

Hey, good morning, everybody. It's good to see you all here this morning. And I am just personally glad that you are here. But as we get started this morning, my question for you is, why? Like, why are you here this morning?

Why are you here? And I know it's kind of an odd question to ask, maybe a little bit of abrasive, why are you here? But there's a point. And so just kind of hang with me here. And I know when we gather into a room like this on Sunday mornings, there's all different kinds of reasons why we come into a space like this.

Some of us, we are here today because it's Sunday. And like, that's just what we do on Sundays. We get up and we go to church. Some of us are here today because we have come to worship. We've come to listen to the preaching of God's word.

We're here today because when we are with the collected and gathered body of Christ, we feel the presence of the Lord. We feel his comfort, we feel his peace. We feel his love. And we're able to extend that to others as they extend it to us. And so that is why we are here today, because we need to be around fellow followers of Jesus.

I tell you, this is one of the reasons why I love coming to worship on Sunday mornings, why I'm here. This morning, in between the 8:00 and the 9:30 service, I told someone it took me 15 minutes, literally, it took me 15 minutes to walk from there to that door back there. Because I just got to stop and talk to people that I love. People who are going through stuff, but their faith is seeing them through it. People whose dad passed away this week and just being able to comfort one another.

Someone who's an Alabama fan and lost worse than we did yesterday, there's something special about the gathered body of Christ. Maybe that's why you're here today. Some of you are here today because you are searching for something in your life and you don't know what it is. You don't know why you have this longing inside of you, but it is there. And so you are here today, not really sure why, but you're hoping that maybe Jesus will provide an answer that you're looking for.

Some of you are here today because someone made you be here. And you're wondering the same thing. Why am I here? They pulled you out of bed and they said, come on, you're going to church with me. It's all different kinds of reasons why we show up in a Room like this.

And so let me just kind of narrow my question a little bit from why to who? Who is the first person you remember being a spiritual influence in your life? Who is the person that instilled that value in you, that, hey, it's Sunday, and on Sundays we go to church. They made you get up and they took you to church and they made you sit and worship

or go to that Sunday school class and just they were consistent and they showed you that it's not just what we do on Sunday mornings that matters, it's how it makes a difference. All throughout the week, who modeled the importance of worshiping God and hearing the preaching of His Word, being with followers of Jesus, encouraging and supporting one another?

Who? Who is it that made you think about turning to Jesus when life got uncertain because you saw something in them that you want more of in your life? Who is that person that loves you enough to drag you to church on a Sunday morning because they want you to experience the goodness of a life lived with Jesus? Who is the first person you remember being a spiritual influence in your life? For me, it's a lady named Linda Strickland.

Linda was my friend Mark, his mom. Linda was feisty, fierce. She was faithful to the Lord, bold for him. She used to tell me, Shawn, God loves you and has a plan in your life. Back when I was in high school and didn't really care about either one of those things, and I was just like, okay, good for him.

I'm just going to keep living my life. Loved me through really dumb decisions that I made when I gave my life to Jesus. She was one of the first people that I wanted to tell. And part of the reason why I am a follower of Jesus today is because of Linda's influence in my life, her faithfulness to Jesus that came out. She really lived out the words of our text today.

I want to read these for us. In 2nd Corinthians 5, looking at verses 17 through 21, the apostle Paul writes this. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come, the old has gone, the new is here. And all of this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us this message of reconciliation.

We are therefore Christ ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. Paul says, we implore you. Some translations say, we beseech you. We beseech you, implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God, be brought into right standing and right relationship with God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This verse right here is the gospel message. It is the message that Jesus came proclaiming in that passage that we looked at last week when he said, the kingdom of God is near. This is what he is doing. God is making all things new. The Father sent Jesus the Son to come into our world, to create a way for us to come back to Him.

