



to report what a "reasonable man" would do in this situation, I replied, "I haven't the faintest idea!"

One time, I was doing research in some case files in the Florida Supreme Court. There was a room with a sign on the door that said, *LAWYERS*. I went in. It was the men's bathroom. When I complained to the Clerk of the Florida Supreme Court, I was scolded and told that "it's always been that way, and we've never had any complaints before you." I held my ground. Eventually the sign was changed to *MEN*.

**Sue D'Auria** - I worked for many years at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. In my early years there, I met a retired curator of the Prints and Drawings Dept. named Eleanor Sayre, who had first come to the Museum in 1945. Eleanor Sayre was the granddaughter of Woodrow Wilson, she attended Bryn Mawr and Harvard, and she was an expert on the artist Goya. She eventually became one of the first female curators on the staff of the Museum. But in spite of her credentials, she was not allowed to eat in the Curator's Dining Room because she was a woman. When she wanted guests to dine in that room, the male curator of my department, the Egyptian Dept., was often asked to accompany them. When I came to the Museum in the early 80's, that policy was long gone and seemed absurd, but it made me realize how much things had changed for women of my generation.

**Madeline Davidson** - In 1969-1970, I was a junior in high school. My boyfriend and I were both honor students, and I was the junior class president. We were both college bound. We were also hormone driven and mistakenly got pregnant. I was required to quit high school with my only option being to attend night school classes to earn my high school diploma.

At my high school graduation, I sat in the bleachers alone crying as my classmates walked across the stage to be awarded their diplomas, even though I had earned all of my high school credits. My boyfriend went on to graduate from high school with honors and went on to college. I got a job at Dairy Queen.

**Ray Gitzendanner** - I never thought much about my gender and fairness---until I became a mother. From being told at interviews to come back after the baby was born, to different projects and different schedules, motherhood impacted all areas of my working life.

**Zack Graves** – When I was a child, my mother and I attended a church where women were not allowed to teach males or even speak in a mixed-gender worship service. One day while the pastor was preaching on the submissiveness of women before men, my mother stood up during the sermon and publicly debated the preacher's theology. We were soon attending another church. My mother has been teaching and speaking in churches for over thirty years.

**Angela Hoppe** shared her experiences as an art major in college with a non-supportive negative professor. She left that school, changed her major to accounting, was very successful, yet realized she had let go of her life's passion, and has now returned to her first love, art.

**Vito Ilaqua** – When I was still living in Italy, my family knew an exceptional nun, with many talents and some theology and philosophy books to her credit. I remember that once the conversation fell on the role of women in the (catholic) church and why they could not be ordained as priests. I had expected that, being brilliant, and being a woman, she would have something scathing to say on the topic, but instead she defended the current situation with

such obvious conviction that she almost persuaded even a polemical teenager like me. That was perhaps the first realization for me that some injustices run so deep that even the victims themselves can be turned into their agents and advocates.

**Margaret Johnston** - My Dad was a marine for 10 years before he married my Mom. I badly wanted to be a strong, ferocious Marine too. When my dad finally broke it to me that Lady Marines did not get to shoot the enemy, I was 9. I still remember the shock of disappointment. I instantly lost interest in being a Marine. If I wasn't going to get to kill the enemy, what was the point? This inequality, as all injustice always is, was unexplainable.

Years later, I read that the government has no real idea of how many American women served in the Vietnam war, not even how many of us died.

**Kimberly McCollough** – When I was in graduate school, there were male classmates that told me that “women should not expect to have a career and a family”, and that I “had no right” to the job I wanted because it would be depriving a male of a job to support his family. Upon arriving at a group project meeting with my all male teammates, I was told that I “could do 50 pushups or be president of the group”.

I could ignore most of this until the day I was sitting in a class of about 30 students, the only female, and the professor decided to tell a rather explicit story from his Navy days. I was stunned at the instant shame and humiliation that I felt over something that had absolutely nothing to do with me. That was the day I realized that the issues were bigger than me.

**Dar Mikula** - I wanted to become a nun. As a young girl, this seemed the only option other than becoming someone's wife. With a fierce desire to be “of service” and to illuminate my inner spiritual life, the black and white-clad sisters of my Catholic education were my main models for these things. The convent offered a way to avoid marriage while still winning my parents' approval.

