**We had some technical difficulties yesterday for which we deeply apologize.**

**For those who didn’t get audio on the livestream. . .here is the written Pastoral Prayer, Sermon Notes and the Invitation to the Table. . .**

**Pastoral Prayer**

God,

we thank you for this most beautiful of days

we thank you for the coolness of the mornings

and for the heat that warms us in the afternoons

we thank you that we are wonderfully made

made in your image, divine and holy,

man and woman, child and adult

of many nations yet one in the family of our God

we rejoice in our ability to sense

sight, sound, smell, touch and taste

and how each presents us with

the wonders of your infinite universe

we confess that we so often use these gifts of senses

to categorize and then limit

to distinguish and then restrict

to discern and then discriminate

to perceive and then forbid

remind us that differences are a blessing

and that love in all of its myriad forms and facets

is shown by all

and can reveal your infinite love for humanity

Amen

**Scripture: 1 Corinthians 14:32-38 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**

And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets,

for God is a God not of disorder but of peace.

(As in all the churches of the saints,

women should be silent in the churches.

For they are not permitted to speak,

but should be subordinate, as the law also says.

If there is anything they desire to know,

let them ask their husbands at home.

For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

Or did the word of God originate with you?

Or are you the only ones it has reached?)

Anyone who claims to be a prophet,

or to have spiritual powers,

must acknowledge that what I am writing to you

is a command of the Lord.

Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized.

**Sermon: “Not Permitted to Speak”**

Hello!

Did I just hear a woman’s voice? What are we to make of hearing a woman’s voice in church? What are we to make of women presiding at our communion table as elders? What are we to make about the possibility of a woman pastor being called by the congregation? Let me read a bit of our scripture again: “As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says.” Is this not clear? Is this not the word of God? Is this not “Bible”? Or, are we just making an exception for today...because...

I was tempted to stand in the pulpit today dressed up in drag. I was thinking a pink dress, a string of pearls, some pink pumps (How is it possible to walk in heels?), and maybe my pink bonnet to complete the outfit. From the pulpit I could declare, for all to see, that I was, in fact, a woman and therefore not allowed to speak in church and therefore get out of preparing a sermon for today.

Women are not permitted to speak in church. I don’t remember my mother speaking in church. She was a splendid pastor’s wife during church service. If no one else was going to listen to Dad during church then, by God, Mom was going to give him her full attention. Although, I do remember a few times when Mom DID speak in church. Just a few times mind you! She would turn to me and my wiggly, chatty brother and say, “Would you two be quiet!” Is a whisper considered speaking? Tell me, how many of you remember being “whispered” to by your mother in church?

If we view today’s scripture reading through the rule of love that I talked about last week then we should have no problem with it. Demanding that women be silent in church is not a loving thing to do. So, we can simply set this strange injunction aside. Perhaps it was simply a product of its times and shouldn’t necessarily apply to today. For which I am grateful.

And, I was grateful when Mom let my brother and I move from the 6th-row pew on the floor in front of the pulpit up to OUR preferred seating: the last row of the balcony. Never again did she have to break Paul’s commandment by telling us to “Be quiet!” in church. Never again. Of course, Mom would have created quite a scene if she did do so. Standing up. Turning around. And needing to scream up to the balcony, “Be quiet!”

Another way of looking at today’s “difficult and troublesome” passage in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians...is...maybe Paul didn’t write these words. In fact, most scholars believe that these words were NOT written by Paul. Telling women to be silent in the church flies in the face of everything else that Paul wrote, including one of my favorite passages, “In Christ, there is no male or female.” And, if you look at the verses just prior to and just after this command in the scripture reading, Paul is talking about prophets. What a strange jump for Paul to make.

What if Paul didn’t make that jump? How, then, did this call for womanly silence get in the Bible? Scholars believe that it was inserted into Paul’s letter by a scribe who was copying Paul’s letter some sixty years or so after it was written by Paul. Why would a scribe do such a thing? To accommodate the growing church to the culture around him.

