

# St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church – Muskego, WI

Sermon for June 24-26, 2006

Has the Church Tried to Suppress God's Role for Women

Texts: Genesis 3:8-15; Ephesians 5:21-33

Today we deal with the issue that lies at the heart and core of *The Da Vinci Code*. It's the supposed best-kept secret of all history, a history-changing secret that's been kept from the majority of the world for the past 2000 years. What is this powerful secret? The claim that Jesus was married to Mary Magdelene, and that he fathered a child through her. But that's not all. Jesus also told Mary that she was to be the head of his church after his death.

Dan Brown's book purports the theory that power-hungry men in the early church began an all-out campaign to suppress these facts. To do so, they manipulated the contents of the Bible in order to make women the enemy of the church—even changing the story of the fall into sin so that Eve took sole responsibility. The book contends that this anti-woman conspiracy has continued in the church to this very day.

Now, we could brush the book aside and say, "It's just fiction." But these ideas, these accusations, are not new to Dan Brown. Dan Brown just gave voice—a world number one best-seller voice—to theories that people have held to for a long time. I also believe that there are people within the church today, even individuals here, who also feel that the church does suppress women.

So we're going to take the bull by the horns today and hear what the Scripture has to say about the roles of men and women in the church.

But, before that, we should address the question: could Jesus really have been married? Just the suggestion blows most of us away. If Jesus had been married, something that big would have been mentioned somewhere in the four Gospels, wouldn't it? The apostle Paul devotes a whole chapter to marriage and to the pros and cons of getting married (1 Corinthians 7). If Jesus himself were married, don't you think Paul would have mentioned it?

On the cross when Jesus made provisions for his mother, wouldn't he have done the same for his pregnant wife? Some might claim the church intentionally edited those verses out. Okay. But, Jesus' marriage isn't even mentioned in **ANY** of the other "gospels" that were rejected by the early church—not even the so-called *Gospel of Mary*. Nor is it mentioned anywhere in any of historical writings of the day.

The Old Testament speaks against any idea of Jesus having a child. In Isaiah 53 we find those very familiar words, "**He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth...**" At the end of that section, Isaiah says: "**...and who can speak of HIS DESCENDANTS? For he was cut off from the land of the living...**"

Dan Brown's book contends that Jesus married Mary Magdelene because she was of royal blood, that Jesus was reestablishing the throne of his father David. Yet, that idea flies in the face of Jesus' mission.

When Pilate asked him if he was a king, Jesus said, "**My kingdom is not of this world**" (John 18:36). Jesus came to die. From early on he knew his purpose. Everything he did was focused on that goal. Marriage did not fit into that purpose. In short, there is no Biblical evidence, no historical evidence, no reason at all to believe that Jesus was ever married.

So what about the second question, to whom Jesus give the authority to be the head of his church? My friends, Jesus didn't give that authority to any one individual. Some contend it was Peter. They understand this from Jesus' words, "**On this rock I will build my church.**" Yet, Jesus was not referring to Peter himself, but to the rock-solid confession that Peter had just made, that Jesus "**was the Christ, the Son of the living God**" (Matthew 16:16-18). It's on the truth of who he is that Christ built his church. There has always been and will always be only one head over the church. And that is Jesus Christ himself.

That brings us to the core issue of contention. What does Jesus teach about the role of women in the church? And, has the church been suppressing that truth?

First of all, have men misused and abused their God-given role throughout history? Yes! History is full of examples. So much so we can understand where people like Dan Brown get these ideas.

God warned us that this would happen. Back in Genesis 3, we hear about the curse that sin brought on this world. In the last phrase in the verse that talks specifically about how this curse will affect women we find these words, ***“Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you” (Genesis 3:16)***. God’s perfect design for the relationship between men and women would never be the same on this side of heaven because now both men and woman have sinful natures to contend with.

And so it shouldn’t surprise us either to see Jesus, the first sinless man since Adam, treat women very differently than the cultures around him. Think about the time Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well. His disciples were shocked to see Jesus talking to a woman. In that culture rabbis didn’t hold conversations with women. Women were more like property than individuals.

Our gospel lesson listed the women that Jesus enlisted to support his ministry, even with their financial resources. Or think about that time Mary was sitting at Jesus’ feet listening to his teaching. Jesus helps us see that when it comes to their importance, their status, when it comes to serving and following him, there is no difference between men and women. As Paul says in Galatians, ***“You are ALL sons [or heirs] of God through faith in Christ Jesus... There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, MALE NOR FEMALE, for you are ALL ONE in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26-28)***.

