

Before you put your bulletin down this morning, I would like you to take Psalm 31, cross out the word WIFE writing in the words TRUE BELIEVER. Throughout history, Jewish and Christian, this has been seen as a token schmaltzy passage to read on Mother's Day. The Bible is filled with stories of ABRAHAM, ISAAC, JACOB, JOSEPH, MOSES, SAMSON, GIDEON, SAUL, DAVID, SOLOMON, JESUS, the 12 DISICPLES and PAUL, as Sacred Images of BELIEVERS, when all of these were MALE. In contrast, there is EVE who for generations was blamed for the corruption of the world, NOAH's Wife who has no name, SARAH who laughed at her own circumstance, REBEKKAH who played favorites between her children and tricked her husband, TAMAR who seduced her FATHER-IN-LAW, JEPHTHAH's DAUGHTER who was killed for running to greet her father after war, DEBORAH and JAEL who murdered the CANAANITE KING SISERA, RUTH who was an IMMIGRANT, Concubines, Wives, Daughters, TEMPTRESSES and PROSTITUTES, ESTHER who wins the Beauty Pageant, MARY whom the Church has named as a PERPETUAL VIRGIN, MARY MAGDELENE whom many claimed was possessed by 7 DEMONS, and LYDIA who sold PURPLE.

In the 1980s the BIBLE Publishers attempted to correct this implicit bias by changing all references from "MAN" to HE/SHE, which disrupts the poetry of what many have described as the best of Human Writing. Instead, if we take one of the only references to A WOMAN/as a WIFE, and rather CLAIM her for what she is as a TRUE BELIEVER, then all of the remainder of this proverb could just as easily apply to a MALE BELIEVER as much as to A WIFE, and all of those references to MEN as "BELIEVERS," could be understood as being Faithful regardless of sexuality.

What a shame to trivialize this passage as so schmaltzy as to only be read on MOTHER'S DAY, because the PROVERB does describe a person of worth, specially valued because they are a BELIEVER, worth far more than RUBIES, possessing our full confidence in her as lacking nothing of value.

Doing Good, working hard, esteemed as a SKILLED TRADER bringing treasures from round the world.

Not only A WORKER WHO STAYS UP ALL NIGHT providing for the rest of us, who also has the resources and wisdom to buy and sell property, and herself work the land.

Reference to a SPINDLE and DISTAFF are the dangerous parts of a WEAVER's LOOM, clothing her family in SCARLET to protect and keep them safe in Winter's Snow, covering their beds with fine LINENS and PURPLE, this BELIEVER is an ARTIST.

On top of all of that, this True Believer speaks with WISDOM, is a keen ECONOMIST, her Children and partner bless her saying, "MANY PEOPLE DO NOBLE THINGS, BUT YOU SURPASS THEM ALL!" Her gifts are not limited to beauty, for she lives her life respecting the LORD GOD, and all her works bring her praise in the Community.

In contrast, I came across the story of Shanghai Pierce. Where are our folk from Texas? Shanghai Pierce was born in New Hampshire in 1834, and at age 17 stowed away on a ship headed for Galveston, Texas with 75 cents in his pocket. He was excited by the idea of raising Cattle, so contracted to give a year's labor in exchange for \$200 worth of steers and cows to begin his own herd. Quickly Shanghai became what was called a Cattle Baron, wearing a brocade vest with gold watch and a tall broad brimmed hat. He even ordered a Grave-site statue of himself, prior to death, so he could enjoy looking at himself! Every evening, Shanghai would lift a glass to toast himself, his ego was said to be like that of a New York Tycoon.

Shanghai decided his ranch should become a small city, with everything anyone could desire. He wanted to call the place THANK GOD, TEXAS, until his more refined friends convinced him BLESSING, TEXAS was better. In later life, he invited several of his Northeastern friends to tour his holdings. As they rode in a carriage pulled by a pair of pure white horses, Shanghai would narrate: "Over there is the Commissary, best restaurant in the territory. That's the School, some places boast of a One room, we have two Rooms!

Over there we have the best Blacksmith in the State of Texas. And over there is the Saloon, best Whiskey this side of the Mississippi. As they continued on the tour, one of his guests spied the steeple of a Church in a grove of Mesquite trees, and asked "Shanghai, do you belong to that Church?" To which Shanghai, spit tobacco juice and replied "No, that Church belongs to me!"

In our Thursday discussion of Church History, we set the stage for the birth of Christianity, that culturally this had been an era of constant WARS, the Babylonians conquering Israel, the Persians conquering the Babylonians, the Egyptians, then the Medes, then the GREEKS with Alexander the Great, ultimately conquered by the ROMAN EMPIRE. The Roman Empire was brutal and sadistic, enjoying the spectacle of human suffering, surrounding itself with wealth and opulence, power and gold, conquerors of greatness.

An agenda of seeking greatness, trying to be The GOAT "The Greatest of All Time" fit Mohammed Ali, and Simone Biles, and the LA Dodgers Rookie from Japan who is the only person to ever hit 51 Homeruns and Steal 51 Bases in a single season, AND IS AN UNDERCURRENT in the setting of Mark's story.

As we read last week, Jesus had asked his Disciples: WHO THEY THOUGHT HIM TO BE? Shortly after Simon Peter identified Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus took 3 of them up the Mountain, where like Moses a Cloud over-shadowed them, Jesus was transfigured in glory, and a voice proclaimed "You are my beloved, with whom I am well pleased." Then they came down the mountain, where the other disciples were struggling to heal the son of a man so possessed that the child often threw himself into fires! Rather than healing the child in front of the crowds, he took the boy off by himself and healed him then returned him to his father. AND Jesus interrogates his Disciples about what they were discussing on the Road.

Can you Not Hear the Disciples, as they walked PETER, JAMES & JOHN describing how Jesus chose them to go up for a Mountaintop Experience, this Holy Moment where Jesus was TRANSFIGURED before them, while Nathaniel, Andrew and Thomas were describing how they had fought this DEMON that only Jesus could vanquish. So which is greater, who is greater, a Disciple who witnessed the Transfiguration, or a Disciple who fought a Demon?

Jesus offers one of his classic WISDOM SAYINGS, that seem to make no sense... "The First shall be Last, and the Last shall be First." Culturally, in the ancient Asian world, Men were not involved in domestic life. Men did not run. Men did not cook or clean. Men conversed with other Men in the marketplace.

In the Ancient Jewish World, as well as in the Roman Empire, an infant had no power, therefore no worth. Like a lamb, she was a mouth to feed. Less than "a Child was to be seen and not heard", Children were kept out of sight as if they did not exist. In a time of Maternal Mortality where 50% of all Pregnancies ended in the mother's death; where 80% of all children died before age 5; a child had no identity. And Jesus took a baby holding the child before the disciples, naming the dependence, the trust, the joy at life, and described that we needed to be like this. As the Messiah reflected on having been born like this, too.

Scott Peck, author of *The Road Less Traveled*, wrote another book called *The Different Drum*, in which Peck told the story of an old Monastery that was dying, no new converts came there, no one from the outside ever came, the buildings were in ruins, the gardens overgrown. Finally, one Monk went to a neighboring Bishop to ask advice. The Bishop said, he knew that one among the Monks at the monastery was a TRUE BELIEVER who would be their SAVIOR. The young Monk returned mystified who it could be. He shared this with the others, and each cognizant it was not them, looked at the others, wondering with new eyes. They began treating one another with greater respect. They began wanting to spend time in the company of each other. They cultivated their gardens. They repaired the Buildings. Seeing a beautiful place, strangers began to come and the Monastery was reborn.