

Sermon Discussion Information

Sermon Series: 1st & 2nd Timothy: Life Changing Lessons

Sermon Title: “Discern between mis-steps, cultural differences, and timeless truths”

Sermon Text: 1 Timothy 2

Listeners Journey: I want my listener to recognize how important it is to discern between mis-steps, cultural differences, and timeless truths in Scripture and that harmful ethics based upon cultural differences and mis-steps require empathy fueled reverse engineering of our practices and systems.

Unique Quotes from Sermon:

Traditions. There is the tell. And, across the sweep of biblical history and Christian tradition there is one thing that is consistent about traditions: They change. They are always changing because of new discoveries, awakenings and shifts in collective consciousness that say at a minimum “its ok to leave these things behind” and sometimes even “it’s *essential* that we leave these things behind.”

Think about changing worship traditions in the Bible: Scripture begins with nomads assembling alters wherever they moved. Then Moses instituting specific practices, rituals, and sacrifices with a new centralized tent of worship. Then King David largely moved away from ritual sacrifice and focused more on prayer and music. David’s son Solomon returned to sacrifice and the idea of worship being a big production and centralized in an elaborate and centralized temple. Then there was the synagogue movement in which worship was localized in neighborhoods with the reading and teaching of Scripture being central. Then after Christ’ resurrection the Early Church innovated many and different forms and new traditions in houses, caves, and eventually large buildings again, and round and around it goes.

The Apostle Paul himself led the most significant first Century change in religious tradition and culture in regards to the Christian faith becoming inclusive of non-Jewish cultural practices. This was necessary for the message of Christ to be true and relevant for all people in every culture. And, over time and throughout Christian Church history, Christian religion has done the same kinds of things on multiple issues, but not without tremendous fits and starts. And, because of this, we are led to our final point of reflection this morning: mis-steps.

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There is no question: patriarchy or the rule of men over women, and women having no rights is historical in biblical history. And yet that doesn’t make it right or a timeless truth. Pondering even a few things help us here.

- Personal and collective sin is clearly owned by both men and women and with equal capacity amongst us.
- Jesus’ kind and frequent relationship with women was ground breaking, even rule breaking in his time.
- The gospel writer’s elevation of the role of women in Jesus’ narrative points toward women understanding what Jesus was saying before most of the men closest to Jesus were able to grasp it.

Going one level higher to the fact that God is not gendered in the ways humans understand and manifest gender, and all humans are made in the image of God—holistic reality is lived in the balance of feminine and masculine, not masculine dominant over feminine or the other way around. Why is this so hard for so many to understand and embrace this?

Power. It is hard to understand because of the human dynamics around power. Men and masculine thought have been in power since the dawn of humankind because men have traditionally been the strongest physical human beings in a world that decides who has power through violence. Then, with Western Civilization, came the Age of Enlightenment, and the Industrial Age, and now the Information Age where physical might is still a power quotient, but not nearly as much as in earlier ages.

Today, the most healing and innovative environments in religion and society are those where feminine and masculine identities are equal, share power, and build society together. Such spaces are increasing and yet are still relatively rare. And, sadly, some parts of Christian religion continue to being unhelpful to nurture them because of the mis-use of Scripture passages like 1 Timothy chapter two! And, because of something much more entrenched than time and culture bound ethical standards—The deeper problem is fraternities of men in power who are fearful of that which will set everyone free. And, set *them* free.

Our best ways forward are Christ' ways forward. And, Christ' ways forward are all grounded in empathy. Jesus' teachings expect that Christ followers will be people of proximity and informed compassion. For the gender conversation this means men listening to and learning from the stories of women. And, women listening to women, for in some cases over history, women have fought against their own gender.

For me as a male pastor and civic leader—this has meant studying and learning from the four phases of modern feminism as it weaves in and out of both Christian religion and broader society. The first movement was in the late 19th century and early 20th century that focused on opening up basic opportunities for women and focusing on the right to vote. Christian women played an important role in this including Anne Hutchinson and Mary Dyer who were the first known women preachers in America in the 1,600s. And, in the face of the domesticity movement fueled almost exclusively by 1 Timothy Chapter two it was black and white women such as Abigail Smith Adams, Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth who spoke the truth about the reality of who women were created to be in the image of God, for themselves, and in relationship to men.

The second wave began in the 1960's and continued into the 90s in the context of the anti-war and civil rights movement and the growing self-consciousness of a variety of black and brown body cultures. The third wave of feminism described by a women gender scholar was "women stepping onto the stage as strong and empowered, eschewing victimization and defining beauty for themselves as subjects, not as objects of a sexist patriarchy."¹

And, now as the fourth wave of feminism is dawning it is part of a larger consciousness of oppression alongside racism, ageism, classism, ableism, and sexual orientation. As I have watched women and the advancement of feminine imagination I continue to be astounded at how they take the whole world in their hands from the birth of humans to a more holistic way of

¹ <https://www.pacificu.edu/about/media/four-waves-feminism> (accessed 7-21-18)

framing conflict. Men desperately need this in every place of society because historically it is most often the distortion of the masculine self that seeks to eliminate or kill other people and go to war in the spirit of domination.

In this fourth movement, and thinking back across my 50 years of life I never remember a moment quite as important as what has happened over the last year with the “metoo” movement. I read this past week of 140 women athletes getting an award for their courage to speak up about a sexually abusing doctor that was shielded by multiple institutions² because, well because that is what men have done to protect men. But that time is over.

Three Discussion Questions:

1. How have you wrestled with the matter of gender differences and Scripture? (Personal sharing)
2. What are some things you have learned in your reading of 1 Timothy Chapter 2? (Exploring the text)
3. What are a few things you can do to bring healing to the gender divide in church and broader society? (Direct application)

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LcjHw3t5Lt8> (accessed 7-21-18)