It was actually a beloved eighth grade teacher, Sister Margaret, who changed my mind about my options. It was 1975, and in the margin of an essay I'd written about my ache to be something other than what was expected, she discreetly encouraged me to not worry about what anyone else thought, and to follow my heart. And ultimately, that's what I did. I stopped talking about the convent and started researching colleges. I never looked down - or back - and to their credit, neither did my parents....or Sister Margaret.

**Lizz Nehls** - In my transition from elementary to middle school, the middle school held a rally for incoming 6th graders who were interested in joining the band to come and pick out an instrument they wanted to play. My mother took me. When they called out the trumpet, I told my mom, "That's what I want to play". She said, "No! It's a boy's instrument!" She said the same thing to me about the next three instruments I picked out: - the saxophone, guitar and drums. I ended up joining the choir.

**Pat Urbano** - In 1975, I was divorced, twenty-six years old with a 5 year old son, was a working head of my household, and a homeowner. Money could get tight if there was an emergency. Much to my surprise, I received an invitation in the mail from a credit card company offering me a card. It was addressed to me, but my first name was listed as “Pat.” I filled out the form and asked them to change the name from Pat to Patricia. Not long after

that, I received a denial of the card. I often wonder if I had left my name as "Pat," would they have given me the card thinking I was a man?

**Wendy Young** - In the 1980's, I had two very different college experiences based on my gender and nationality: one at Smith College and the other at Oxford. I went to Smith College as an undergraduate, one of the few women's colleges in the U.S. Smith was an amazing place to learn without any additional pressures placed on women due to gender. Everything was set up for a female student body.

Oxford was a different experience. England in the early eighties, though ahead of the U.S. in attitudes toward women and sexuality (Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister at the time), had many arcane practices dating from earlier periods of history. Oxford is an extraordinary place, one of the oldest and best Universities in the world. However, I remember quite a number of intentional and unintentional slights due to gender.

My favorite story is about attending a college built in the 1200's for male students and faculty. I received a formal invitation to dinner at All Souls College, where my Supervisor lived. There were no women dons at that college, and my supervisor had to host a special dinner party in a "lower dining room" to allow his female students to gather with the group. During dinner, I excused myself to find the women's room. I found the men's room quickly, but it took me ten minutes to find the women's room, which was in an entirely separate building. The women's "loo" was down a garden path and around a corner. Neither rest room had a label. But that's because it was England, not because I am female!

### **Reprise – "Why Walk When You Can Fly"**

**SCRIPTURE – Luke 8: 43–48 - Woman healed by Jesus** - One day, as the crowds pressed in on Jesus, there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. Though she had spent all she could on physicians, no one could cure her. She came up behind Jesus and touched the fringe of his clothes and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. When Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" and she saw that she could not remain hidden, she came forward trembling. Falling on her knees, she declared how she had been healed. And Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

In considering this Biblical story, it is important to note that the purity laws in Jesus' time equated cleanliness with godliness. Any discharge of blood was considered unclean and, whenever a woman was unclean, she was regarded as contagious to anyone who might touch her or anyone she might touch. This woman had been bleeding for twelve isolated years. By not rejecting her, Jesus freed her from the grasp of an unjust and prejudicial law of the time.

When and where have we seen women coming forward, joining with men who see and hear the injustice, and who do bring change to the concepts of justice for women? Coming forward – having the faith to persevere – being open to the change – accepting and being accepted ....

### **TESTIMONY :**

**Vince Amlin** – I had never seen a female preacher until I was in middle school, but, fast forwarding just ten years to my time in divinity school, my class was unusual as the first in several years in which the men again outnumbered the women. Outnumbered, but never

overpowered. Two of those women, Lindsey and Erin, have become members of what I call my "Dream Team," three friends to whom I go with all my questions about ministry. This fall, Erin was ordained into the Lutheran church, and just this week I got an email from Lindsey saying she had been approved for ordination in the United Church of Christ. I can think of no greater gift to the Church, than their leadership.

**Darrell Hartman** - I am the father of three daughters. All three were interested in athletics in high school. When I graduated from High School in 1965, girls there could be on the swim team, the tennis team or the cheerleading squad. That's it.

