

*She Rises: A woman's perspective*

Almaden Neighborhood Church Mother's Day 5/12/19

Written by Becca Wong

It's an honor to be sharing with you this morning. I know it sort of feels like asking women to speak on Mother's Day is just a gimmick, like using a bird puppet to speak to kids on Kids' Club Sunday, but this is really about something that God is doing. I believe, we believe, that all believers in Jesus Christ regardless of who they are have the Holy Spirit inside of them and the Spirit wants to speak through each one of us including women. Typically, God calls on two kinds of people, those who have a gift to do something and those who do not, which really means that anyone can be called. For example, God usually calls those with the gift of speaking to speak. In the body of Christ they are the mouths. Jordan definitely is a mouth as God has gifted him with speaking and preaching, and it blesses us. But that is not why I am speaking to you today. I'm from the second group. These people do not have the gift for what God calls them to do, but they are willing and available when no one else is. That is me today. God has shown me that my part in the body of Christ is more like a placeholder, because I find myself in places where no one wants to serve. And I serve holding a place until the right person with the right gift comes along. My gifts are best served in the background, but sometimes God calls me to the foreground, where I have to rely on the Holy Spirit to help me for a time. So, I am not here to speak to you with the the gift of speaking, I'm here to speak to you with nothing but the Holy Spirit. I'm here to create a space, to create a place, for another woman, who does have the gift of speaking and preaching. This place right here. So, to the woman in our loving church community with the gift is speaking and

preaching, I am holding this place for you. But, until she comes to take her place, I want share from the Lord. As I speak, my hope is that whatever you see, you see from the Lord and whatever you hear, you from hear the Lord. My hope is that you don't hear my words, but hear the Spirit speaking words to you and that anything I say that is not from him would not be heard by you.

So, when Jordan first mentioned this idea to me a few months ago about having women speak on Mother's Day I said, ok, yes. God is doing something by raising up women to speak on his behalf. Actually, God is raising up women everywhere in all areas of life. You see it in the culture, politics, sports, business. The church has to respond because women are listening, young women are watching. How will the church respond? How will the church empower women?

For example, we recently saw the movie, Captain Marvel, because if you couldn't tell Jordan loves superhero movies. You may have noticed that I live with the friendly neighborhood Spiderman. I have seen many of them not necessarily because I'm into superhero movies, but because we love watching movies together. So over spring break as a family we went to see this movie. I'm not sure if you've seen it, so I won't spoil it for you, but in this movie the main character is a woman. And from my oversimplified understanding of superhero movies the hero is usually a normal person, and then he or she experiences something supernatural and gains a new super power, which hopefully he or she uses to help others. This is exactly what happens to the character in Captain Marvel. She experiences this new found power which is physically within her and she's virtually indestructible. In fact she is able to destroy all kinds of things like

spaceships and bad guys. I have to tell you even though I enjoy these movies, I kind of laugh at them sometimes because they are usually so far from reality that in my practical mind it seems a bit ridiculous, ok a lot ridiculous. However, this was the first superhero movie I walked out of feeling like, I had all this power that I could totally destroy some stuff, like with one kick I could knock over a whole building or totally take on like 10 bad guys at the same time on the way to the car. Unfortunately, we encountered no bad guys on the way to the car. But, I left the movie feeling so empowered and thinking, yes, let's empower women in the church!

So, when Jordan mentioned that he wanted to use Proverbs 31 as the scripture for the sermon. I groaned, Proverbs 31? Really? That's the scripture to you want to encourage women? I wanted to talk about women like Deborah in the Bible, who was this woman judge, who led and defeated the enemy army or Jael in the same story, the woman who took a tent peg and killed the enemy general by driving it through his head. Now that sounds powerful. There are lots of other brave women who risked everything to help God's people in the Bible.

But Proverbs 31? I love and I hate that scripture. I love it because it's a beautiful homage to this noble, excellent woman. She's everything that calls to what we as women want to be, valued, successful, accomplished, adored by her husband, children and her community. But I also hate it because she's so perfect. In the scripture she never does anything wrong, she has no flaws whatsoever. She's the impossible Supermom that makes everyone else look bad. How could this be the scripture to empower women? I usually feel like I don't measure up when I read about her.

Then I started to think about this passage and thought well maybe she wasn't all that perfect. Maybe this is like those poems on Mother's Day cards that have a sweet sentiment that women all over America will be receiving today.

