

SERMON
By: Gail Fricker

Dance, Sister, Dance (Social Gospel Part 2)

March 12, 2017

Luke 10:38-42. Galatians 3: 23-29

(note: This sermon was given in role as Nellie McClung)

Well let me begin by saying how delighted I am to be speaking with you. On this anniversary of International Women's Day this week, we have so much to celebrate – we have indeed come a long way in our journey to support women. I am delighted to hear that you have a woman minister here at Knox, following in the footsteps of Lydia Gruchy, our first ordained sister in the United church in 1936. And, I understand that you have a woman as head of your Council. In my day, “women were certainly allowed to labor in church, there was no doubt of that .. They made strong and useful garments for the poor, they taught in Sunday School, attended prayer meetings, they augmented missionary funds with their bazzars, held birthday socials and suppers. The women were allowed to build churches, or any other light work, but the real heavy work of the church, such as moving resolutions had to be done by strong, hardy men.” (No Small Legacy pg 40) How wonderful to know that things have changed in the church.

And it is good to know that the journey for gender equality, is not just a battle fought by women any longer. I am sure that my brothers gathered here would all support the argument that each person, male or female, are made equal in God's sight. In Genesis 1:27 we are told that

God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

I am sure that you have heard Matthew Henry's commentary on God's creation. He wrote in 1710:

“The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”

Yes, my dear friends, God made us all equal. What ever inequality has crept in since, has come without God's sanction. And so, I come here to speak to both my sisters and brothers today. For we are all united equally as one in Christ. The passage that was read to us from Galatians reminds us that:

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

And I believe, ladies, that we must acknowledge the support that we do get from our brothers, husbands and fathers. My dear husband, Wes McClung, always supported me. He did not believe the widely held view of my day that “housekeeping was the only occupation for women, and that all women must be housekeepers, whether they like it or not.”(pg 17) Why it was believed that “all women just adored housework, and simply pined for Monday morning to come and get at the weekly wash.” Is that how you feel ladies? Now, I suspect that quite a few men here know how to use those automatic washing machines that you have.

And, in my day, it was considered 'unwomanly' for women to become involved politics, or any public position for that matter – men's "tender hearts shrank from the idea of women lawyers, or woman policemen, and even women preachers .. they just couldn't to bear to see women leaving the sacred precincts of the home ... or maybe it was the thought of women getting into comfortable and well-paid positions which really wrung their manly hearts!" Now, I suspect that it is sometimes the woman in the household that is the major breadwinner. Why, I have even heard it said that your Prime Minister Justin Trudeaux declares himself a feminist.

Ah, yes, it is so good to see that things have changed. And yet, my friends, brothers and sisters, there are still many places where the ugly head of gender injustice still exists. You may think that your Canadian parliament has gender parity, but did you realize that currently in the House of Commons, only 26% of the seats, are held by women. In my time, 50% was equal – and I don't think **that** has changed. It was wonderful this week to celebrate the 100 years of women having the vote – I worked so passionately for women's suffrage, fighting for their right to vote by writing books, writing newspaper articles, and giving lectures across the country. I delighted in seeing 338 chosen women sitting in the House of Commons this week as part of Daughters Of The Vote. But my heart broke with the predictions that it will take another 91 years to truly reach gender parity in parliament if current trends hold.

When you arrived at church today, and were segregated according to your gender – it was a little experiment so you could see what it felt like to be treated, or to treat, women as second class citizens. But while this little experiment may have been fun for us, it is a reality for many parts of the world still. And I am not just referring to other religions and cultures – no – even within North America, there are places and people who think that women should have no voice. There are some that will even use our Holy Scriptures to support their argument. They will claim that women should not be filled with ambition, since she is like the lilies of the field that neither toil nor spin. But to those people I say that "every plant has one ambition ... the ambition is to grow – to spread – to travel -to get away from home. Every seed has its own little plan of escape. Maple seeds uses its little spreading wings to conquer space, and if the wind does its part, then the plan succeeds. Some seeds travel caught up in sheep's wool, dog's hair, or the clothing of people- and so they travel to far country – to lands of growth and promise. And all plants struggle to reach light, like the cucumber vine, or the morning glory- their tendrils reach out to find a rusty nail or fence – anything that can rise them higher into the air.

And there are others who say that it is God's will to accept the role given to women. NO, it is never God's will for injustice. That is not the vision for God's kingdom. "Thy Will Be Done is a call to fight for better conditions, for moral and physical health, for a fair chance for everyone!" And, as people of faith, we are called to bring about God's Will for justice here on earth. Social Justice is our Social Gospel.

Oh, listen to me. I know that times have changed for women, but I know that there are still many that consider that women should be put in their place – a place of lowliness and a place below men. People who still believe that women should not be in positions of authority – that they will break the glass ceiling if they rise to power. Well to those people I say, think of the story of Mary and Martha. While Martha was busy in the kitchen, cooking and cleaning, Mary sat thinking and listening to Jesus. It was a woman's traditional role to serve, but instead, she sat, as an equal with Jesus, and listened. And when Martha complains that her sister is not in the kitchen, fulfilling the gender role, didn't Jesus say that Mary was doing the right thing, for she placed emphasis on the things which are spiritual. In Luke 10:42 Jesus says:

"Mary has chosen what is better."

I tell you, Mary was an example of the great truth that it is not the house you live in, or the food you eat, or the clothes you wear that make you rich, but it is the thoughts you think.

I pray that these words are encouragement to all women that are in situations of abuse, mental, physical, or sexual. In my time, there were horrifying statistics of gender abuse. In 1921, when I was elected as the first woman in the liberal party legislative assembly of Alberta, it was still illegal for an abused woman to leave her husband; getting caught taking her children to safety, carried a much longer prison sentence than a man stealing a cow! It was ridiculous. And when I was elected, I fought hard to change the divorce laws to protect women.

But, do you realize that still today, in 2017, 96 years later, 67% of Canadians say they have personally known at least one woman who has experienced physical or sexual abuse. And, approximately every six days, a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner. It's why there is funding for more than 455 women's shelters across Canada. It is why there are social programs to help women rebuild their lives after escaping violence. It is why there is funding for counselling for children who have witnessed violence, to help them heal and prevent them from becoming victims or abusers themselves.

Gender violence, male or female, is not God's will. It is unjust. It is wrong. And we must take a stand. One month ago, more than one million people around the world, men and women, were united in their protest for gender equality and against right wing government leadership. It was not just a march for pay equity, or gender equality in the workplace. They were speaking out against social injustice. Today, I see that many of you gathered are wearing black in support against gender-violence. This is wonderful that your voices are being heard. But my friends, do not become complacent. It is not enough to just march one day, or have a photograph taken in support on another. If we are to stand up for in justice; if we are to bring about the Reign of God here on earth, we must speak up daily. In our workplaces, in our clubs and societies, in our newspapers, in our churches. The slogan for your International Women's Day this year was Be Bold For Change. I say, Be Bold For the Reign of God. As I looked back on my life, "I could see too many places where I could have been more obedient to the heavenly vision, for a vision for the creation of a better world." I pass this vision onto you now, my sisters AND brothers in Christ. Stand against injustice, and stand up for God's heavenly vision, for as we heard in Galatians – each one of us are "*heirs according to the promise*" (Galatians 3:29)