A lot changed in this country from 1965 to 1989, when my oldest daughter was a freshman at Eastside High School. One of the things that changed was federal Title IX legislation in 1972. It stated that no person shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. In 1989, girls at Eastside could participate not only swimming, tennis and cheerleading, but also basketball, track, golf, soccer, softball, volleyball and cross country.

**Deborah Hill** - I was 22 and full of hope, and vividly remember when a door swung widely open, and *my* concept of social justice for women changed. It was the announcement at the 1984 Democratic National Convention in San Francisco. Geraldine Ferraro, a political pioneer, courageously stood before all of us on national television and shared her intention of becoming the first woman to run for Vice President of the United States. She said, "*America is the land where dreams can come true for all of us*"... and although the Democrats did not win the election, I believe she won a historic and symbolic victory for women... she paved the way where a woman might one day be President. She conveyed the *power* implicit *in vulnerability* and the *strength* required *to overcome*, and reminds me to this day, that women are not to be undervalued *or* underestimated, as we continue on our journey for equality and social justice for all.

**Jenny Hill** - Mine is a story both of justice that has been done, yet not carried out to its full promise. Let me first say I love the place I work – an incredibly family friendly environment - and I love my boss, who more often than not is understanding and supportive about my family's needs. When the time came for me to request maternity leave, I learned about the Family & Medical Leave Act, which gives employees adequate job protection while they attend to a new child. I wasn't eligible for this leave because I hadn't yet worked there a year, but I figured if the US government considered 12 weeks to be a reasonable amount of time for a mother to stay home and care for her newborn child, then that would be a reasonable request to make. This felt like justice to me – a law which ensured a new mother's job would be protected while she attended to her child's most basic and fundamental needs.

I was ultimately granted the 12 weeks of maternity leave, but the negotiation was uncomfortable and I found my concept of justice changed. Women still have to fight for their rights as childbearers and caregivers; for example, small businesses are not subject to the FMLA. Our society still has a distance to go when it comes to protecting the important and sacred time of a child's first months with its parents and a family's need to feel safe from repercussions in the workplace.

**Larry Reimer** - In the early 1980's, UCG purchased about 100 copies of the then-new red UCC hymnal. It had cutting edge hymns in a variety of styles. However, it had one major flaw. It had been published in 1974, just before inclusive language for women became an issue of justice. The work of Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem and many others suddenly made us realize that we could not use the words, "sons", "brothers" and "all mankind" and assume this included everyone.

So at UCG, we put together our own songbook with inclusive language. But what were we to do with our hymnal? What were we to do with a hymn like "In Christ There Is No East or West" which is supposed to join hearts everywhere across boundaries and yet has a verse that says "Join hands then *brothers* of the faith, What e'er your race may be! Who serves *my Father as a son* is surely kin to me?" And that is just one example among many.

Well, one day a very kind and embarrassed young Santa Fe College student showed up at our office and asked about doing community service with us. She had a DUI charge and needed to do about 60 hours of work. Since she was from a Southern Baptist Church, doing her community service in a church seemed safe to her.

We asked her to type out little strips of stick-on paper with inclusive language for the blatantly non-inclusive lines in thirty hymns and paste these strips into each of the 100 red hymnals. So verse 3 of "In Christ There Is NO East or West" became "Join hands then *people* of the faith, What e'er your race may be! *All children of the living God are surely kin to me.* Justice changed in that we began to understand how much words matter, and creating inclusive language is an act of faith. And by the end of that tedious task, that young Southern Baptist woman believed this too. In fact we gave her a dozen roses.

### **Reprise – "Why Walk When You Can Fly"**

**SCRIPTURE – John 8: 1-11 - Woman caught in adultery** - Early in the morning, Jesus came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and making her stand before all of them, they said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law commands us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground.

One by one, they went away, beginning with the elders and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" And she said, "No one sir."

And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way and do not sin again."

Notice who is missing from this story: the man who presumably also committed adultery. Notice that the accusations for whatever happened and the need to punish are directly focused on the woman. Notice that in his bending down and writing on the ground, Jesus divides his attention almost equally between the scribes, who represent the forces of the law, and the woman herself, who is in one way or another a victim. Jesus avoids the trap the scribes set for him and he also deals fairly and with compassion for the woman. In both cases, he invites the scribes and the woman to give up their old ways and to enter a new way of life. Grace and mercy are offered to all.

Where do we need to see and hear, to accept and be accepted, with compassion?

