All: **For all women we give thanks to God.  
 To the God who is without gender and of all genders.**