

Sermon, Sunday, May 13, 2018 – Pastor Paula Kraus

Scripture Proverbs 31:10-31

“Ode to a Capable Wife”

These ancient words allegedly describe the ideal woman. Remember however, the writers in Proverbs equate wisdom with a woman so these words also describe wisdom, whose efforts are those of human women; but the combination is one that no human being can maintain.

Today we want to honor Women / Mothers – so let’s look at these verses and see how these ideals honor the Women in our lives.

I can begin by saying that verse ten lays out something of a caveat for us – it tells us about the rarity and the difficulty of living up to all these ideals. Husbands, pay attention to these verses, a woman who meets all of these circumstances is truly more precious than rubies and fine jewels.

Verses 11 & 12 tells us that a capable wife earns her husband’s trust, she increases her husband’s stature and does him good. This describes a woman who loves her partner enough to work with him not against him but she must also have the love and trust of her husband for that to work. Notice verse 11 states “The heart of her husband trusts in her”.

In verse 13 we learn she works with willing hands, not complaining or begrudging her tasks. If you ask me this is also where a woman needs her husband’s support to help her see that she is appreciated for doing what she does. Otherwise those tasks become drudgery and she is going to wonder why she is working so hard.

In verses 14 & 15 we are told she provides for her household. This is another indication that the capable wife cares for her family, ensuring they have enough. What mother would not want to do everything they could for those they loved.

In verses 16-18 we learn this woman shows wisdom and works to increase the family holdings, she does not squander resources and she takes care of herself and her merchandise. This can’t be done unless the woman receives support from her family, how can she work to increase family holdings if her husband shuts her out of the family decisions or fails to take her opinions into account. How can she ‘consider a field and buy it’ unless she has access to the family finances or has her own finances? This does not really fit with how we perceive the women’s role in biblical times does it?

In verse 20 we learn this woman is generous, helping to care for the needy and less fortunate.

And in verse 21 we learn that, because she has taken care of her household and her family, she has no reason to fear the hardships of changing seasons or changing times. She is prepared for whatever life may throw at her, because she has been frugal and resourceful.

In verse 23 we see that her spouse can proudly socialize and do business because he trusts and loves the woman who supports and cares for him. Her spouse knows that she is not doing anything that will fall negatively on the family’s reputation.

In verses 24-26 we learn this woman is cheerful, wise, kind, strong, and dignified.

Verses 28-29 tell us she is an example to her children who respect her and the pride of her spouse.

Finally verses 30 & 31 offer praise for this woman who fears the Lord.

WHEW!! how many of us can live up to these ideals?

The key here is found in verse 30 “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD, is to be praised.” Fear of the LORD, trusting God to lead, provide, comfort, and strengthen – that is the only way I can see a woman being this “Capable Wife”

Most of us fall short of these ideals because it is hard to be all things to our families these days, our culture is different, expectations are different and work load is different although certainly these ancient women of the time Proverbs was written had no easy life.

One thing to note here is that the Proverbs 31 woman is independent. She is an entrepreneur, creating and marketing her creations. She is an investor and business woman who is able to buy a field out of her own money and plant a vineyard to produce a crop for wine. She is a philanthropist opening her hands to the poor and needy. She is an employer, setting tasks for her 'servant girls' which today we would call employees.

This contradicts everything conservative chauvinistic societies consider proper for a women. This contradicts everything that we thought were women's roles in ancient mid-eastern cultures. She is not sitting quietly at home having babies, cooking, cleaning, and leaving all the important decisions to the men in the family. The Proverbs 31 woman is not the silent, subservient woman so many Christians imagine. Rather, she is an assertive accomplished woman whose success has clothed her "with strength and dignity" and who is relied on to speak "with wisdom" for "faithful instruction is on her tongue." Furthermore, this is a woman from old testament times, from a culture thousands of years gone from us. So, how did things get so misrepresented that many churches expect a lesser role for women, so changed that we women aren't perceived as capable enough to hold roles equal to men.

NO – I am not going to launch into a women's liberation dissertation. I think this church, this congregation, realizes that women are just as valuable as our male counterparts and just as capable of making informed intelligent decisions. I found this quote I think is worth sharing, it is from Patricia Gundry, an evangelical feminist and author of several books about women and leadership within the church, she says:

"God entrusted women with some of His most important tasks. He sent women with the Resurrection news to the rest of the disciples. Jesus accepted women into full discipleship. He commended Mary of Bethany for her efforts to sit at His feet and learn, rather than do the accepted thing and retire to the kitchen. To those who say women cannot fill positions of leadership, the Bible says women did. As the great evangelist D. L. Moody replied when someone asked him what a woman can do to serve Christ, "What could they not do?"

I remember a time when members of this church used to challenge the belief that women could hold leadership roles, that was not so long ago although most of those members have gone now. First Corinthians 14 was often referred to as biblical evidence for those beliefs. But, Paul's words are vague and he contradicts himself – compare chapter 14 to chapter 11 where Paul acknowledges women can pray and prophesy in church. Some scholars interpret the passage in chapter 14:26-40 as an admonition to men to keep the peace. The disruption is caused by the belief that women should be silent. Paul states "Did the word of God originate with you?" "Are you the only ones it has reached?" Could these words be addressed to those men who oppose women in leadership roles?

Actually, these words of Paul speak to me as a reminder of what we learned last week, God is an impartial God.

I like particularly what Paul states in First Corinthians 11:11-12: "Nevertheless, in the LORD woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God."

ALL THINGS COME FROM GOD

In God / Christ, there is no distinction. Male, Female, we are all created in the image of God. Woman from man but all men through women. So that takes us back to Mothers on this Mother's day.

God had a good plan. Although the creation story gives us woman being created out of man, through science and biology we know man comes from woman. So if anyone wants to have a bit of a chauvinistic attitude, hold off, remember and respect your mothers without whom you would not exist.

And, Ladies, remember we can't do it alone, we need each other. Man needing woman and women needing man but all needing God.

It's really all about relationships – the relationship we have with our family, our friends and our Church. The relationship we have with our God, the source of Being, the Womb of Life, the Mother and Father of us all.

Honor your Mother and honor God who planned it so well – creating Mothers for all of us. So what does it look like when we fail to see our Mothers in the light God intends.

There was a teenager who didn't want to be seen in public with her mother, because her mother's arms were terribly disfigured.

One day when her mother took her shopping and reached out her hand, a clerk looked horrified. Later, crying, the girl told her how embarrassed she was. Understandably hurt, the mother waited an hour before going to her daughter's room to tell her, for the first time, what happened.

When you were a baby, I woke up to a burning house. Your room was an inferno. Flames were everywhere. I could have gotten out the front door, but I decided I'd rather die with you than leave you to die alone. I ran through the fire and wrapped my arms around you. Then I went back through the flames, my arms on fire. When I got outside on the lawn, the pain was agonizing but when I looked at you, all I could do was rejoice that the flames hadn't touched you.

Stunned, the girl looked at her mother through new eyes. Weeping in shame and gratitude, she kissed her mother's marred hands and arms.

Today, let us remember and honor the sacrifices mothers made for us, let us remember the love that mothers have for us. Let us too, remember those who for whatever reason are not mothers, but who show the same love and willingness to care for us as if they were.