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Glen Ridge Congregational Church

“The North Star”



Sunday, July 19, 2026
1 Corinthians 14:33–34

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Today, we begin our summer sermon series, in which I asked you, our members and friends, what you would like me to preach on. Thanks to all who shared with me your questions, thoughts and subjects that you'd like to hear about.

This week's question is:

"Why it's important to worship Jesus for what he said and did and not just pick and choose which Bible verses support our beliefs."

Our Bible is a collection of stories, histories, prayers, hymns and visions which have been collected from many communities over the course of centuries. They reflect the time, the place, and the thoughts of those who

wrote them as they had been thinking deeply about their relationship to God, and to each other. As we read through the Bible, with all of its various voices, we encounter many passages which bring us hope, and instill in us a sense of what it means to live a meaningful and just life. But let us call a spade a spade. Our Bible also contains passages that don't ring true to our sense of morality.

Today's passage is one of those.

We hear the words of Paul, writing to the church of the followers of Jesus in the city of Corinth. And he is telling them how to be together as a congregation. And towards the end of the letter, he makes the statement that women should not speak in church, and that they should defer to their husbands in all matters. To hear these words today is corrosive, and a betrayal of the gifts and blessings that women bring not just to their families, but also to the family of faith.

Are we really to believe that women should not speak in church? Are we really to follow a teaching that denies the equality of women that was set forth in the Creation stories that begin our sacred scriptures?

When we come across passages in the Bible that make our hearts break, and have undergirded the inequality of women that we still experience in our society today, what are we to do?

One approach is to ignore the passages that offend us, to act as if they don't exist. And the question that one of you submitted points to this approach. Should we pick and choose the passages from our sacred scriptures that only support our view of the world?

Another approach we might take is almost the opposite of ignoring. It is an approach that says we should take in what the Bible says, even the difficult passages, and simply adopt them because we think they are the word of God.

We see this approach in our own denomination's history. It wasn't until the 19th century that our church allowed women to preach, and lead congregations, not under the direction of their husbands, but according to their own sense of faith and conscience. Some denominations still do not

allow women to preach, or serve communion, or take part in the governance of the church in meaningful ways.

But I think there is a third way that we can approach, not just passages that offend us, but all of the passages of the Bible, and that is to use the gifts God has given us: our intellect, our experience, and the fullness of the biblical story, to engage with the passages we read from our sacred scriptures. And the foundation for those of us who follow the Christ is the example and the words of the Christ himself.

The person who submitted the question I'm responding to today makes the point that we follow Jesus in his words and deeds. That is our faith's center of gravity. It is our North Star that helps us navigate what we do with all of the ugliness that the Bible contains, and it does contain ugliness.

I always come back to Jesus and the great commandment he gives us: love God with everything you have, and love your neighbors as yourselves. We hear this charge, from the one we call Savior, and we need to apply it not only to our daily lives, but also to how we read the Bible.

Does silencing women in the church show love? It doesn't.

To silence someone's voice is to do them harm. To disavow women's innate sacredness, given to them by God, is to show a lack of faith in our Creator. To dismiss the truth of women's gifts of teaching, of leading, of proclaiming is to corrode God's truth. If we did these things we wouldn't hear Mary's Magnificat. We wouldn't hear Miriam's song of celebration at the deliverance of Israel from slavery. We would never know another Mary's witness to Christ's resurrection.

We wouldn't have Sherry's voice leading us in worship when I am away. We wouldn't have most of our Church Council. We wouldn't have our Church School teachers helping our youth understand our faith.

And that would be the real sin, a terrible waste of so much blessing and wisdom.

But it is through the example of Jesus sharing the Great Commandment, of speaking to the woman at the well, and the woman who came to beg him to

heal her daughter, that we see that Jesus wanted to engage with women, to speak to them, and to allow what they said to change him. We too should be listening to women, and opening ourselves to be transformed by them, to be transformed by you. And the good news is this church has been doing this for a very long time.

I chose the image for today's bulletin as a visual comment on our scripture reading today. It is of Barbara Jordan speaking at the DNC meeting in 1976. It is a vision of a woman speaking, and speaking powerfully. And if you notice, there are mics in front of her to amplify her words, and carry them across the arena, so that all could hear her insights and her perspective. Not only should women be heard, at the DNC and in church, their voices should be amplified, because what they, what you, have to say is so important, it would be a sin not to hear it.

But we can't hear you, if we simply take Paul's words at face value, without putting them into conversation with the Gospel, with the good news of love, that women matter, and that your voices must be heard. We can't hear you if we turn off our minds, and forget our history, and think that we are being more faithful by doing that. We're not being more faithful; we're actually being less faithful.

So, my invitation to all of us would be to read the Bible in its entirety, even the ugly parts, even the parts that make our stomachs turn.

But don't stop there.

Revulsion is a kind of wisdom. It tells us something isn't right. And if we feel revulsion, let us follow it, guided by Christ's North Star of love, and let our understanding move beyond ignoring and simple adherence. Let it move, in love, to a place of reflection, study and more inclusion, to the celebration of the voices of women, in every part of our lives, even in church, even in all churches.

Amen.