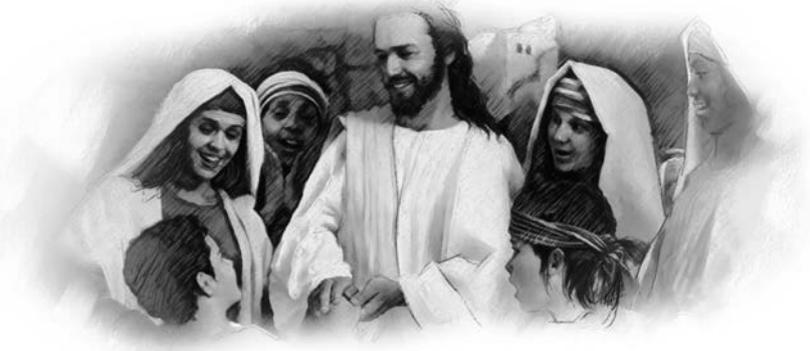


Women in the Ministry (Work) of Jesus



SABBATH—MAY 2

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Luke 1:39–55; Luke 2:36–38; Luke 7:11–17, 36–50; Romans 10:17; Luke 8:1–3; Luke 18:1–8.

MEMORY VERSE: “You are all children of God by believing in Christ Jesus. . . . There is no Jew or Greek. There is no slave or free person. There is no male or female. Because you belong to Christ Jesus, you are all one” (Galatians 3:26–28, NIV).

LUKE'S GOSPEL IS SOMETIMES CALLED “THE GOSPEL OF WOMEN.” This is because it shows how caring Jesus was to the needs of women. This also shows how involved women were in His ministry (work done for God).

In the time of Jesus, as in some cultures today, women were second-class citizens. Some Jewish men in that time thanked God that they were not created a slave, a Gentile, or a woman. Greek and Roman societies sometimes treated women even worse. In Roman culture a man often had a wife only in order to have children who would inherit his property. And he often kept mistresses for his own sinful pleasures.

Many cultures treated women very badly. But Jesus brought the good news that women are, really, daughters of Abraham (read Luke 13:16). How happy the women of those days must have been to hear that. To Jesus, they are children of God and of equal worth with men in the sight of God. The message today for women of all nations remains the same: we are all, men and women, one in Christ Jesus.

WOMEN WHO WELCOMED JESUS' ADVENT (FIRST COMING) (Luke 1:39–45)



Mary's song is rooted not only in the Bible but in her relationship with God.

Only Luke describes how happy these women were when the Son of God took human form in order to finish the mission of the Father to save humankind and to fulfill the hopes of His people for a Messiah (Savior; Chosen One). These women did not fully understand what was happening. But their words and actions toward these wonderful events showed their faith in the works of God.

Read Luke 1:39–45, the meeting of Elizabeth and Mary. What does Elizabeth say that shows her understanding of the great events that were to happen?

After Elizabeth spoke, Mary then followed with her own words (Luke 1:46–55). Often people understand them to be a song instead of a speech. Either way, these words are full of pieces of verses from the Old Testament. This shows that Mary was a faithful student of the Bible and thus a fit (suitable; good) mother for Jesus. Mary's song is rooted not only in the Bible but also deep down in her relationship with God. This song shows a strong connection between her soul and her Lord and between her faith and Abraham's hope.

Read Luke 2:36–38. What important truths are brought up in the story of Anna in the temple?

This expected hope finds its unexpected fulfillment in Jesus. An old widow recognizes the miracle. From then on she made it her urgent mission to preach about the Savior to all those who came to the temple. She became the first woman evangelist¹ of the gospel.

Try to imagine the wonder of these women at the events unfolding around them. What can we do to help keep alive in our own hearts the wonder of the great truths that we have been called to proclaim (declare publicly)?

DEFINITIONS

1. evangelist—a preacher who spreads the good news about Jesus to others.

WOMEN AND JESUS' HEALING MINISTRY (Luke 7:11–17)

Read Luke 7:11–17, the story about the miracle at Nain. This woman, a poor widow, now faced more suffering, the death of her only son. A large crowd of mourners was with her in the funeral march. These people showed much grief and sympathy. The loss of her only son and the uncertain future of life alone made the widow feel hopeless and very sad.

But the funeral march going out of the city met with another march entering into it. At the head of the outgoing march was death in a casket. But at the head of the incoming march was life in the Creator. For behind Jesus' command, "Don't [do not] cry," was the power to remove the reason for her crying: Jesus reached forward, touched the coffin, and ordered the young man to arise. The touch was thought of as being "unclean" since it broke Jewish law (Numbers 19:11–13). But to Jesus, mercy was more important than ceremonies (rules). And meeting human needs was more important than obeying just rules.