He sent Jesus to bear the weight of our sin and our shame so that we could be brought back into right relationship with Him. Jesus was perfect and sinless. He took on all of our sins so that we could be fully accepted by the Father. And that means that you don't have to perform, you don't have to pretend, you don't have to project this image of perfection in order to one, be loved by God and two, to be loved by us. In fact, some of the people that I love the most are the ones who are most authentic and genuine.

This is who I am, and this is what God's doing and how he's continuing to grow me. We don't have to put up this front of perfection. You don't have to have it all together. Because through Jesus, God is putting you back together. He's transforming you into a new creation that Paul talks about.

That word, the verbiage, is like this ongoing process. It's not one and done, it's continuous. God is continuing to form us back into the people that he made us to be. He is transforming you from death to life. God is bringing people back to Himself so that they can experience true and lasting life.

This is the message of the Kingdom of God. And it's not just the message to the kingdom of God. This is the message and ministry of Jesus. It is everything that he was about, everything that he spoke, everything that he came to do was all about this bringing people, bringing us back to the way that God desires and intends for us to be. And then making a way for it to happen.

And we see that this is not just the message of Jesus alone. He goes, he gives it to his disciples in Mark 6, who take it out. They do what he did, they taught what he taught at the Great Commission. As Jesus is about ready to ascend into heaven, he says, go, be my witnesses, disciple people, baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. He says, take this message.

Take what you have heard and seen and share it with others. And on and on and on it went through the generations.

It sets up what I wanted to make this adjacent point to our message today, this idea of of Christ giving us the ministry and mission that he started to be able to advance that around the world. And he's given it to both men and women. He's given it to both men and women. Both have equal value and play equal role in this mission that he has invited us to extend. And so I invited one of our elders, Elin Rajmani, up here to kind of talk a little bit about how we as a church are trying to do that more.

We've been in this process over the last few years of looking at some areas where maybe we have drawn lines that Scripture hasn't and removing some of those barriers so that women can feel fully empowered

to use their gifts and serve at Sherwood Oaks. And so over the last few years, we've started ordaining women. We've had a few women that we have been able to set aside for ministry, and God is using them in incredible ways. We've been able to expand our deacon's ministry to include women now, and that has elevated the amount of care that we're able to give to our church family. And a couple of years ago, after some study that our elders did and I did, even personally, we just came to the conclusion, like, scripture does not draw a line when it comes to women preaching.

And there are some texts that I think maybe have been latched onto and misunderstood we're going to talk about today. But we just kind of wrestled through those and felt like the Lord said no. Yeah. And so Maggie Mobley is someone that the Lord has clearly gifted on our team. And so I invited Maggie to preach a couple of years ago.

She knocked it out of the park. It was the best sermon on discipleship that I've ever heard. And two things became apparent. Number one, God truly has gifted her for this. And number two, I did not do enough to prepare our congregation for this.

And some of you know this. Maybe some of you, even your friends, some of my friends ended up leaving the church because I didn't do a good enough job teaching, preparing us for that. It was jarring for some people because of the tradition, maybe that they had grown up in. Maybe it was jarring for you. And so we're doing a series next month called Fearless and Faithful, where we're going to be looking at the women of the Christmas Story.

And Maggie is going to come back up and preach Next month. Long overdue. And so Elin and I just wanted to take a moment here in this sermon that is about God sending his church and using us to continue his message and talk about why we feel like this is actually moving towards scripture instead of away from Scripture, which was an accusation that was levied against us during that time. So, Elin, welcome. I'll stop talking.

Okay. Let me just ask a question, and then I'll turn it over to you. Preachers gotta preach. I don't mind if you do all the talking. You don't mind it?

Yeah, yeah. This is. Elon is stepping out of his comfort zone here, so I appreciate you being a part of it. I don't know anybody that has a heart for this more than Elin does. And so there are passages of scripture, really 2.

1 in 1 Corinthians 14, 1 in 1 Timothy 2, and I want to read that one that seem to indicate that we are actually crossing a line when we allow a woman to preach. So let me just read this. The Apostle Paul writes these words to this church and to this leader, Timothy. A woman

should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man.

