

If you believe and I believe . . .

Stories of women from Scripture and Sudan

written by Elizabeth J. Keller, August 2009

Stories include: John 4: 7-15, Unnamed Womaen at the Well & at Work
Matthew 15: 21-28, Florence: Woman of Fire & Future
Luke 10: 38-42, Dimanche: Woman with Education and Edge

Attention please: These stories are sacred. They belong to actual women in Sudan. Please give thoughtful attention as to how the stories of women from these Scripture texts connect with actual stories of women in Sudan in the year 2009. Each story should be read – or rather spoken and delivered – by a woman with a dramatic interpretation. Please bring to life the reality and agony, the strength and defiance, the power and possibility of their lives – and ours. We hold much responsibility when we share these sacred stories.

It is **not** recommended to read the actual scripture text prior to these dramatic readings. However, if your church or group is not familiar with these texts, it is recommended to ask them to read prior to the worship experience.

As the stories are spoken, it should first appear that these stories are entirely about women in scripture, but what the listener will soon realize, is that these are stories of Sudanese women . . . and that Jesus meets us then and now, at the well, beyond the borders, and even wearing green pants (this will make sense when you read the stories!).

It's suggested to include women and girls of various ages. Perhaps a woman in her 50s or 60s could speak the Womaen at the Well story, a woman in her 30s or 40s could speak Florence's story, and perhaps a girl in her teens or twenties could speak Dimanche's story. It's important to convey how these stories cross all ages and generations.

Please sing the hymn, "If you believe and I believe" from the Brethren Hymnal Supplement, #1101. It's suggested to sing it twice before the readings begin, and then again after each story is spoken.

Lastly, it is suggested that the speakers sit together – in solidarity – on three stools while speaking their stories.

SING: If you believe and I believe and we together pray, the Holy Spirit must come down and set God's people free, and set God's people free; and set God's people free; the Holy Spirit must come down and set God's people free.

John 4: 7-15, Unnamed Womaen at the Well and at Work

I believe, but . . . so what? You think the men in the village are going to believe *me*? Yeh, I met him. You know the one? That's right, the one who is greater than our ancestor, who gave us this here well. Yes, it was here, right here, where he told me about this *living* water. He said to me, "Woman, the water that I give will become in you a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

Ahh, he knew my story. He knew I had to walk four miles every day – at the hottest hour of the day – just to pump my family's daily water. Women, you know, do all the cooking and cleaning; planting and harvesting. Our chores usually lead us into the more rural areas, often alone. Yeh, I go out to gather up thatch – oh, it's the straw-like material we use to cover our roofs. I bundle it up – and sometimes even sell it for \$3.00. Other women have to go deeper into the forest to cut down firewood; about a 3-hour walk one way – sometimes the hyenas kill them.

The men? Ohhhh, they build the tukuls (you know, the homes where we live, no bigger than like a tool shed or one-car garage back here in the United States) – yeh, and that's about all they do. Sometimes they herd the cattle and goats – but usually our sons are sent to do that work.

Well, to be fair, it is true that most of the men died in the war. (pause) We all saw things. Horrifying. Haunting. They called it a civil war – but there wasn't anything civil about it. They stripped our trees, raped our daughters, orphaned our children, widowed the wives. Sure, some of the men survived – but now most of them are depressed – who can blame them. They usually spend their Friday nights drinking away what little income we make. Sometimes my husband gets rough with me . . .

This man who told me about the living water – he knew it all. He knew how I had been passed around from one husband to the next, nothing more than property and slavery to them. He knew. He knew the life of a Sudanese woman. He knew how much this living water would satisfy my soul . . . how it would heal my scorched feet, fill my children's hunger, make me whole and worthy as a woman in this culture . . . Well, I believe that God believes that I am worthy – but what does it matter, if they don't believe . . .

SING: If you believe and I believe and we together pray, the Holy Spirit must come down and set God's people free, and set God's people free; and set God's people free; the Holy Spirit must come down and set God's people free.

Matthew 15: 21-28, Florence: Woman of Fire and Future

Yeh, I believe too – but I must tell ya' . . . it took **this man** some real convincing to **believe in me**. Oh, sorry. My name is Florence – they say I'm the feisty one. You'll soon see why.

Anyway, this land was my home. I say "was" because it was taken from me – stripped away from me and my family. These people from the north came and took it away . . . they called us black dogs – not even worthy to eat the scraps from their Lord's table, they said. We had to seek refuge in Uganda, exiled from our native land. Well, as you know, the war finally ceased just four years ago, so eventually, we were able to find our way back, building from nothing – absolutely nothing. Where do you even begin? Coming home meant no work and no roads, no clean water and no health care, no education and no structure. Just the barren, burning bush, I call home.

