



A Worship to Inherit

Reflections by Sera Chung,
liturgy by Rhashell D. Hunter

**Celebrate the Gifts of Women Sunday
March 6, 2016**

Fragrant Oil, Janice VanCronkhite (www.jvcArtworks.com)

In 2016, Celebrate the Gifts of Women Sunday honors women who contribute their gifts to the church and community, lifting up issues of women's rights and the role of women in our communities and world. Though Celebrate the Gifts of Women Sunday is March 6, 2016, your congregation or women's groups may use this resource on any date that you choose.

Order additional copies of this free resource, item 27501-16-001, through Presbyterian Distribution Service, 800/524-2612, or download from www.pcusa.org/women. A limited number of bulletin covers are available from PDS while supplies last; item 27501-16-002; \$5 for a pack of 25. The bulletin cover also may be downloaded free from www.pcusa.org/women.

A Reflection on Bold Witness

BY SERA CHUNG

In Mark 14:3–9, we hear of a woman who breaks open a jar of costly perfume to anoint Jesus. Some people with Jesus criticize her, deeming her gift wasteful. Jesus vindicates her, praising her faithfulness, saying “wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her” (14:9). This story resonates with many women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), particularly those who practice and live out a bold paradigm of worship. This unnamed woman’s act is a model we are fortunate to inherit.

At first glance, “inherit” may seem like an odd verb to describe the act of this nameless woman. During the time that Mark’s Gospel was written, women were excluded from positions of authority within society. Nevertheless, this socially, politically and culturally disinherited individual approaches and engages Jesus. Her interaction with and understanding of Jesus are invaluable.

She breaks open a jar of pure nard (a very costly perfume) and pours it on Jesus’ head. She anoints Jesus—a sacred tradition reserved for men and religious authorities. The unnamed woman boldly inherits the act of anointing. By carrying out this symbolic act of worship, she risks condemnation from those who witness her action. But Jesus silences her critics and praises her, saying she will be remembered forever in connection with the proclamation of the Gospel.

This woman’s action reverberates beyond the pages of the text, and much more than a jar breaks. Her witness suggests the *breaking* of inequality, injustice, social barriers and old traditions. She shows how to adapt anew to a society in which divisions—artificially created by religion, class and social and patriarchal order—are abolished, demonstrating that *all* are equal in Christ Jesus.

The men in Simon’s home argue: “Why wasn’t this perfume, worth a whole year’s wages, sold and given to the poor?” But what this woman gave was much more than what can be counted materially. Her act of selfless worship produces a priceless gospel inheritance, which speaks to the people of God to this day.

In 2016, Celebrate the Gifts of Women Sunday honors and remembers women whose faith leads us like a torch. Today is the day we celebrate them. There are women leaders who are paving the way and passing the torch. The legacy of these women and their worship inheritance remains in the hearts and minds of worshipers in their congregations and worshiping communities.

My hope is that we will inherit a worship that includes all—women and men, young and old, and those *named* and *unnamed* outcasts in our society. This kind of worship will include gestures of humility, will invite all to the cross and to the table, and will leave a heritage—a sacred impression, a fragrant remembrance—wherever the good news is proclaimed.

A Service in the Worship of God

BY RHASHELL D. HUNTER

Call to Worship

Based on Mark 14:3–9

One: Remembered for an extravagant act,

All: she is remembered for the beautiful thing she has done—

One: expensive oil poured upon Jesus’ head,

All: boldly inheriting the act of anointing.

One: Scolded by some, but defended by Jesus:

All: “Wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

Suggested Hymns¹

“A Prophet-Woman Broke a Jar”

(GTG 201)

“In the Midst of New Dimensions”

(GTG 315)

“God, You Spin the Whirling Planets”

(GTG 23)

“When in Our Music God Is Glorified”

(GTG 641)

Call to Confession

We come seeking reconciliation and peace.
We come to experience forgiveness. In faithful witness to your grace, O God, we confess our sins before you and one another.

Prayer of Confession (unison)

Gracious God, we confess that too often we pass judgment upon others, because their behavior seems excessive and extravagant to us. We neglect to realize that there is no one right way, but there are a diversity of ways to serve you. Forgive us for trying to control the abundant ways that others express their love and service to you. Forgive us for our short-sightedness and sin. Give us the strength, O God, to glorify and enjoy your abundant love.

Assurance of Pardon

One: Our God forgives us, even when we have been unforgiving of others.

All: Our God loves us, even when we are not particularly loving ourselves.

One: Our God gives us grace, even though we do not deserve it.

All: So let us love one another.

One: So let us forgive each other.

**All: So let us offer grace to one another.
Amen.**

Scripture Readings

1 Samuel 2:1–10

Psalms 32

2 Corinthians 5:16–21

Mark 14:3–9

The Confession of Belhar (unison)²

We believe that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ;

- that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.
- that God’s lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God’s lifegiving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world;
- that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;
- that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

Therefore, we reject any doctrine which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

To the one and only God, be the honor and the glory for ever and ever.

Charge and Blessing

One: May God's love and grace anoint you.

All: May God's blessings be poured upon you.

One: Remember God's beautiful ones,

All: who inherit sacred acts of worship.

One: Perform good services, do beautiful things,

All: in the name of Christ Jesus. Amen.

Program Suggestions

Schedule a "Women in Leadership in the Church and the Community" program in your congregation, worshiping community, presbytery, synod or organization. Invite women in your church, local churches and the community to join you. Promote your event on line and in church publications, and also ask women to invite other women (and men) to come.

In advance of the program, ask five women who have gifts in leadership in the church and/or the community to prepare 15 to 20 minutes of reflection on a selected topic, such as "Becoming a Courageous Woman of Faith," "Determining Your Purpose," "Balancing Work and Life," or other topics of interest.

Begin the program with breakfast or lunch together. Gather the women presenters in chairs or at a table facing the participants. Each presenter will share her reflections, followed by insights she has gained in her life and ministry.

Be sure to ask a person to serve as moderator or facilitator. Following each woman's presentation, hold a panel discussion (or conversation), and ask the other four women to reflect on what they heard and to share their own insights. In between the prepared reflections and spontaneous panel conversations, be sure to include two question-and-answer sessions, approximately 10 to 15 minutes each. Also, schedule a time for small table group discussions. Consider offering one or two guided questions for those in small table groups.

This program affirms the leadership gifts and wisdom of women in the church and offers an opportunity for women to share wisdom with each other, build confidence, affirm each other's gifts, and encourage one another as sisters in faith.

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Notes

1. *Glory to God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013).
2. The Confession of Belhar appears here excerpted and adapted for this liturgy. Full text available at www.pcusa.org/site/_media/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/belhar.pdf.

Resources

Ronald J. Allen, Dale P. Andrews and Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, eds. *Preaching Gods' Transforming Justice: A Lectionary Commentary*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, Years A, B & C, 2011, 2012 and 2013.

Priests for Equality, *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation*. Lanham, Md.: Sheed & Ward, Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.