## **TESTIMONY:**

**Tanja Philhower** - Gretchen Howard had planned to be here this morning to share her thoughts about justice for women and what is needed in the aftermath of someone experiencing an act of human, civil, or criminal injustice. Unfortunately for us, Gretchen had a scheduling conflict and could not be here with us. These are Gretchen's words, though as a victim advocate as well, I share the feelings she expressed.

"Being an advocate & counselor for victims of crime has taught me many things--one of them being that people feel, and become, vulnerable after acts of irresponsibility, intentional meanness, and victimization. One crucial ingredient in supporting such victims is compassion. Simple, sincere, compassion that is offered and given early and consistently after interpersonal violence, intentional unkindness, or any system's thoughtless response--can help reduce the pain and the trauma. Compassion occurs when we realize that life will keep offering us second chances. Compassion occurs when we realize that each of us is more than a label. No woman is strictly a domestic violence victim or a rape victim or a child abuse victim. Compassion helps all of us see that no woman is exclusively the victim of an offender's control or actions.

Compassion is lending our ears to listen and to withhold judgment. Compassion is patiently being present with someone who is considering how to describe what they have endured. Sometimes, that compassion may be channeled into advocacy to improve laws or the way services are delivered or to expand legal rights and remedies. We must not overlook or discount, however, the powerful difference that can be made simply by extending compassion to those who have been harmed, hurt, ignored, disbelieved, devalued, neglected, or forgotten. We ourselves heal when we express our deepest feelings and experiences in the presence of someone who cares for us, believes in us, and stands by us".

Henri J.M. Nouwen said, *When we honestly ask which persons in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving much advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness... makes it clear that whatever happens in the external world, being present to each other is what really matters."*

## **REFLECTIONS AND PRAYER – Sandy Reimer**

Three scripture stories – and personal stories from women and men in our congregation – all point to the ways our concept of justice changes. There are times when our concepts change because we experience the injustice of not being counted, of being marginalized or ignored or hurt by people and institutions and systems. As women, realizing we are not counted lifts up the awareness and the experience of injustice. This changes our perception of the world and our perception of ourselves – and we are never the same again.

Sometimes our concepts of justice change because a law, a practice, a civil right, the status-quo way of life changes around us. The woman reaches out for Jesus' healing, grasping for what she needs. A law like Title 9 is passed; language changes; women are accepted in professions and in new walks of life. As women, a window opens, a door swings back, we walk through to a place of increasing wholeness - and we are never the same again.

And sometimes we find ourselves in situations where, as Abraham Lincoln said, “mercy and compassion bear richer fruits than strict justice.” As women, we are judged on so many spectrums of life, held to so many conflicting standards, and carry at the core of our being the awareness of how easily and quickly our safety and security are at risk, how easily and quickly we can be blamed. Compassion for ourselves and for one another also changes our concepts of justice.

Larry said a few weeks ago that justice has no tenure. Perhaps justice is a moving target; sometimes change happens and women get to vote and have credit cards and become ordained ministers. Sometimes change seems to happen, and women have the right to maternity leave or to buy a house, and yet the reality does not match up with the promise of the change. And sometimes the most important thing we can do for each other, women to women and men to women, when justice slips back a gear, is to simply be with one another in compassion without judgment or recrimination or blame. Compassion as a response to injustice always has tenure.

**PRAYER** – Holy One, whom we call by many names, your call to us is crystal clear: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly on our path with You.

Open our eyes and ears and hearts, we pray, so that we may name and count and empower the uncounted and disempowered in our midst, in our world, and within our selves. Give us the courage and strength to do justice in ordinary moments where we can make a difference. Give us the perseverance and hope to do justice over the long-haul through the particular gifts that we have to offer.

Strengthen and widen our compassion for all people, so that we may be the healing listening caring presence which is so needed when justice fails or when justice itself is not enough.

Lead us, O God, from the center of our lives and call us with your love to yearn for justice, to pray for peace, and to heal what is broken. Amen. Blessed be.

**\*BENEDICTION** - ~ *adapted from Women Included from the St. Hilda Community*

May the God who dances in creation, who embraces us with human love,  
Who shakes our lives like thunder and restores our souls like rain,  
Bless us and send us forth with power to fill the world with Her justice. Amen.