

C. Jesus and Women

We will look into Jesus' life and teaching in order to find answers about gender equality or women's leadership roles.

- Women were among followers of Jesus (Mt 14:21; Mk 15:40-41; Lk 8:1-3)
- Jesus had female apostles and female disciples.
 - a. Mary Magdalene (Lk 8:3; Mk 15:40-41; John 20:11-18)
 - b. A Samaritan woman (John 4:9-25)
 - c. Martha and Mary of Bethany (John 11:1-44)
 - d. A woman who anointed Jesus (Mk 14:3-9; Mt 26:6-13; Lk 7:36-50; John 12:1-8)
- Women were believed to participate in the Lord's Supper.
- Women were the final witnesses **to** Jesus' crucifixion.
- Women were the first witnesses **to** Jesus' resurrection.

1. Women Among the Followers of Jesus

In Jesus' time the context was of a purity system that created a world with sharp social boundaries between pure and impure, righteous and sinner, whole and not whole, male and female, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile that became the base of discrimination.¹ Traditional patriarchal law denied women adults autonomous civil status. Women were treated legally as permanent minors and dependents of fathers and husbands. They had no rights to represent themselves politically as legal persons. Civilly, women were non-persons who were represented by their male guardians. The daughter or wife was in some sense property or chattel, regarded as being owned by her father or husband.² In Jesus' day, it was a scandal for a man to appear in public with a woman. A woman's word was considered useless in court. It was better to burn a copy of the Torah than to allow a woman to touch it. Women were excluded from most parts of the temple nor did they count in calculating the quorum needed for a

¹ Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 53, 55-56.

² Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Western Religious Tradition and Violence against Women in the Home," in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*. Edited by Carson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 31.

meeting in the synagogue. First-century Jewish men regularly thanked God that they were not Gentiles, slaves, or women”³

In such a society, there was no ground for women to stand on. It was unthinkable for women to meet other men or to walk with them but women were among followers of Jesus, traveling with him. This is because Jesus emphasized equality and justice of the community, embracing the marginalized, the oppressed, women or children into the household of God. The writings of the apostle Paul state there are no longer Jews or Gentiles, men or women, and adults or children. All are treated as the children of God. In this vision of Jesus are included women, children, tax collectors, sinners, prisoners, the disabled, the sick, and all kinds of the marginalized by politics or religion. Jesus preached to them the love and justice of God,⁴ envisioning a new community of love where all people belong together, regardless of their social standing or gender. In this new family of God, one of the least is to be cared for and included (Mt 25:40). In a sense, Jesus himself was one of the least, who advocate for them at the cost of his life.⁵

2. Female Apostles and Disciples Among the Followers of Jesus

Some argue that women were excluded from leadership roles in the church because Jesus as a man called only male disciples (the Twelve), and that only men can serve as apostles and disciples. We wouldn't deny that Jesus is a man, but let us ask, did he save men only because he was a man? Do we believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior because his gender is male? The Church of Mary Magdalene, a homeless women's church, affirms that “we re-image Jesus Christ as a forgiving and healing mother, father, sister, brother, friend and Savior.” Regardless of his gender, we believe in Jesus because he is our Savior. We also know that Jesus Christ is not only a man but also a Jewish male. Then shall only Jewish men become disciples? Of course, in his days, only a Jewish man could become a rabbi. Should that be the case today also? As we described above, in the tradition and culture of Jesus' days

³ Pedrito U. Maynard-Reid, *Complete Evangelism* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1997), 75.

⁴ Brian Blount, *Run the Risk*, 113-114.

⁵ Jean Kim, *Root Cause of Homelessness and the Church's Response* (National Council of Korean Presbyterian Church, 2008), 53.

that discriminated against women as slaves, it could have been difficult to include women in the Twelve disciples. Therefore, should that also be the case today? Our contemporary secular society is ever more open to gender equality, for instance, allowing women to serve as President or Prime Minister. Should the secular society practice gender equality better than the church? Should Christ's church discriminate against women more than secular society?

