

In Their Own Words

These passages may be read as part of a women's history celebration, used in a display, or printed in the church newsletter to challenge, educate, and inspire.

Jarena Lee

I met with many troubles on my journey, especially from the elder, who like many others, was averse to a woman's preaching. And here let me tell that elder, if he has not gone to heaven, that I have heard that as far back as Adam Clarke's time, his objections to female preaching were met by the answer, "If an ass reproved Balaam, and a barn-door fowl reproved Peter, why should not a woman reprove sin?" I do not introduce this for its complimentary classification of women with donkeys and fowls, but to give the reply of a poor woman, who had once been a slave. To the first companion she said, "Maybe a speaking woman is like an ass, but I can tell you one thing, the ass seen the angel when Balaam didn't."

from *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee* (1849)

Lydia Sexton

[An] old man . . . was at first a great persecutor of preaching women . . . One day after the congregation was dismissed, he stood in the aisle until I came along by him, when he handed me twenty-five cents. That quarter was of great value to me, as I looked upon him as my persecutor. The brethren told me he had said that our work was a money-making scheme; and if the people would quit paying the preachers they would quit preaching. When he handed me the quarter he told me to pray for him. That was a good omen. That same man professed religion [and] joined the church.

from *Autobiography of Lydia Sexton* (1882)

Annie Wittenmyer

The time spent by the women of the Church in *dress* and personal adornment—in useless and ornamental work—is almost incredible . . . I have known women in the Church to spend months of precious time over a piece of embroidery not much larger than a lady's pocket-handkerchief, and the while make excuse that they had no time for Christ's work. What a spectacle for heaven to look down upon!

from her book, *Woman's Work for Jesus* (1873)

Fanny Jackson Coppin

I never rose to recite in my classes at Oberlin but I felt that I had the honor of the whole African race upon my shoulders. I felt that, should I fail, it would be ascribed to the fact that I was colored . . . Slavery made us poor, and its gloomy, malicious shadow tends to keep us so . . . It seems necessary that we should make known to the good men and women who are so solicitous about our souls and our minds that we haven't quite got rid of our bodies yet, and until we do we must feed and clothe them; and this thing of keeping us out of work forces us back upon charity.

from her autobiography, *Reminiscences of School Life, and Hints on Teaching* (1913)

Eugenia St. John

There is a serious question before you . . . Dare this conference stand before the omen given by God and frustrate his will for the upbuilding of his church by your prejudices? . . . The great question of the future is whether you will have power to conquer the forces of sin, and I tell you it will need every woman that can be found to stand side by side with the good-minded men in this work if the church is to be triumphant.

from debate over seating women delegates at the 1892 Methodist Protestant General Conference (quoted in *Methodist Recorder*, June 4, 1892)

Frances Willard

Of all the fallacies ever concocted, none is more idiotic than the one indicated in the saying, "A woman's strength consists in her weakness." . . . Let us insist first, last, and always that gentleness is never so attractive as when joined with strength, purity never so invincible as when leagued with intelligence, beauty never so charming as when it is seen to be the embellishment of reason and the concomitant of character. What we need to sound in the ears of girlhood is *to be brave*, and in the ears of boyhood *to be gentle*. There are not two sets of virtues; and there is but one greatness of character; it is that of him (or her) who combines the noblest traits of man and woman in nature, words, and deeds.

from her address before the Women's Christian Temperance Union at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, October 16-21, 1893

Anna Howard Shaw

At a [woman's suffrage rally] held in San Francisco, Rabbi Vorsanger, who was not in favor of suffrage for women, advanced the heartening theory that in a thousand years more they might possibly be ready for it. After a thousand years of education for women, of physically-developed women, of uncorseted women, he said, we might have the ideal woman, and could then begin to talk about freedom for her. When the rabbi sat down there was a shout from the audience for me to answer him, but all I said was that the ideal woman would be rather lonely, as it would certainly take another thousand years to develop an ideal man capable of being a mate for her.

from her autobiography, *The Story of a Pioneer* (1915)

Mary McLeod Bethune

Can one love God and yet believe that he is right in attempting to restrict his neighbor's knowledge, the growth of his mind, to that which will restrict his neighbor's livelihood? His neighbor's share in the conduct of the community? Can one love God and serve Him with open mind and open heart and still wish for his neighbor less than he has for himself? Consider his neighbor to possess less human dignity? To be worthy of less courtesy and respect? To need fewer physical comforts and cultural opportunities? No! Surely none of these things are the love of God, nor are these the acts of brotherhood.

from "We march forward to brotherhood," sermon given at Riverside Church, New York City, November 13, 1949

Margaret Henrichsen

The more families I got to know, the more people came to trust me, the heavier the load and the less time for study, meditation, and creative work What little time I could get for real study was further trespassed upon by glaring needs in the house; floors that had to be swept or washed, windows that had become so smoky they cried out to be washed, some ironing and mending—although I did as little as I possibly could. Yes, the trouble was that having chosen to be the minister—I also had to be "her wife."

from her autobiography, *Seven Steeples* (1953)

The Status of Women

The words and acts of Jesus give the Christian a vision of what a just society should be. Discipleship to Jesus requires both men and women to measure their attitudes about themselves and all others by his values and to act in accord with those values. The full worth and dignity of each person is to be acknowledged and expressed. The Church may help the vision of Jesus to be realized by proclaiming that women are persons created in the image of God, here to serve with men in the breaking forth of the Kingdom.

from *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church*; resolution adopted 1980