Paul comes along into Corinth preaching radical room cleaning; not just in Corinth but everywhere he went. Paul boldly declares, “In Christ there is no male or female!” In Paul’s letters we hear him giving thanks for women apostles on equal footing as himself, blessing women saints of the early church, and commending the work of several women as leaders of the movement which began with Jesus of Nazareth, who also surrounded himself with women. One scholar (Jouette Bassler) asks, "How can women like Euodia and Synteche (mentioned in Paul's letter to the church in Philippi), Prisca, Junia, Tryphaena and Tryphosa and Mary (mentioned in Romans) function as co-workers in the churches if they cannot speak in those churches? How can Phoebe (also mentioned in Romans) fulfill the role of deacon if she cannot speak out in the assembly?" Bassler ends by saying, "Something is seriously amiss here."

How long do you think radical room-cleaning will last in a house the size of the Roman Empire? An Empire where Caesar was head of the family, indeed where all men were heads of the family. Where the cultural norm was for women to BE submissive to their husbands. When you are faced with a new way of living that is completely different from your own way of life, what changes do you make? How completely do you change? Even though you become utterly devoted to this new way of living, your old ways, habits, and tendencies never fully go away. This is especially true if you still live in the same social and cultural setting as before. For example, it is easier to become a hermit by going into the forest alone than it is by remaining in your house in town.

Early Christianity experienced this same tension. Paul comes preaching a radical egalitarianism where there is ‘no male or female’ that flies in the face of the culture of the Roman hierarchical and patriarchal way of life. For a while there is ‘no male or female.’ Over time, though, the strict separateness of ‘male and female’ of Roman culture begins to draw Paul’s upstart vision of ‘the way life could be’ back to the center of ‘the way life is.’” And so a scribe adds a bit of his own experience, an experience that is succumbing to the pressures and realities of Roman male dominance. “When in Rome. ”We see this same process happening over and over again. A radical vision of how a God of love intends for all human beings to be equal and free.

On the cover of today’s bulletin is a picture found in an ancient cave outside Ephesus, Turkey. The picture portrays Paul and a mother of the church, Thekla. Both are the same size which in ancient iconography meant that both were of equal stature. Both lift their right hands with pointer and middle fingers raised which is a sign of Christian apostolic teaching authority. The representation of Paul has survived the years unscathed except for the wearing away of time. Thekla’s picture, however, has not. Her raised fingers have been removed. Her eyes have been scratched out. The intention is clear. Women are not permitted to speak in church; let alone teach as one with authority.

In today's world the removal of women's fingers and eyes is a bit more subtle. Women do most of the housework while making less than men at the office. We say time and time again, That's a woman's job. What are we implicitly teaching our children if all they see are men as pastors and elders and teachers in the church or in any institution for that matter. My three daughters have consistently amazed me with what they strive for; one was a research scientist in Africa, another is a scientist at a pharmaceutical company and another in school to become a surgeon. Would this have been the case if I did not allow them to be themselves and fully human in church and in the world in which they grew up in?

The author Sue Monk Kidd, whose recent works of fiction have touched millions, gives a current example of the struggle. In an interview Sue Monk Kidd describes a conference on the divine feminine and women held at a mother house of a community of Catholic sisters. Kidd says, one afternoon while seeking refuge in the library, I was summoned to the office of one of the sisters and found myself standing before an elderly nun in full habit. She had her arms crossed over her chest. She did not look happy. She said, “I understand you’ve been speaking about the Divine Feminine.” I said, “Yes ma’am.” Then she said, “And I also understand you’ve kicked up quite a hornet’s nest.” I nodded. “Well,” she said, “I just wanted to tell you that it’s high time people realized that God is more than two men and a bird.”

I rejoice in the gift of life given to me by my mother. My guess is Mom didn’t know that when she was in labor her soon-to-be-born son would one day labor in the pulpit. My guess is that she would be proud to hear me say, “Mom, if I get a bit too loud in church, then please, please, please! stand up and tell me with authority, ‘Be quiet!’”

**Invitation to Christ’s Table**  
  
Here at this table, we celebrate our identity in the gifts provided for everyone

who gathers. No distinction between us.

We’re each, and all, invited to share these emblems of the bread and juice.

So come!  Claim your place.  Know you are welcome.

Rejoice in this meal, and in our identity as joint heirs with Christ!

Will you pray with me: Thank you God, that we are all welcomed at this table. You have come to us in Christ Jesus to teach by example the way of faithful living. As Christ’s disciples, we pray that you would make yourself known to us now in these gifts of bread and juice. Because you call us into this community, we are able to become a gift to one another. We rejoice in your presence, loving God, now and always. Amen