Women were among the foremost disciples of Jesus, recorded in all four gospels. For instance, Mk 15:40 affirms, "When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables." What this verse suggests is that in the inner circle of Jesus there were more than the Twelve. In Mark's Gospel, "his disciples" was used 43 times whereas "the twelve" was used 10 times only. Women were part of "his disciples" and followed Jesus wherever Jesus went. According to Mary Ann Tolbert "discipleship" means, "to follow, serve, and suffer for Jesus, and women were an excellent role model for all of these qualifications for 'discipleship.'" Therefore, it is possible that Mark's community must have had prominent female apostles and disciples.⁶

Apostleship

As for Paul, apostleship was not limited to the twelve; rather, it included those who witnessed the risen Lord and/or those who were assigned a new task of preaching the gospel. In Acts, we find a little different story of apostleship. In discussing who would become a disciple instead of Judah Iscariot, Acts 1:21 states a few conditions for a new disciple: the one who followed Jesus in his earthly ministry and witnessed the risen Lord. In fact, women appearing in the four gospels satisfy these conditions because they had been with Jesus from Galilee to the last moment of Jesus' crucifixion. They were the essential apostolic witnesses of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection. They were asked to witness to the risen, preaching good news to all (Mt 14:21; Mk 15:40-41; Lk 8:1-3; 23:49, 55; Jn 20:11-18). Indeed, women were prominent among the apostles.⁷

Calvin freely acknowledges that:

⁶ Thurston, *Women*, 77.

⁷ Oo Jung Lee, 230-231. See also Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads, 1982), 111.

[Christ] even gave them the message of the gospel for the apostles, in order to make them the teachers of the apostles. That in the first place was a rebuke to the listlessness of the apostles, who were lying all but dead of fright where the women were anxiously hurrying to the tomb and thereby earned no common reward [Pardoning their mistaken intent to anoint the body, Christ] deemed them worthy of singular honor, giving over to them the apostolic mandate taken away from the men for a short time ⁸

This is Calvin's remarkable statement on women's leadership.

Discipleship

Discipleship means "to follow" Jesus. Women were among "the followers" of Jesus, "But all his acquaintances, including the women who had 'followed' him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things"(Lk 23:49). "Following" is essential to discipleship, as Lk 5:11 indicates: When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and "followed him." Some of these women came from Galilee (Lk 8:1-3). If they followed Jesus, they were also disciples, who responded to the call of Jesus and who supported Jesus' mission with all their mind and material (Lk 8:3). They served Jesus and learned from him just like male disciples. In Luke, woman is a model of service and discipleship.

The image of female disciples in Mark is more positive than that of male disciples, who hardly understood Jesus' humanity, teaching, and mission (Mk 6:35-36, 49, 52; 8:16-21; 9:32-36; 10:35-45; 13:1). Male disciples challenged (Mk 4:38; 5:31; 8:4; 14:4) and disobeyed him (Mk 7:36). Though Peter's confession of Jesus was excellent, he still could not understand Jesus. His mind was set on the flesh or glory (Mk 8:27-32). Even one of the twelve, Judas Iscariot, betrayed Jesus and handed him over to the religious elites and authority (Mk 14:10-21). All male disciples fled from Jesus when he was captured and tried (Mk 14:50-52). Peter was busy denying Jesus, when he was being interrogated at the High Priest's yard (Mk 14:53-72). But women followers did not abandon but followed Jesus all the way to the scene of his crucifixion (Mt 27:55-61; Mk 15:40-41; Lk 23:49; Jn 19:25). So Ahm Park argues that Jesus had women disciples with him. In Lk 8:1-3 (Mk 15:40-41, Mt 27:55-56), women were followers of Jesus, coming from Galilee. They provided support for Jesus' mission.

⁸ Douglas, *Calvin*, 58.

These women's devotion is an example of discipleship. They left their homes to follow Jesus just like the twelve. Jesus challenged society's norm that women would not be disciples.

Jesus called Matthew, a tax collector, one of the most hated jobs, to be his disciple (Mt 10:3).⁹ Tax collectors were hired by the Roman government to collect taxes from Jews. They collected more than required by the Roman Empire and put the over-collected money in their pocket. Because of this, Jews hated this job. Tax collectors did not have even the power of witnessing in a court. This means they were treated like other Gentile slaves (Mt 18:17; 10:5), sinners (Mk 2:15), or prostitutes (Mt 21:31-32). In addition, their money was not accepted by charity.¹⁰ But Jesus accepted this tax collector through the love of God and made him his disciple (Mt 9:9-13; Mk 2:14-17; Lk 5:27-32). Likewise, Jesus made women disciples with him. Let us look into four women disciples who took leadership roles.

