



Sermon Growth Guide

May 29, 2022
Awake to Women



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Mark 14:1-9

Key Verse: Mark 14:9 “Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

Big Idea: Women are image-bearers of the Creator and are full participants in the mission of Jesus.

Foundations

This week we conclude our sermon series ***Awake***.

The story of this woman’s faithfulness is sandwiched between the betrayals of the religious leaders and Judas, a member of Jesus’ inner circle. She is an example of exemplary faith and discipleship.

This incident happened in Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem and was Jesus’ home base on arriving in Jerusalem. This was the scene of the spectacular raising of Lazarus from the dead and the close relationship with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Although Mark does not name the woman, she likely is Mary of Bethany. So, what is so spectacular about her?

By crashing Simon’s dinner, we learn she is bold. By giving such an expensive gift to Jesus, we learn she is generous. But the most profound aspect of Mary is that she is the first person to recognize that the new life that Jesus will bring must come by way of His suffering and sacrificial death. She faces and honors that reality while the disciples, who have been told this is what Jesus faces, don’t acknowledge it.

While the men condemn her, Jesus rebukes their harsh and wrong comments and elevates the importance of her example in the global proclamation of the gospel.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Mark 14: 1-9 (10-11)

In Mark 12, Jesus commended that widow for her generosity when she gave pennies to the Temple and he commends Mary for giving the equivalent of a year’s salary when He says, “She did what she could.” What do you think doing what you can means for our discipleship?

Applying God’s Word

In a culture which devalued women, Jesus recognized their gifts and their full humanity. As you reflect on this incident, discuss the ways and places in which you have seen women patronized...valued. How do you think the inclusion of women can enhance gospel ministry?

Witnessing God’s Word

To value and include women in the mission of the church does not mean admitting them to the “Old Boys’ Club” where they are encouraged to act like the men. Rather, women are included based on the gifts that are unique to each of them.

Galatians 3:28 says, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” When we live in that reality, what does that tell the world of the nature and value of God’s creation? Of the nature of God’s love for them?

Okay, this is it! Last one. Today is our last sermon in our **Awake** series. After all this being awake, I'm ready for a long nap. Don't catch me this afternoon. I'll be asleep for sure. Our final hot topic is about women. Jesus was **Awake to Women**. It might depend on your generation whether you think this is still a hot topic or not. It's hard to imagine life before women were allowed to vote. I grew up with women in leadership all around me. You might think, "Jesus was nice to women. Big deal." It was more than that. It is difficult for us to reach back into a time when women were diminished so terribly and disregarded so horribly. But this represents most of world history. During Jesus' time, one of the daily prayers was "Blessed art thou, O God, for not making me a Gentile, slave, or woman." Infants born female were left to die by exposure, so men outnumbered women, 140 men to 100 women. Women were not allowed to own property. They were not allowed to receive inheritance. They were not allowed to give testimony at trial. Their identity was based solely on the man to whom they were attached. Imagine.

How's it going today? I mean, it's 2022. Earlier this month in Afghanistan the Taliban announced the return of the head-to-toe burka for all women. After twenty years of freedom, women are not allowed to leave the home without covering all of their body except the eyes. But they're not supposed to leave the home anyway unless they have a valid excuse. Schools are closed to girls despite Taliban promises. In China and India, the shortage of women compared to men is almost as bad as ancient Rome. Where did all those girls go? How about here at home? It was only a year ago that a young man gunned down seven women in Georgia, near where I used to live, blaming them for his inability to control his own urges. If you had the news on this week, you saw the report come out on sexual abuse in our nation's largest protestant denomination. Most, if not all, of the victims are women. It has felt over the last few years like the church is the last bastion for misogyny and harassment.

It's worth talking about how Jesus regarded women.

Women were first at the cradle and last at the cross. You can't tell the story of Jesus without the story of women who were part of his life and ministry. The longest recorded conversation with Jesus is the one he had with a Samaritan woman at a well in John 4. When the disciples found him at it, they were shocked. He didn't talk down to her. Jesus engaged in a deep, personal, theological conversation about her relationship with God. No wonder she ran to tell everyone she knew. Here was a man who treated her like a person. In Luke 8, we read: "After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means" (Luke 8:1-3). Women participated in the ministry of Jesus, supporting the ministry with their own resources. I would challenge you to find any other ancient text written at the time of the Gospels, in any language, anywhere in the world that told names and stories of women operating in their own agency like this. It's hard to find. Jesus was changing things.

That brings us to our passage. The Passover was coming. Jesus was staying with friends in Bethany. We don't know who Simon the Leper is, but we know who the friends were. This was Lazarus, the guy Jesus raised from the dead in John 11, and his sisters Mary and Martha. Mark doesn't give us their names, but John does when he tells the same story in John 12. My only explanation for this is that maybe Lazarus and his sisters were still high-value targets to the Jerusalem leadership when Mark was writing. There was a price on Lazarus' head for a while. But that gives you a sense of



the mood even in the moment of this passage. The Passover festival filled up the city and amped up the tension. The chief priests and teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly... and kill him. When the pressure is on people keep a low profile. In these moments that nobody takes a chance associating with the person from the margins, the minority, the outsider, the woman. But here we have Jesus.