Jesus’ teaching has certainly had an influence on our Western culture. How differently women are viewed and treated in Christian cultures as compared to Islamic and other eastern cultures! Jesus definitely lifted women up!

Yet, the Bible does assign different roles to men and women. And Jesus clearly applied these roles in his ministry. The obvious example is Jesus choosing 12 **MEN** to be his disciples. Some may say that Jesus was just bowing down to the culture of his day. But Jesus was not one to do things because that’s the way they were done by those around them. In fact, he got into trouble many times because he refused to follow the cultural moors of the day. He was the perfect Son of God. He did what he did because it was in line with the will of his heavenly Father.

Paul made this application in his ministry too: ***“I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man” (1 Timothy 2:12)***. Paul isn’t basing this on personal preference or his own idea. This is God’s design. In the next verse Paul tells us why he doesn’t permit a woman to have authority over a man, ***“FOR (or because) Adam was formed first, then Eve.”*** This is the order that God created.

It may be difficult, but when it comes to the Bible’s teaching about the roles of men and women, we simply accept that this is God’s design and trust that God knows what he’s doing. The problem is our sinful nature. We often think we know better than God. That’s sin and for that God calls us to repentance.

Many also have trouble with this teaching because they don’t really understand what biblical headship is.

So what is true Biblical headship? Think for a moment about Jesus’ teaching about leadership. Jesus says that a leader is the servant of those he leads. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says: ***“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:26-28)***.

Jesus is the ultimate example of servant leadership. Jesus was the ultimate head, the greatest leader because he saw the needs of his people and made the ultimate sacrifice. He went to the cross and he died to meet those needs.

In Ephesians 5, when Paul talks about the man being the head of his wife, he makes sure we understand what that really means, ***“..AS CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH, his body, of which he is the Savior...” “Husbands, love your wives, just AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH, and gave himself up for her.”*** God chose to give men the role of headship, but along with that role

comes incredible responsibility. God calls men to make the spiritual, emotional and physical welfare of their wives, their families, their churches, their communities, the number one priority in their lives.

That's their job. It's a call to follow Jesus' leadership, to sacrifice and even lay down their lives if that is necessary. God recognized that ultimately someone had to have this responsibility. This is God's design and it's good.

And it's not that men are in any way superior to women. We see the same kind of role relationship in Philippians 2, as Jesus ***“being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.”*** Jesus' submission to his Father didn't make Jesus inferior to the Father. He was still equal to his Father in all ways!

Most people who think they have a problem with the Bible and men and women issues don't understand what the Bible really says. They see men and, yes, even men in the church abuse their roles by making it a power thing, an abusive thing, and/or an excuse to live selfishly. But that's not Biblical headship.

So where do we go from here? First off, men, we need to look at our lives and see if our headship lives up to God's ideal. And where we, as sinful human beings, have not carried out our role as we should, we need to repent and ask God for forgiveness.

Secondly, our Lutheran church is and has always been committed to adhering to the truth of the scriptures and applying those truths as best we humanly can.

Because the Bible teaches it, we accept God's principle of male headship. But in the church we may at times disagree on how to apply the principle. Jesus didn't give us a rulebook with laws for every situation, like voting in meetings and teaching college courses. We have sincere Christian people on both sides of issues like these. So, for the sake of good order, we seek to follow the same guidelines in all our churches, guidelines that all our consciences can live with. We do it out of love for Christ, for our fellow Christians, and for the well being of Christ's church.

Finally, it is true that our church has not always utilized women and their many gifts to the extent Jesus would if he were here. In fact, I believe we've been underutilizing both men and women. Over time, we've gotten into a pattern of one person in the church, the pastor, being responsible for doing a vast majority of the work of the church. That's not the way it was in the early church or even in Jesus' ministry. Jesus called twelve men and many women to assist him. If you've been paying attention to some of the opportunities we're seeking to create in our church, you know that we're working on that.

We want a community of faith like Jesus' first community of believers, a church filled with men and women working and serving together, loving and respecting each other, as we carry out the roles that God has given us for life in this world. God help us make our church that kind of community! Amen.

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