Mary Magdalene (Lk 8:3; Mk 15:40-41; Jn 20:1-18)

Mary Magdalene appears twelve times in four Gospels. Except for Lk 8:2, she appears in the stories of Jesus' passion, burial, and resurrection. Her name Mary Magdalene is derived from her hometown Magdalene near Genesaret Lake. She recovered from her disease through Jesus' healing ministry. Then she left her home for Jesus, serving him with all strength (Lk 8:3). Mary Magdalene is more frequently mentioned than other women, which suggests that she was a leader of the community. In a certain gospel tradition, Mary Magdalene has the same leadership position with Peter.¹¹ She traveled with Jesus throughout Galilee and followed him to Jerusalem (Mk 15:40-41). From the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee women were involved and supported Jesus' mission with all their means (Mk 15:41; Lk 8:1-3). Mary Magdalene was highly regarded by the church fathers of the Greek Orthodox Church until fourth century CE. She was among prominent apostles. Moreover, on the wall of the temple she was drawn and depicted as a female leader appointing priests.¹² In Mk 15:40-41, Mary Magdalene, along with Mary and Salome, followed Jesus, and "following" means

⁹ SooAm Park, *Women Ordination*, 84-85.

¹⁰ Jean Kim, 48, 61; SooAm Park, 85.

¹¹ OoJung Lee, 231.

¹² Hyun Sook Nah, 132.

discipleship, as we saw before. This verb *ekolouthoun* (“to follow”) was used when Andrew, Simon, and Levi were called by Jesus (Mk 1:18; 2:14). Mary Magdalene served Jesus in Galilee. Thus her service can be understood as ministering or priestly work. Galilean women were leaders in Jesus’ ministry.¹³ Mary Magdalene was an outstanding disciple, who accompanied Jesus all the way to the crucifixion and resurrection. She was the first witness of Jesus’ resurrection; she is a true disciple and apostle.¹⁴ In the Gospel of Mary,¹⁵ she was portrayed as a willed, intelligent apostle of Jesus – a model disciple who experienced holistic life. Indeed, she is the one who witnessed everything about Jesus: his life, suffering, death, burial, and resurrection.¹⁶ Mary Magdalene was a perfect candidate for an apostle who could replace Judas Iscariot. She meets conditions of apostles mentioned in Acts 1:21.

Mary Magdalene was the first witness of the risen Christ (Jn 20:1-18). She watched Jesus suffering and dying on the cross and went to the tomb of Jesus early in the morning. Finding the empty tomb, Mary cried. But the risen Christ appeared to her. “Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (Jn 20:17). Mary was given a task of sharing good news of resurrection to other disciples (Jn 20:11-18). Mary was the one who first met the risen Lord, the one who was first called to deliver the message of the risen Lord, and the one who first announced it to the world. Mary was assigned an important task of witnessing of the risen Christ. This was against the social norm of the day that women’s witness was useless. The story of Mary Magdalene in John 20 suggests that she was an apostle or disciple of Jesus. According to Jang Sang, Mary is a foundational figure of the early Christian community as a carrier of Jesus’ resurrection news.¹⁷

A Samaritan Woman (Jn 4:1-40)

Jesus traveled through the regions of Judea and Galilee, ending up by a Jacob-related well in the

¹³ Thurston, *Women*, 69.

¹⁴ Hyun Sook Nah, 139.

¹⁵ This is one of the apocryphal Gospels.

¹⁶ SangNim Ahn, 248-249.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 237.

village of Samaria. Jesus meets there a Samaritan woman and asks her to give him water. No doubt she was surprised because a Jewish man was not supposed to talk with a woman in public space. In addition, Samaritans were in hostile relationship with the Jews. Funk reports:

The Samaritans were a bastard race by Judean standards. They were presumably descended from Israelites who had remained behind when the Assyrians deported the leading families of the region following their conquest in 722 B.C.E. The Israelites remaining behind intermarried with foreign settlers brought in by the Assyrians in the years that followed.¹⁸

Since then, Samaritans had been despised by Jews because they were racially and ceremonially mixed people. They were treated like sinners or the unclean pagans. Jews were not allowed to be with Samaritans. Even eating or worshiping with them were prohibited.