In comes the woman we know is Mary of Bethany. “While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head” (Mark 14:3). These jars were very valuable, filled with perfume with a wide body and a narrow neck so that just a drop would come out when you put your finger over the opening and turned it. A little dab will do you! The perfume was strong. People didn’t take showers every day. Perfume covered other smells. She broke it and poured the whole thing on Jesus’ head. It would have filled the room. People would have gasped. The disciples did; particularly Judas. “Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, ‘Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.’ And they rebuked her harshly” (Mark 14:4-5). In our terms, this might have been worth like \$50,000 or so. It was a treasure. Something a person would hold onto for a lifetime. Isn’t it hers to do with what she wished? Women and property rights. What is mine is mine and what is hers is mine, apparently. Jesus doesn’t defend her property rights, but instead defends her agency—her choice to do just what she did. “‘Leave her alone,’ said Jesus. ‘Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me’” (Mark 14:6).

This is not the first time Jesus said to leave Mary alone. In Luke 10, we read, “As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened

her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said” (Luke 10:38-39). Martha was a little put out that Mary wasn’t helping serve, so she asked Jesus to tell her to get back at it and help her. “‘Martha, Martha,’ the Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her’” (Luke 10:41-42). Leave her alone. Mary wasn’t an irresponsible dreamer. She sat at the feet of Jesus listening to his teaching. To sit at the feet of a Rabbi was terminology for taking their training, being subject to their instruction, being enrolled in their class, just like Paul said he sat at the feet of Gamaliel in Acts 22. When Jesus endorsed her choice to sit at his feet, he was publicly proclaiming that it was right for her to be his disciple. Leave her alone. Women equally come to the feet of Jesus as disciples.

What Mary does with the alabaster jar is dramatic and powerful. In another message we can talk about the passion and devotion it displays, the worthiness of Jesus to receive the very best of our treasure, and just what this all meant for Jesus’ impending death and burial. “She has done a beautiful thing to me,” said Jesus, a right thing. “She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial” (Mark 14:8). It moves me every time I think of it to imagine how Jesus would have still smelled that perfume days later when he was arrested, how it covered the smell of blood and sweat in the Roman barracks as we was whipped, and how when he hung on the cross, the sweet smell would still have wafted from his hair. What did Mary see of the days approaching? But I want to jump to what Jesus says at the very end. Mary is part of the Gospel.

“Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her” (Mark 14:9). “Truly I tell you.” This is Jesus’ way of introducing



a monumental, signature, summarizing statement. “Amen, I say.” Listen up, buddy! “Wherever the gospel is preached through the world,” he says, “Mary’s deed goes with it.” Jesus rarely talks about his own gospel. The Gospel is the good news about Jesus. Its key message is that Jesus has defeated sin and death and opened up eternal life through his life, death and resurrection. Jesus is previewing his sacrifice on the cross and previewing his resurrection from the dead. In fact, the only other place I find Jesus talking about his own gospel like this is two chapters later when the resurrected Jesus gives Mark’s version of the Great Commission: “He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation’” (Mark 16:15). Jesus says that story can’t be told without her, without Mary.

People ask all the time why we ordain women into all offices of the church here at First Pres. Let me be frank, there are churches who believe the Bible teaches not to ordain women, but they want to do it anyway. Other churches believe the Bible teaches not to ordain women, so they don’t and they think you are compromising if you do. Our church is among those who ask, are we sure the Bible teaches not to ordain women? There are passages where Paul outlines his practices in certain churches that were facing particular difficulties, and he taught to curtail women’s leadership to guard the impact of the message and the reputation of the Christian community in those burgeoning mission fields. But we ordain here because we believe, I believe, Jesus set a new trajectory for women. In John 20:17, Jesus personally sent Mary Magdalene (another Mary) to preach the resurrection to the male apostles. In our church, that’s pretty much what it is to be ordained—preach the resurrection of Jesus. The early church was full of women leaders. About half of the churches mentioned by Paul in the New Testament were supported by households run by women. Opponents of the early church called Christianity a religion of

women, children and slaves. A Roman governor famous for persecuting Christians wrote, “I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses.” Women’s leadership declined sharply after Christianity was Romanized.

Jesus was **Awake to Women**. He saw what other people didn’t see; he was aware of what other people were not aware of, that when before him stood a woman, before him stood a full person made in the image of God; an image-bearer. “Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness...’ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:26–27). Jesus was awake and aware. A woman as much as a man is an image bearer, worthy of dignity, honor and respect. Dorothy Sayers wrote, “Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man—there never has been such another.”

This is our Jesus. Awake. Awake to race. Awake to children. Awake to political issues. Awake to sexual issues. Awake to women’s issues. Would you box this Jesus up on a shelf and relegate him to the dusty annals of history? His vision changed the world. His eyes, his vision, they change the world still. When Jesus died, he didn’t just die for men. He didn’t just die for adults. He didn’t just die for white people or for brown people or for black people, or any others. He didn’t just die for people who hold the same political beliefs. If you would come awake, if you would grow in awareness, come awake with Jesus. He is Lord of all.