The village of Nain both witnessed a great miracle and received a marvelous message: in Jesus' eyes, women suffer as deeply and feel no less deeply than men. And Jesus defeats the power of death.

Read also Luke 8:41, 42, 49–56. In this story, we read about Jairus, who was an important person. He was a ruler of the synagogue (Jewish house of worship). He was an officer responsible for the care and services of the synagogue. Each Sabbath he would choose the person who would lead in prayer, Bible reading, and preaching. He was a person of influence and of wealth and power. He loved his daughter and did not waste time in reaching Jesus for the healing of his child.

In these stories, it was the power of Jesus' words that brought a dead son back to his mother and a dead daughter back to her father. Think about how wonderful these acts must have been to those who saw them, especially to the parents. What do these stories tell us about the power of God? What do they tell us about just how limited we are in understanding that power? (Even science at present does not have a clue about how this could happen.) But most important, what must we do to learn to trust in this power, and the goodness of God, no matter what happens to us?



Jesus reached forward, touched the coffin, and ordered the young man to rise.

WOMEN WITH A THANKFUL SPIRIT AND FAITH (Luke 7:36–50)



A woman who was a sinner washed Jesus' feet with her tears.

In Luke 7:36–50, Jesus turned a meal into a wonderful spiritual lesson that brought honor to a sinful woman. Simon, a leading citizen and a Pharisee (Jewish religious leader), invited Jesus for a meal. After the guests were seated, something happened suddenly. “A woman in the city who was a sinner” (verse 37, NKJV) rushed straight to Jesus. She broke an alabaster (white stone) box of very expensive perfume and poured the ointment on Him. Then she bowed down to His feet and washed them with her tears.

Read Luke 7:36–50. What lessons can we learn from the woman's gift of thanksgiving and Jesus' acceptance of her act of faith?

“To human eyes her case seemed to be hopeless. But Christ saw the possibilities for good in Mary. He saw the better side of her character [thoughts; feelings; actions]. The plan of redemption has given humans the possibilities of great hope, just as it did for Mary. Through Jesus' grace² Mary became a partaker of God's nature [to have Christ's character]. . . . Mary was first at the tomb after Jesus' return to life. It was Mary who first announced a risen Savior.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 568.

In Luke 8:43–48, a case of great suffering becomes the subject of the Savior's great mercy. For so long, this woman had a disease that could not be cured. It destroyed her body and soul. But, after 12 years of sadness, there was a small spark of hope: “She heard about Jesus” (Mark 5:27, NKJV).

What did she hear? A little or a lot, we do not know. But she knew that Jesus cared for the poor. She knew that He accepted those who were not accepted by other people. He touched lepers. He turned water into wine. And above all, He cared for people who felt hopeless, and she felt hopeless. But hearing was not enough. Hearing must lead to faith (Romans 10:17). And that faith led her to a simple act of touching the hem of His robe. That touch required faith.

It is so easy to look at people and judge them, is it not? Even if we often do not say it, in our hearts we judge them. This is very wrong. How can we learn to stop judging others when we do not know what we would do if we were in their situation?

DEFINITIONS

2. grace—God's gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

SOME WOMEN WHO FOLLOWED JESUS (Luke 10:38–42)

Read Luke 10:38–42. What important spiritual truths can we learn from this story? (Read also Luke 8:14.)

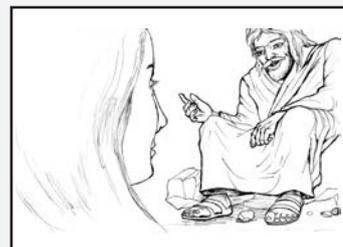
As the hostess, Martha “was busy with all the things that had to be done” (Luke 10:40, NIV). She was busy in getting the best for the guests. But Mary “sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word” (verse 39, NKJV). So much so that Martha complained to Jesus that she alone was left to do the hard work. Jesus did not scold Martha for her decision to be busy serving people. But He pointed out the need for putting the most important things in life first. Fellowship with Jesus is the most important thing in discipleship.³ Fellowship with others can come later.

“The cause of Christ needs careful and hard workers. There is a wide field for the Marthas in active religious work. But let them first sit with Mary at the feet of Jesus. Let hard work and energy be made holy by the grace [power and mercy] of Christ. Then the life will be an undefeatable power for good.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 525.

Read Luke 8:1–3; Luke 23:55, 56; and Luke 24:1–12. What do these verses teach about the work of women in Christ’s ministry?