Jesus surprised her by asking for a drink. Jewish men did not speak to women in public. Jews viewed Samaritans with distaste, and in fact the rabbis especially shunned Samaritan women, whom they viewed as perpetually unclean. Jesus breaks both a cultural and an ethnic taboo and a religious prohibition and begins a discussion about "living water."¹⁹

Thurston claims:

the Samaritan woman is, in fact, one of the most theologically informed person in the Fourth Gospel. She knows the regulations about ritual purity (4:9), ancestral traditions of Israel (4:12), the necessity to worship at a valid temple (4:19-20), and the expectation of a Messiah (4:25). During the discussion he asks about her "husband" and remarks that she has had "five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband" (4:16-19). For the first time in the Gospel and to her, Jesus both reveals his messiah-ship and uses the "I am" self-designation that characterizes John's Christology (4:25-26). The woman returns to her village, shares what she knows of Jesus, and leads many Samaritans to believe in him – thus in effect fulfilling the role of the first apostle/evangelist.²⁰

Through her testimony, people of a Samaritan village believed in Christ (Jn 4:39). As disciples of Jesus left their homes, boats, and nets to follow Jesus, this Samaritan woman also left her things behind at the well to tell good news to her people in a village. Her work is an example of apostleship (Jn 4:5-42). This is evidence that Jesus had no preference of people on the basis of gender, ethnicity

¹⁸ Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 175.

¹⁹ Thurston, *Women*, 83.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 83-84.

or religion.

Martha in Bethany

Raising Lazarus from the tomb (Jn 11:1-44), Jesus asked Martha about her faith in him. She answered: “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world” (Jn 11:27). Her faith is very mature in John’s Gospel.²¹

Martha’s confession is comparable to Peter’s in the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus revealed his identity to a Samaritan woman earlier in the Gospel and now Martha confesses about his identity. Traditionally, Peter’s confession was considered the rock of the church (the Roman Catholic Church believes that Peter’s confession is the foundation of the church, and Peter is the first pope). Since Martha had an excellent confession, she seemed to be an excellent apostle. In John’s Gospel Martha is a model of leadership. Wendel-Moltmann argues that Martha seemed to be a respected leader in the Johannine community.²²

Today many people read of Martha as a kitchen worker, preparing food for a guest (Lk 10:38-42), but the text does not say explicitly about such a work. Martha’s work is referred to as *diakonian* in 10:40, which means “to serve.” In Luke’s Gospel, it can be related to a mediator or a leader of Christian mission. *Diakonian* is used in Acts eight times, and six times of which mean the work of leaders. As Carter points out, the story of Mary and Martha was included in Luke’s Gospel to demonstrate the importance of women’s ministry in the church. Both listening to the word of God and acting it out are important. Mary and Martha served in different ways; both were disciples of Jesus. Mary D’Angelo also agrees with Carter that Mary and Martha were among female followers of Jesus, serving as leaders of the house church. Fiorenza also thinks that Martha’s *diakonian* implies her special leadership role in the house church. Martha’s understanding about Jesus is clear and deep, calling Jesus as the Lord.²³

²¹ Ibid. 87-88.

²² Moltmann-Wendel, *Women and Jesus*, 25-26.

²³ Thurston, *Women*, 110.

A Woman Anointing Jesus' Head (Mk 14:3-9; Mt 26:6-13; Lk 7:36-50; Jn 12:1-8)

A woman anointing Jesus' head appears in all four Gospels. In Mk 14:3-9 and Mt 26:6-13, this episode occurs when Jesus stayed at the leper Simon's house in Bethany, in the time of the Unleavened Bread season. In Lk 7:36-40, this woman is described as a sinner and anoints Jesus when he was sitting at the table at the Pharisee's house. In Jn 12:1-8, it is Mary who breaks her jar of ointment and anoints Jesus' head. It happens at Lazarus' house when Jesus ate six days before Passover. Though this woman's anointing story is a bit different in each gospel, all four gospels record this episode, suggesting that this story is very important to early Christian communities. According to Mk 14:3-9 and Mt 26:6-13, a woman approaches Jesus when he was eating with a leper at Simon's house. Jesus breaks cultural, religious taboo that one is not to eat with lepers (Lev. 13-14). It is a clear message that these lepers are also equal in God's house. It is possible that she was invited to this table. She could be among the disciples of Jesus. She brought an expensive jar of ointment.

Even though this woman's name is not given in this story, her outpouring of love and anointing prepares moments of his last life – his betrayal and suffering and death. Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem. Judas Iscariot betrayed him. Religious leaders such as high priests and scribes planned to kill him. Jesus predicted his suffering, death, and resurrection three times to his disciples. In the first prediction (Mk 8:30-32), Peter rebuked Jesus not to do so (Mk 8:32). Jesus then rebukes back Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things" (Mk 8:33). Peter seems not to understand about Jesus' identity and work. Just moments earlier, Peter's confession had been great. Jesus again predicted about his suffering and death (Mk 9:30-31), but his disciples still did not get it. Even they were afraid of asking him about it. The third time Jesus spoke about his suffering and death (Mk 10:32-34), but his disciples did not care about it, aspiring for a higher place and glory: "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory" (Mark 10:38).

