

An Idle Tale
Nashville UCC, May 12, 2019

What would you do if you had the most important information in the world, but no one would listen to you when you tried to talk about it? How would you feel if what you had to say would revolutionize our lives and change them for the better, but everything that you said was ignored? I think that we would agree that you would find it frustrating at best and infuriating at worst! But that was the experience of the women who met the risen Christ on that first Easter morning (Luke 24:1-11). They had seen him with their own eyes and heard him with their own ears, but when they went back to tell the others, the men dismissed what they had to say as “an idle tale.” They thought that it was nonsense, a story not worth anyone’s attention. In fact, the women probably got the look that we sometimes get when we come home with a story that Harriet told Maude who told Peggy who told everyone at the beauty parlor! We know that look. It’s a mixture of “You’ve got to be kidding!” “You can’t really believe that stuff?” and “Give me a break!”

The truth is that many things that women say are treated as “fake news.” And sometimes, that’s exactly what they are. But all too often all the things that women say get lumped into the “fake news” category, to be listened to but not really heard, to be tolerated but not taken seriously. Maybe that’s the reason that women’s voices fall silent in church history after the gospels were written. An image painted in a fresco was found in the catacomb of Priscilla in Rome. In the center of the painting is a woman in a pose that suggests that she is leading worship, possibly even preaching or officiating at Holy Communion. But you’d never know that women were leaders in the early church from looking at the historical records! Men’s voices are heard loudly throughout church history, while women’s voices are virtually silent.

The fact is, though, that women’s voices have been vital to the proclamation of the good news of God’s work through Jesus Christ down through the ages! It began with Mary, Jesus’ mother, and her powerful song *The Magnificat* that we can read in the gospel of Luke. “God’s mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation,” she sang. “He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts; he has lifted up the humble and filled the hungry with good things.” (Luke 1:50-53) That sure sounds like the Good News to me! And women were the first ones to proclaim the resurrection. All three of the gospels that record stories of Jesus’ resurrection appearances say that the women were not only the first to meet the risen Christ; they were the first to proclaim it! A meme recently circulated on Facebook that said, “In the interest of historical accuracy, all Easter sermons this year will be preached by women.”

Today, women all over the world still preach the gospel, standing up for what they believe is right as followers of Jesus Christ or protesting what they believe is wrong. In a world where women’s voices are often considered to be worthless, they must let their actions speak for them. In 1995, for example, hundreds of Russian mothers were horrified by the Russian invasion of Chechnya. Their pleas for peace fell on deaf ears, so they descended on the war-torn city of Grozny to find their sons and persuade them to desert the army! Since their voices were not heard, they took action. This is a portion of a report from a January, 1995 issue of *USA Today* reporting on their actions. “The mothers, wearing black combat boots and carrying

small Russian icons of Jesus for protection, are stopping at nothing to find their sons. They have locked arms and stopped a column of Russian tanks that was leaving the militia base at nearby Mosdak until Russian commanders let them in. They have entered Grozny's war-torn presidential palace to gather the names of Russian soldiers being held as prisoners there. They have walked along Grozny's sniper-ridden streets hoping to identify dead Russian soldiers. Sympathetic military commanders are allowing the soldiers to leave if their mothers come after them. 'It's a mother's duty to be here!' yelled one of them. 'We won't let our government sacrifice our boys! This is stupid!'" When their voices protesting war were ignored as "idle tales," these mothers followed Jesus at the risk of their lives. And during the war that lasted nearly two years, about 3,500 soldiers were brought home by their mothers.

Women not only call for peace; they also call for tolerance and unity, calls that are dismissed as unrealistic. Since their voices are ignored, they join together and take action. The story is told of how a group of women gathered in a cemetery in Tuzla in the former Yugoslavia and decorated it with symbols of doves, crosses, and crescents – symbols of their differing religions in a country that has been torn apart by religious and ethnic hatred. They told the journalists who witnessed the event that they were working together for the future of their country.

There are millions of other women around the world who are crying to be heard as they proclaim the good news of the gospel: the possibility of peace, love, justice, and unity. And those in power dismiss them as dreamers. The reality of life, they are told, is the struggle for power, competition, and a dog-eat-dog world that spares no one! Why, Christ is not risen! Who in their right mind would believe such an idle tale? It is past time that we join the women in telling some "idle tales" of our own, and protest the world's insistence on hate and violence! Christ is risen! Love will one day be triumphant! We can all work together for peace! War will one day be a thing of the past! These are all stories that women have told at one time or another. I invite you not only to listen to those stories, but to raise your own voice in telling them, helping to convince the world that they are not, after all, just idle tales.