She must be quiet. All right, so, Elin, what do you do with that? You know, whatever we do in this church, we ought to be faithful to the scriptures. I think that's our foundation. But when you're looking at this scripture, I think one thing we need to do is we need to take a step back and look at the whole narrative arc of the Bible.

What is the whole Bible saying? How is God using women in different roles throughout the Bible? I think we need to do that first before we look at the Scripture so we can start from Genesis. Right from Genesis, God creates both men and women, you know, in his image. And so he give them equal dignity and respect and value, and then he gives them authority to rule the earth, you know, as partners.

And then you go through the rest of the Old Testament, you can see how God is using women in many leadership roles. I mean, you see Deborah leading the Israelites in a battle. You see, when King Josiah discovers the new Scriptures, he calls Huldah to come and help him understand and obey the Scriptures, even though there were other male prophets around. You see Miriam actually leading together with Aaron and Moses in the Exodus. And if you go to the New Testament, you can see Jesus also, you know, elevating women and helping them to be part of his ministry.

You see the Samaritan woman become the first evangelist, you know, you see Priscilla teaching Apollos, you see Mary Magdalene, Susanna, Joanna, all are part of going through Jesus Christ. And they actually even fund, they financially support ministry. And then if you go to Romans 16, you see Paul listing a whole list of women, actually one third of the whole list are women who he calls them co workers. And he acknowledged their partnership and their leadership in that. So when you see all of that, you need to see that God is using women all throughout history, all throughout Scripture.

And is this foundation that we should use to now understand these other scriptures. That's right. So we want to kind of look at maybe one or two scriptures in particular and really ignore the rest of the 66 books of the Bible that seem to teach something different and show something different. And so how do we take that interpretation technique and apply it to passages like this that seem to indicate one thing that doesn't really line up with the rest of what we see in Scripture? Yeah.

So if God is using women in all different ways, then we need to be careful. Is this one or two scriptures now stopping them, which is not in line with the rest of the scripture. So you go to 1 Timothy 2. First Timothy is a letter written to Timothy, and Timothy is in Ephesus. So the letter was written for a reason.

Paul is writing the letter for a reason. And you need to understand what is the context, why is he writing. So in Ephesus, there is a woman led Artemis call that women are involved in. They are the leaders. They kind of overpower men and lead.

And some of the women came to faith and now they are part of the church and they want to lead. And some of the baggage from the old cult comes through. And so they are teaching false doctrine. They're kind of mixing the message between this idol that they were worshipping and Jesus. And it was creating a little confusion in the church.

So Paul, what he's trying to do, he's not giving a universal ban for women from preaching. He said this particular woman should not teach false doctrine in this domineering way. And he's saying, you know, they need to learn. And that's the passage you read, they should learn so that they can be equipped to lead. So he's not giving a universal ban.

And so in our church, I think we should allow for any woman who has been called and gifted and equipped and trained in the scriptures to teach us. Otherwise we will lose, you know, some of the gifts that God has given. Right. And that's, you know, when we read through the New Testament, we see, it's that the Holy Spirit is gifting the church for the work of ministry. And those gifts as he's giving out, including preaching, teaching, leadership, those gifts are not gender specific.

He's not saying. And to men, he gave these gifts, and to women, he gave these gifts. It is to the church. He gave these gifts for the edification and the building up of the body. And if we say, but we're not going to allow the Spirit to use half or over half of the church in the way that he has gifted them, then we're actually the ones that are going to suffer from it.

I mean, it is like. I mean, giving an example of a football because we just lost a game, but it's like, you know, our quarterback saying, hey, I heard that Coach Signetti told me, the next game, you know, tie your hand in your back and play the game. Because the next game, I think, is not a big problem. Yeah, we're playing Purdue. That should be a problem.