All male disciples of Jesus seemed not to understand about Jesus even though they followed him for long time. Their mind was set on worldly things. Jerusalem for them was a place of victory without foreseeing the difficult journey ahead. But this woman anointing Jesus knew what was going

to happen to Jesus in Jerusalem. She knew about his suffering and death. That is why she prepares for his death in such a symbolic gesture, with holy waste of expensive ointment. This woman's preparatory act is contrasted with male disciples, who never understand Jesus. It is also contrasted with Judas Iscariot, who betrayed his teacher. Her gracious act is also contrasted with the religious leaders' plan of killing him. She truly loves Jesus and understand his ministry.²⁴ This woman poured an expensive jar ointment on Jesus' head, equivalent to one year's wage. Anointing the head of a king or a priest means a special calling from God. Prophets in Ancient Israel established a king after anointing him. This woman's anointing of Jesus is a symbolic act of declaration that Jesus is Messiah (the anointed) (Mk 14:6-7). This woman's act also foreshadows Jesus' crucifixion (Mk 14:8-9). Perhaps this story implies that in the Early Church women's role was outstanding. This woman's act is prophetic – the first person who truly understands about Christ crucified.²⁵ Jesus praises her act: “She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her” (Mk 14:8-9). This is a unique statement from Jesus and nobody else received such a high praise. Her act of anointing is the work of a true disciple.²⁶ As we see here, Jesus respected women and made them disciples. Both men and women were leaders of the Early Church.

3. Women Were at the Lord's Supper

Scholars believe that women also attended the Lord's Supper besides the twelve disciples. Quentin Quesnell vigorously so argues: “Women at the Lord's Supper.” On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus taught at a synagogue, and women followed him. Therefore it is believed that women were to be part of participants at the Lord's Table. In fact, some ancient manuscripts have “apostles” at the Lord's Supper, instead of “the Twelve” in Lk 22:14. Apostles include women as well in Luke. But some editors changed to “the twelve.” NRSV has “apostles” in its translation. Women seemed to be there at the Lord's Table, as we relate them to “those who have stood by me in my trials” (Lk 22:28).

²⁴ Ji Chul Kim, 111.

²⁵ Thurston, *Women*, 75.

²⁶ Sang Nim Ahn, 181-182.

A more conclusive evidence of women's presence at the Lord's Supper would be that Passover meal is a meal of family, which includes women as well (Lk 22:13). Similarly, Joachim Jeremias thinks that women must have been there.²⁷

4. Women Were the Final Witnesses of Jesus' Crucifixion

Notably, all male disciples fled from Jesus, but women followers were there at his crucifixion. Women's response to Jesus' teaching was remarkable. Jesus taught women and fought for them. The relation between Jesus and women were very strong; they worked together for the kingdom of God, impressed by Jesus' teaching. At the risk of their lives, women did not leave the final scene of Jesus' death, because they loved him so much. All four Gospels record women's presence in Jesus' death and burial (Lk 23:49, 55-56; Jn 19:25-27; Mk 15:40-41; Mt 27:55-56). Women's faithful following of Jesus demonstrates a model of true discipleship.

5. Women Were Witnessing to the Risen Lord

After Jesus' death, the male disciples fled because of their fear and disappointment. Judean authority attempted to arrest mobsters, including Jesus' disciples, to hand them over to the Roman governor. (cf. Josephus, B.J. 6, 300f) If they were standing with Jesus in his trial and were witnessing his death later, they would be captured by the authorities. So the male disciples did not have the courage to visit his tomb. By contrast, a few women, including Mary Magdalene, witnessed Jesus' death and went to his tomb at the risk of their lives. Magdalene's meeting of the risen Jesus is called "a vocational epiphany"(Jn 20:1-18). It is these women's courage and bold witnessing of Jesus that Jesus movement survived and continued after his death.

Women followers of Jesus played a major role in proclaiming the prophetic message of Jesus.²⁸ As Moltmann argues, "These women were the last to have witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus and the first to see the risen Lord. Women were welcomed by Jesus and they found hopes and healing in the

²⁷ Thurston, *Women*, 112.