Then my daughter struck illness – she was tormented by a demon. She needed medical attention right away. But like most in southern Sudan, our village of Pegari doesn't have a hospital – the nearest one is in Nimule, a 3-hour drive by truck. But even if we were able to coordinate the journey, what could the doctors do? They have no real medicines – nothing more than to aid the typical intestinal worms or bacterial infections. Malaria, you probably know, also strikes our people, mostly young children under the age of five – but little is done to prevent it, even though a mosquito net only costs about \$4-5. Then there is HIV and AIDS – devastating diseases with no hope without real resources. My country, we are a poor country.

I was angry, so angry. I wanted so desperately to help my dying daughter – there just wasn't the money or the means for health care. I love my daughter so deeply – she is my hope. My only hope. I needed a Holy healer.

So, this man came into town – I had heard he could heal the sick, and so I found him . . . and you bet that I screamed and shouted out to him, "Have mercy on me Lord." You know, he just ignored me.

No, no, no. I would not have it! You should know . . . there is something inside me that is filled with fire. Call it God, call it Defiance – I refused to walk away. My daughter is just as worthy to receive this gift of healing and wholeness, I thought.

Oh, and you should have heard his friends with him – just mocking me, judging me, pushing me to the edges. I just wanted to be noticed.

I mean, I realize that to this man, I was the Other – you know, not one from his culture or country, but I still loved the same God as he and I told him so. Then . . . then something happened. He saw that fire in me – it was blazing. He saw it. **He saw me**. He finally noticed me. He said, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And my daughter was healed instantly.

Yes, yes, with a whole lotta' prayin', I believe. But you know, I wonder, what will happen next year, in 2010, when the north and the south no longer have a peace agreement – will there be war once more? Will the Spirit really come down and set my daughter's future free?

SING: If you believe and I believe and we together pray, the Holy Spirit must come down and set God's people free, and set God's people free; and set God's people free; the Holy Spirit must come down and set God's people free.

Luke 10: 38-42, Dimanche: Woman with Education & Edge

I also believe. Hello, my name is Dimanche – that means “Sunday” in French – and I am like few women here in Sudan. [*Speaks like she's whispering*] Don't tell anyone, but from time to time, I like to wear pants to work. I just feel . . . liberated, you know. Free to chose how I present myself to the world. Oh sure, they say a woman's legs are quite seductive – but that doesn't seem to be my issue as much as it is the man's issue, right? What, so because they lack self-control, I should be forced to wear skirts – which as you probably realize, are not most ideal with all the cooking and cleaning that is demanded of me.

Well, I work at the Catholic compound and sometimes Father Mawa insists that I change into a skirt – but then other times, he just turns away. Oh, but I heard what happened in our capital of Khartoum – several women were arrested for wearing green pants . . . they say they might get 40 lashes. Can you believe it? Will women's liberation ever come?

I mean, I met the man – yeh you know, the one who speaks of living water and gives healing touches – and who sets God's people free . . . well, from what I learned from him, he could care less what I wear to work.

My sister Martha was busy working in the kitchen when he arrived. Well, you already know, it's a girl's duty to work in the kitchen, while the men host our guests. But you see, my father died in the war; and my mother had just ran to the market to get our daily cooking supplies – sugar, salt, oil, and grain.

And I love to learn . . . and he seemed like he wanted to teach. So when he knocked on our door, I kneeled right beside him, listening to his every word. He is wise, so wise. And you know what – I'm a girl – but he thinks I'm smart, too. Can you believe it? He even encouraged me to continue my education . . . but I can't. With my dad gone, my mother needs me – the eldest child – to work and earn money for my four siblings. I finished as much school as is available here in Sudan. But to get my associates degree, I'd have to move to Kampala – leave my family. Without that additional education, I can't become a teacher or a translator . . . or I don't know, there isn't really much in the way of vocation here in Sudan.

I like that this man encouraged education for girls – but he is like few others here in Sudan. Girls are meant to work, not read. Education is viewed as a waste of money – for they will soon be married and lead a life of servitude. Even upon their birth, their parents count the number of cows they might earn from selling their daughters. Girls certainly don't have a choice about their husbands. Some very young girls – as young as thirteen or fourteen – are forced to marry men as old as fifty and sixty years. **Their families can't afford to say no.**

Yet for some girls, like me, there is hope. When we become educated, our parents see the difference we can make in the world – and so like my mom, they don't force us to marry, instead, they support our wearing green pants and working towards liberation. I believe, and one day, so will they . . .

SING: If you believe and I believe and we together pray, the Holy Spirit must come down and set God's people free, and set God's people free; and set God's people free; the Holy Spirit must come down and set God's people free.