But if you're playing a championship game, you know, that will be a problem. Sorry, Mitch. But, you know, when, you know, our quarterback hears this, he can respond one of three ways. He can say, he's the head coach. I'm going to just do what he tells me to.

Or he can say, you know what? Coach is crazy. Yeah. Or I think he can do the third way. He say, you know, I've played 11 games for this coach.

I have gone through hundreds of hours of training with him. Of all that I know about him, I don't think that is what he probably meant. I need to talk to him and verify whether what he said. This is what he said. And I think that's how our response should be when we see 1st Corinthians, chapter 2, or 1 Corinthians 14 and 1st Timothy.

And he said, is this, you know, stopping women from doing what God has called them? Maybe we should stop and say, maybe I understood it wrong. Maybe there's something that I need more work I need to do because of the rest of the narrative of the Bible says something different. Yeah. So real quick, as we kind of close off here, who are some women that have been influential in your faith?

Yeah. You know, 18 years ago this week, I gave a eulogy in Singapore for my mom. And during the eulogy, I said, my mom has a simple but profound faith, but not simplistic. And because she has shaped my faith journey and continuing to do so. And she told me a story about, you know, in India, how her family and her village came to faith in the early 20th century, there were Bible women who were going around all of South India to different villages preaching the gospel, and people were coming to faith.

And that's how her grandparents and the village came to faith. And I am a beneficiary of that because those women were taking the gospel, continuing that message and ministry. And I, after I came to faith as a teenager, one of my sisters was my guide through my faith journey during my formative years and after I got married, Ronnie is my champion. She challenges me. She helped me to be a better Christian.

And 23 years ago, when we moved to Bloomington and started joining Sherwood Oaks, you know, we became part of many different groups and ministry teams, you know, like the International Coffee Hour, Furniture Giveaway, the Racial Reconciliation Task Force Missions Team. And in all of those groups, there was many, many women who poured into me, challenged me, corrected me, you know, helped me be a better Christian. You know, I want to share this list because I think it's crucial that we recognize how God is working, you know, in the lives of men in the church and elders as well, women who are playing a huge role. I can think of people like Christie Houston, Gail Pontius, Maggie Mobley, Pam Dyer, Peggy West, Louis Briggs, Christy Laughlin, Lorena Mendowskowski, Vanessa Limbrick, Beth Long, Donna Pruitt, Virginia Guthrie, Norma Landgraaff, Melissa Ganker Collins, Kitty Lynn, Dorothy Gang, Esther Kata, Gloria Gwaquin. I can mention more names, but I want to read out this name.

Amen. Because I think we fail to recognize there are women, even you, who are helping us be better Christian. They are teaching us and through their life, they're actually preaching to us so that we can hear the Word clearly. And I think they have the right to be up here and teach us. When we stop women or we put barriers for women to do

what God has called them to do, we are not just stopping women.

We are actually creating a barrier for the Holy Spirit to do his ministry to the gifted woman that he has called to do ministry. And if we do that, I mean, we lose out on what God has. I don't think we want to pick a fight with the Holy Spirit. Preach. Amen.

Yeah, definitely.

I was going to say, look who's preaching now. You took it. But, man, that was a good word. And Maggie is going to be up here. She's going to be preaching on December 15th, and I'm looking forward to that.

So, Elin, thank you so much for coming and sharing and for all the work that you're doing to help just even steer us closer to scripture and all of this. I love you and appreciate you, man. Yeah, I want to close with this. A couple years ago when I was in Israel, we got to go to this town called Magdala. Magdala is the hometown of Mary Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene was a follower of Jesus. She supported his ministry in many ways, including financially. Mary Magdalene was at the crucifixion, and she was the first person to see the empty tomb. And she was the one that took that good news of the resurrection and went and preached it to the other disciples. And God used her in incredible ways.