We give them to our moms as a way to thank and appreciate them, let them know how much we love them. We tell them how great and amazing they are, because they are, but deep down we know what the cards don't say. We know that even though moms are great and amazing, they were and are not perfect. They are sinners just like us. They've made mistakes and sometimes those mistakes have really hurt us. Or continue to hurt us. And if I think of the Proverbs 31 lady in that way, I think that maybe Proverbs 31 is supposed to tell us that things are actually worse than we think, but also better than we think. You see, Proverbs 31 reminds me of the law in the old testament. It's a standard that was meant to help the people live perfect lives. However, the people were far from perfect and all the law showed was how impossible it was to live a perfect life. I see Proverbs 31 kind of like this. It makes me realize that not only do I not live up to this perfect example, things are actually worse than I think. There are so many opportunities for us as women to fall short of the standard. For example, instead of bringing good not harm, women can struggle with bringing harm and not good through our anger and words that cut people down by criticizing, condemning, and comparing others. Instead of being focused on what God is calling us to do, we can miss God's mission as we are distracted by our busy lives, or busy-body lives as we try to control situations or our children so they reflect the image we want about ourselves. Or on the other extreme we can become complacent, lulled to inactivity by the false security of living in the

suburbs. We can experience depression, anxiety and worry, trying to keep up with all the pressures of our lives and the image we want to project. We can struggle against temptations to make ourselves feel better through food addiction, social media, flirtatious behavior (not with our husbands by the way) or fantasizing about a different life. And when that doesn't satisfy us, we may turn to self-harm, and even contemplate suicide. We can feel hopeless in our relationships with our children, which may be contentious, or even painfully non-existent. Our hearts break for them as they walk away from the Lord, or we see them in bondage to addictions, anxiety and depression. Honestly, we struggle to separate our identity from their successes or failures and measure our own success or failure as moms by what they do. Sometimes our relationships with our husbands are no better. They are not filled with love and sacrifice, but bitterness and resentment. Or maybe it's just cold indifference. Years of unmet expectations, hurtful words, broken trust because of addiction to pornography, affairs or abuse can leave us empty and numb. This leads us to self-hatred for the body, mind and soul that God gave us because we've exchanged God's truth for the lies of this world. We struggle to see the beauty God made in us as the world tells us that we don't have the right body, the right personality, or the right face. It's exactly what Satan suggested to Eve in the garden, that she shouldn't be satisfied in the way God created her. Instead of remembering our value, we are plagued with feelings that I'm not good enough, I'm not smart enough, who could ever love me?, I can't do anything right. I'm a failure.

Didn't I say it's worse that you think?

Ok, this is turning out to be the worse Mother's Day message ever!

But hang on with with me. Remember, the standard is supposed to show us where we've fallen short of living the perfect life God intended. It was never going to be able to give us the perfect life because we are not perfect, no matter what the Mother's Day card says. But, the rest of scripture tells us that even though it's worse than we think, it's also better than we think, because there is good news. What the law or standard was unable to do in us, Jesus did for us. He lived the perfect life, ok, not as a woman, but the same principles that the Proverbs 31 woman showed, he did perfectly and exchanged his righteousness for our imperfection through his death on the cross. He clothes us with scarlet, as the woman does with her children in verse 21. He clothes us with his scarlet blood that takes away all our imperfection and relieves us of all our guilt and shame. It is an amazing transformation that we receive. It's truly a Captain Marvel moment. We as imperfect women have an encounter with a supernatural power, Jesus, who is God himself and something extraordinary happens. His love and power is within us and we cannot be separated from it. It transforms us from the inside out. We experience healing through his love from all the hurt and pain, and that allows us to be slow to anger and quick to listen. It brings us out of the paralysis of grief. It changes our heart by experiencing eternal, unconditional love, value, and security that allows us to live in peace without striving to perform, striving to impress, or striving to control our children to reflect that we are good mothers. His love satisfies all the aching my heart feels. There is nothing else that can. His presence within me empowers and strengthens me to withstand all and any difficulties, disappointments, and setbacks with trust and hope that He is with me and will never leave me. It allows me to rise in my night of depression, grief, pain, illness,

uncertainty, and doubts. I can rise in the darkness because I know that the morning is coming. The same power that causes me to rise is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. And even though my heart may change, my situation and the people around me may not, no matter what I do or how hard I try. Even then, I trust that He is enough for me. Jesus is enough for me no matter what. He is all I need.

When we experience Christ personally, we are no longer normal, we are like the superhero. In the movie, after Captain Marvel experiences her new power, she gets new name and a new purpose. Her old name represents her old life and her new name, Mar-Vel, or Marvel, reflects the wonder that she now is. When Christ transforms us and he enters into our lives, we get a new name that scripture says only God knows and will be revealed to us in heaven. (Rev. 2:17) We are no longer that old person, we receive a new identity in Christ. An identity that we are chosen, loved, valued, accepted, forgiven, made whole, redeemed. We have been transformed and just like Captain Marvel, we now have a new purpose. We have been repurposed to use the power within us to help others.

It kind of reminds me of finding things on the clearance aisle at Target. I'm a total bargain shopper and I love looking through the clearance aisles at stores just to see what I can find. I imagine that God is kind of like a bargain shopper, but not for the deals, but for the goods. I imagine him picking something out of the clearance section. It's a bit banged up and maybe a little damaged. It has a little red sticker that says AS IS. Usually those are pretty good bargains because either a piece is missing or a part may be damaged, but the price has been discounted 50% or more. I imagine God picking up a broken painting with one of those stickers on it.