As His ministry grew, Jesus “went through every city and village, preaching” and teaching (Luke 8:1, NKJV). He had the 12 disciples with Him. Luke also records the powerful testimonies⁴ of certain women whom Jesus had healed and who were touched by His preaching. Also, the women who were wealthy followed Him in His growing ministry. Here are some whom Luke names: (1) certain women healed of evil spirits, including Mary Magdalene; (2) Joanna, wife of Chuza, business manager of Herod; (3) Susanna; and (4) many others who “were helping to support Jesus” (verse 3, NIV).

We understand that Jesus died for every human person. That helps us to understand that every person is equal before God. How well do we show this truth in our attitude (feeling) toward others? How can we make sure we do not look down on others?



Fellowship with Jesus is the most important part of being a disciple.

DEFINITIONS

3. discipleship—answering the call to follow Jesus and inviting others to follow Him.
4. testimonies—stories of what Jesus has done for each of us personally.

FAITHFUL IN PRAYER, MAKING SACRIFICES IN GIVING (Luke 18:1–8)

Luke shows how Jesus turned to two widows in order to teach important spiritual truths.

In the first case (Luke 18:1–8), Jesus had mercy for a poor and powerless widow who was up against a wicked and powerful judge in her fight for justice (fairness). She was a victim of injustice (unfairness) and fraud. She believed in the rule of the law and in justice. But the judge was anti-God (against God) and anti-people. So, he clearly did not care to help the widow. Caring for widows is a Bible requirement (Exodus 22:22–24; Psalm 68:5; Isaiah 1:17). But the judge chose to not obey the law. However, the widow had one weapon, stubborn patience. With it she wore out the judge and got her justice.

The parable⁵ teaches three important lessons: (1) always pray and never get discouraged (Luke 18:1), (2) prayer changes things—even the heart of an evil judge, and (3) steady faith is a conquering faith. True faith has eternal wisdom for every Christian: never give up, even if that means waiting for the final victory when the “‘Son of Man comes’ ” (verse 8, NKJV).

In the second case (Luke 21:1–4; Mark 12:41–44), Jesus had just finished criticizing the religious two-facedness of the scribes and the leaders. Then He pointed out a sharp difference to them: a poor widow who shows true religion.

Jesus described some of the religious leaders as those who “‘take over the houses of widows’ ” (Luke 20:47, NIV). And they also break the Bible rule about caring for the widows and the poor. Many people back then gave only in order to look “religious.” They gave money out of their own surplus wealth. This means that their giving involved no personal sacrifice. People are no different today.

But Jesus asked His disciples to look to the widow as the perfect example of true religion. This is because she gave all that she had.

Showing off was the reason the first group gave. Sacrifice and the glory (praise) of God was the reason for the widow’s giving. The widow recognized God’s ownership by giving all she had—two mites.⁶ Jesus praised her because her spirit was right. What is very important to the all-seeing eyes of the Creator is not what we give but why we give. It is not how much we give but what is the measure of our sacrifice.

How much do you give of yourself for the good of others and for the cause of God?

DEFINITIONS

5. parable—a very short story that teaches a lesson or truth.

6. mites—the smallest coins available at that time; the minimum wage for a day’s work was about 128 mites.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Jesus remembered His mother when He was suffering great pain upon the cross. He appeared to the weeping women and made them His messengers to spread the first glad news of a risen Saviour. The same Jesus is woman’s best friend today and is ready to help her in all the parts of life.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, page 204.

“The Lord has a work for women and not just for men. They may take their places in His work at this crisis. And He will work through them. If they have a sense of their duty and work under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they will have everything that is necessary for His service. The Saviour will think upon these self-sacrificing [giving] women as lights in His service too. And He will give them a power that goes beyond that of men. Women can do in families a work that men cannot do. This is a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their work is needed and important.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*,⁷ pages 464, 465.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① One of the most interesting parts of the Gospels, including Luke, deals with the work of women during Jesus’ return to life from the dead. All the Gospel stories have women as the first ones to see the risen Christ. They also are the first to tell of His resurrection (return to life) to others. Bible researchers have been able to use this fact to help support the fact that Jesus’ resurrection was real while some people deny or question it. Some people claim the stories of Jesus’ resurrection were “lies” invented by the authors. But these people cannot understand why the Bible authors would create stories in which Jesus first appeared to women after His resurrection. Women were not well-respected. If the stories were made up in order to get people at that time to believe, why use women instead of men? Discuss.

② In a society that did not always respect women, Jesus respected them and gave them the position that belongs to them in God’s creative order. Women as well as men are made in God’s image and equal in His sight. At the same time, although men and women are equal before God, they are not the same. Can we support the equality of men and women before God while also accepting that their differences are important?

DEFINITIONS

7. evangelism—preaching the good news of salvation from place to place.