She is a pillar of the early church. And so in her hometown, there is a church that kind of honors the role that women play in Jesus life and ministry. And so when you walk into it, there's this massive dome that is held up by eight pillars that kind of look like this. And on each one of the pillars, there is the name of a woman who is influential in Jesus ministry. And in the early church, like this one with Mary Magdalene's name on it, but one of them is blank.

There isn't a name on it. And it could be that they just forgot to put one up there. And they just like, it's too late now. We're going to leave it unfinished. It could be that they could only think of seven names of women who made an impact in the early church.

But that's not it. This column is intentionally left blank to represent all of the women who continue to be pillars in the church today. And our guide encouraged us to go and to take our finger and to scribble the name of women who have been influential in our own faith. And so I wrote Linda's name and I wrote Amber's name, and I wrote my girls names as I prayed for them to grow strong in the Lord, trusting in him that they would be spiritual influencers in others. And I wrote the names of faithful women that I've been able to serve alongside of in the years, including here at Sherwood Oaks.

Women continue the message in the ministry of Jesus today. It's a message in ministry that God has given to his church, both men and women, young and like, not so young. You never like. There's no term limits to being an ambassador for Christ. You continue the mission.

And Paul says this in 2nd Corinthians 5:19, in this verse that we looked at today, he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. That word commit means he has handed it over. He has put it in the care of us. And so Jesus came to preach the good News of God. And then he handed it to the disciples, who handed it to the early church, who handed it off over the centuries, all the way to the person who was the influencer in your life.

And so now the question becomes, will the message and ministry of Jesus continue through you? Will you continue to take the good news and to share it with others? And all of us, every single one of us, we have someone in our life that is close to us but is far from God. And they are looking for peace in their life. They are wrestling with feelings of guilt and shame and inadequacy.

They desire authentic community, but they're afraid that if they open themselves up, that they will be rejected. And the good news of God is that Jesus came proclaiming is good news that they need to hear. And they're probably not going to hear it from someone like me. They're going to hear it from you. They're going to hear it from you.

And so will you take the good news and help them discover that he who made Jesus with no sin, he became sin for us, so that in him we have become the righteousness of God. Will you take that message and will you share it with somebody? And this afternoon, maybe, if you're able, would you just take a moment and call that person, send them a text that was a spiritual influencer in your life, maybe nudge them right now and say, hey, I'm sorry to give you a hard time for dragging me to church this morning. Thanks. Just thank that person.

And the good news of the kingdom of God is that we have been made right through faith in Jesus. We can stand in that love and that freedom. And so this is our prayer. Thy kingdom come. And when life feels chaotic and uncertain, we will turn to the one true King and put our hope in him and him alone.

Thy will be done. We will allow Jesus to disrupt us so that we no longer follow our ways, but his on earth as it is in heaven. We will carry on the message and ministry of Jesus to a lost and broken world that desperately needs to hear it. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. We're going to take a chance to celebrate and remember the gift that we have received in Christ, the mercy and the grace and his love now.

And we do that through by sharing in communion. The communion meal is

an opportunity just to celebrate and to remember this good news of the kingdom that is good news for us. And so we've got some baskets here in the front of the room in the back. And if you're new with us here. In a moment we're going to kind of get up and scatter and go up to one of those baskets, grab a little cup that has a piece of bread that helps us remember Jesus body that was given and his blood that was shed and take it back to your seat and take it whenever you're ready.

Ready. Just spend some moments reflecting on this gift or maybe you are ready to become that new creation that Paul talks about, to lay down your old life and to take up new life in Christ. And if that's you, we'll have some people around the room with lanyards that would love to pray with you and help lead you in that decision. If you just need someone to pray with you, let this be that time. God, we give this to you.

Doing us what you will. Meet us in this space Lord, and may we be grateful, and I know that we are for the gift of Jesus that has saved us. May we also just spend some time celebrating and being grateful for the one that shared that message with us. And may we pray for the one that you are calling us to take this message, take the good that we have received and give it away to them. And so we give this time to you now.

Lord, we thank you for what you have done to make available in Jesus name. Amen.

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