He takes it to the check out and the cashier says it's been discounted by half, but God says, no he doesn't want to pay half, not even full price, he said, *"I will pay what it's worth. You don't really see its true worth and value. You see, it's worth everything to me. I am willing to pay greatly for this piece. I created this painting and seeing it brings me so much joy"*. The cashier asks, why would you pay so much for something that's so dirty and damaged? God says *"because it belongs to me and has been separated from me. I've longed to have it returned to me. It brings me so much joy to find it again. He explains, it doesn't look like much now, but I still see the original design and I will restore it to its original beauty and glory, full of life and no longer confined by its brokenness. It will become a new creation in the fullness and freedom that I intended. I will delight in her and she will delight in me. I am willing to pay whatever it takes."*

That is what we are worth to God. He purchased us with Jesus's blood. So that we could be returned to him as his children. So that we could be free from all that binds us. So that He could delight in us and we could delight in Him. So that we could rise and enter into a new life with Him, just as Jesus rose from the grave. Our original design was made in God's image and but because of sin that design has been marred. He now wants to remake us in His image day by day by the power of the Holy Spirit. God is the original creator and the master restorer. He is in the business of restoration and redemption. This is the redemption he wants in our lives and calls us to join him to redeem what was lost. This is the new purpose that God is calling us to. With our new power in the Holy Spirit, God is calling us to be part of bringing redemption and restoration to the world. With each person who has been restored to him, he now puts a longing for the redemption and restoration of the world in their hearts as well. What



breaks his heart, now breaks ours. Some of us have a burden for children who are vulnerable and God is calling us to protect them. Some of us have a burden for those living in poverty and God is calling us to help them. Some of us have a burden of bringing reconciliation between people and God is calling us to be one who builds bridges. God has put his desire for restoration in your heart and is calling you to help bring restoration wherever he sends you. Just like the Proverbs 31 woman, who has been saved and redeemed, she is actively engaging in her world to bring good not harm. She carries God's power to restore, with her wherever she goes; when she goes to the grocery store, when she visits with her neighbors, when she goes to work, when she serves at her child's school, when she cares for her family, when she interacts with those who are different than her. She rises to be part of God's offensive strategy of bringing redemption to our world to do good works that He has prepared for her to do. (Eph 2:10) She is empowered for a purpose. We are empowered for a purpose. You are empowered for a purpose. And as much as I love the idea of kicking some enemy butt like Captain Marvel, our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers and spiritual forces of evil (Eph 6:12). Our enemies are subtle and not always obvious. Scripture says this (read from Bible 2 Cor. 10:3-4) *“though we live in this world, we do not wage war as this world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”* We are empowered with divine weapons to fight against enemies that keep people in spiritual bondage. Enemies that keep people in strongholds of unbelief, depression, complacency, despair, addiction, and love of self. And it says our

weapons are not of this world, they are supernatural. Much like the woman who killed a man with a tent peg in the Old Testament, I believe that God is giving us unconventional tools in our hands to fight with that are not of this world. Weapons of forgiveness, unconditional love and acceptance, truth spoken in love that pierces the heart, godly wisdom, supernatural visions and understanding, and faithful prayer. In Jesus name and authority, these divine weapons demolish spiritual strongholds.

I believe that the Proverbs 31 woman is fighting woman. She speaks with wisdom and faithful instruction is on her tongue as she listens to the Lord. She goes with confidence knowing her worth and value in Christ. She is clothed with strength and dignity through the power within her. She can laugh at the days to come because she knows that the power of Jesus within her will help her withstand whatever may come her way and that He is enough. She is bringing redemptive power wherever she goes. She can rise in hope while it's still night because she knows morning is coming. And unlike Captain Marvel, she has a relationship with the power within her which is continually restoring her. Her power is through her relationship with Jesus Christ and it is one of delight, love, guidance and peace. He equips her to join the battle for redemption in this world. She was made to do great things with Him through his power.

Last weekend, I attended the women's retreat with 12 other ladies from our church. And on the last day of the retreat, the speaker gave us the challenge and commission to do the next brave thing in your ordinary life. I loved that idea because I'm not sure what the next season of my life holds, but I know I could take one step towards it by doing the next brave thing. Then as I thought about what would be my next brave thing, God

revealed it to me. It was this. It was to speak to you today. So I am standing here before you, despite my fear and trembling, to bless you. To say to you; *God sees you, He longs for you, He loves you, He wants to set you free, He wants to restore you so you can live the amazing life He has planned for you, He has empowered you to do great things in the battle for good, for redemption, for restoration; Will you join Him? Will you do the next brave thing in your ordinary life? He will take it and do something extraordinary with it.*