²⁸ WooJung Lee, 241-242.

reign of God. ...”²⁹

Jesus showed an example of love and equality for all. We also have to follow him in our lives today. He became friends of sinners, the oppressed, and women. Jesus broke all barriers of discrimination in society, declaring human equality before God. All can be equal leaders of the church. Jesus lived for that ideal at the risk of his life. But we saw that Jesus’ vision and exemplary life was not well understood by later followers of the church. We also found that Paul’s radical theology of human equality would be very helpful for our church today. Many theologians today base their progressive theology in Paul.

D. Conclusion

In this chapter, we attempted to reinterpret various scriptures (creation stories of Genesis, Paul’s letters, and gospel texts) that were used to support a gender hierarchy in the early church. In the case of Paul, we studied scholarly positions and concluded that a gender hierarchy could not be Paul’s own voice or theology partly because a specific local church’s context should be considered and mainly because Paul’s theology of his letters is egalitarian. We then examined Jesus’ ministry and his view of gender relations. There are plenty of stories in Gospels that support Jesus’ radical theology of human equality. We also saw that women’s discipleship or leadership was an excellent model to follow. Women followers of Jesus were true witnesses of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. They bridged Jesus’ earthly ministry with post-Easter Jesus movement. We pinpointed some misunderstandings about women’s status in the church. For a long time, women were prevented from church leadership, which is against Jesus’ vision and Paul’s gospel. Now we need to reclaim the gender equality in the beloved community. The Bible cannot be a means of control of women any more since it advocates equality of people in God’s kingdom.³⁰

Many scholars and theologians alike argue that the Bible actually promotes gender equality and equal leadership of both men and women. The main reason for that argument is God’s character. First of all, God created humanity as male and female in the image of God, and blessed them equally. All

²⁹ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 146-147.

³⁰ HyunSook Nah, 131.

are equal before God. Second, the Bible as a whole portrays God (and his Son Jesus) as the liberator of the poor and the oppressed (Lk 4:18-19). The exodus event is a good example (Exod 3:7-10). Christ's coming was to deliver the captives from all forms of bondage (Lk 4:18-19). Third, God and Jesus are compassionate. God is with the oppressed, the poor, and the marginalized.

But still in our Korean churches, men dominate leadership positions while women are considered not equal with them. Few women are ordained as elders or pastors. Even women's mission worship services more often invite male speakers than female speakers. Women candidates for elders are yet to be supported by the congregation as a whole. Often women do not want to take an elder's role. While men are accustomed to dominating women in the church, women sometimes take for granted their passive position in the church. Some women think that they are not interested in the leadership roles at all. But the issue here is not about personal choice but about the church's exclusion of women's leadership roles, based on a hierarchical reading of the scriptures. If God and Jesus want all members to work together, nobody can block women's leadership in the church.

Cynthia Campbell, president of McCormick Theological Seminary, argues that any idea or teaching that denies the equal humanity of women does not reflect God's salvation, a far cry from God's true character. Conversely, anything that advocates full humanity of womanhood is holy, reflecting the true character of God. Such efforts to heal broken relationships between men and women would be good news for all people.³¹ The point is that the issue of gender is not merely about gender but about our relationship to God. In a way, this issue is a mirror of ourselves, reflecting our relations to other aspects of our lives. Without mending this issue, we would not make a holistic ministry in the church. Now is the time for the Korean churches not only to recover the full humanity of both men and women but also to establish equal leadership roles, regardless of gender. In so doing, we will recover Jesus' (also Paul's) radical vision of gender equality not only in the church but also in society. As we have pointed out in this book, we need to understand the Bible in a fresh way. We should make this new reading a reality in our church. This reading is not a new one but we reclaim

³¹ Cynthia Campbell, *Theologies Written From Feminist Perspective* (Louisville, KY: Office of General Assembly, PC USA, 1987), 22.

equal leadership roles once practiced in early church by rejecting a hierarchical, patriarchal reading of the scriptures. We should renew our reading of the Bible with a focus on God's character and Jesus' ministry.

We also think that male Christians need to recognize their explicit or implicit participation in the oppression of women in the church or in society. Women also need to understand that they are equal partners with men in all aspects of ministry in the church. Women need to be empowered for the church and cannot give up their hopes of serving the church equally with men. The Christian church that God wants is not a male dominated church but a church of servanthood that men and women equally serve as leaders. We hope that many women will be proud of their service and leadership roles in the church. We also hope that men and women together will walk hand in hand for God's kingdom – a place of equality and solidarity. When we move forward for this goal and vision, we envision a better future for our Korean American churches, full of wisdom and strength. We hope all churches will join in NCKPC's efforts to enhance women's leadership roles in the church.