



## **WOMEN'S DAY**

### **CULTURAL RESOURCES**

**Sunday, March 6, 2011**

**J.B. Blue, Guest Cultural Resource Commentator**

PhD Candidate/Practical Theology, Boston University School of Theology, Boston, MA

**(See the 2011 Women's Day worship unit for a host of great ideas to make your Women's Day activities meaningful and memorable.)**

#### **I. The History Section: International Women's Day**

Whereas women of every race, class, and ethnic background have made historic contributions to the growth and strength of our Nation in countless recorded and unrecorded ways... Whereas women of every race, class, and ethnic background served as early leaders in the forefront of every major progressive social change movement... Now, therefore, be it resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that March is designated as "Women's History Month."<sup>1</sup>

This Congressional Resolution, passed in 1987, was born out of the struggle for visibility.

Before the 1970s, missing from mainstream conversation was the acknowledgment of women's contributions to society. As a result, the Education Task Force of the Sonoma County (California) Commission on the Status of Women initiated a "Women's History Week" celebration in 1978 and chose the week of March 8 to coincide with International Women's Day.<sup>2</sup> Sonoma County's foresight and initiative spurred others to follow their lead. As local Women's History Week projects grew, they began the groundswell of congressional support for what we now call Women's History Month.

International Women's Day began in 1911, a year after Clara Zetkin of Germany spoke at the International Conference of Working Women in Copenhagen. There she proposed that in every country there should be a Women's Day in order that women, as a collective, could press for justice and equality. This proposal was made in the aftermath of New Zealand becoming the first country to grant women the right to vote. In 1913, International Women's Day was transferred to March 8 and remained the global date for International Women's Day ever since.

During International Women's Year in 1975, the United Nations and many other governments officially recognized International Women's Day. Currently, International Women's Day is a national holiday in China, Armenia, Russia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam.<sup>3</sup>

## **II. Cultural Response**

The black church has long designated a day in which to honor African American women for their tireless and often overlooked contributions in all facets of society. In conjunction with celebrations in honor of Women's History Month, this year your church may want to celebrate Women's Day in March.

Often veiled by male privilege, the achievements of African American women have remained largely invisible to the dominant society. This was historically due to their perceived second- or even third-class status by the dominant society. However, as the lesson for today reveals, Jesus by his actions dispels the notion of invisibility by acknowledging the dignity and worth of the woman and subsequently all women. He does so by the simple act of "seeing" her. He then heals her and states to all present that she is a "daughter of Abraham."

African American women have long viewed themselves as daughters who were equal to any son. Often oppressed by the dominant culture, and in many cases with minimal support from their own culture, African American women charted their own path, guided predominately by their faith and belief in God's depiction of them as wonderfully made. They encountered numerous roadblocks. However, African American women persevered and continue to persevere. As a result, they entered and opened doors to many areas of society, blazing trails for others to follow. Their participation and contributions within society are without question. Their work is interwoven into the fabric of society so much so that the strength of American society would not be what it is without them.

Some African American women pioneers include:

 Lucy Terry—first black poet in America (1746);

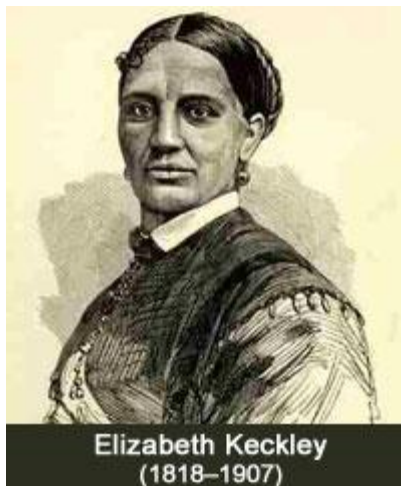
- ✚ Frances Williams—first black college graduate in the Western Hemisphere (1758);
- ✚ Rebecca Crumpler—first black female physician (1864);
- ✚ Charlotte E. Roy—first black female lawyer (1872);
- ✚ Maggie Walker—first black female bank president (1903);
- ✚ Florence Price—first black female composer to have a symphony played by a major orchestra (1933);
- ✚ Crystal Fauset—first black women elected to a state legislature (1938); and
- ✚ Jane M. Bolin—first black female judge (1939).<sup>4</sup>

Although these pioneers and many who followed continue to blaze trails for others, African American women continue to struggle against the prevailing winds of the dominant culture to receive the acceptance, opportunities, and the acknowledgment that they deserve. Now is the time to do as Christ did and raise the visibility of African American women by acknowledging their worth and dignity as well as their status as daughters of Abraham.

### III. Audio Visual Aids

- Visual images and additional historical facts on African American women can be found in the digital collection of New York’s Public Library Schomburg Center’s digital collection of African American images and in the National Archives African American Resources.<sup>5</sup>
- The History Channel provides visual overviews on the lives and speeches of the following African American women: Humble Beginnings, Sylvia Woods, Sojourner Truth, Barbara Jordan, and Shirley Chisholm.<sup>6</sup>
- Listen to the interview with Shirley Chisholm hosted by NPR.<sup>7</sup>

### IV. Two Little-known African American Women Pioneers



**Elizabeth Keckley (1818–1907)** is a little-known entrepreneur. As a slave, Elizabeth was an exceptional seamstress. Sometime after the age of 18, while still a slave, she started a dressmaking business that allowed her to support her owner, his family, and hers. Once free, she relocated to Washington, DC, where she once again went into business, this time employing 20 girls. While in Washington, she was introduced to Mary Todd Lincoln, the First Lady of the United States. Ultimately, she would become the First Lady’s dressmaker, moving into the White House. Keckley told an interviewer, “I dressed Mrs. Lincoln for every levee. I made every stitch of clothing she wore. I dressed her hair. I put on her skirts and dresses. I fixed

her bouquets, saw that her gloves were all right. My hands were the last to touch her before she took the arm of Mr. Lincoln and went forth to meet the ladies and gentlemen of those great occasions.”<sup>8</sup>



**Brigadier General Sherian Candoria (1943– )** was the first African American female general in the United States Army and the highest ranking female at the time of her retirement in 1990 with the rank of Brigadier General. The first African American general was Hazel Johnson-Brown (1927– ) of the Army Nurses Corps. Brigadier General Candoria entered the Army serving initially as a Protocol Officer in Vietnam, a position normally assigned to men at the time. Following a tour in Vietnam, she spent the remainder of her career in law enforcement and intelligence positions, becoming the first woman commander in many of her assigned positions. In an *Ebony* magazine interview in 1985 she stated, “A woman can excel in the army. You have to prove that you can do the job many times better than your male counterparts... [But] as women work alongside their male counterparts, they’ll recognize that we have the ability and that we can do quality work. And things will change. Maybe not in my lifetime, but it’s coming.”<sup>9</sup>

## **V. Ideas to Make Your Women’s Day Celebration Memorable**

Nannie Helen Burroughs conceived Women’s Day as a way to raise funds to support the women’s auxiliary of the National Baptist Convention and women’s causes. Why not at least use your Women’s Day celebration to support women’s causes.

### **Possible Ideas**

**Make All Women Visible Sunday**—Include as part of your celebration women who society makes invisible: women who have been incarcerated, disabled women, women with HIV/AIDS, and other groups of women as applicable to your church and community.

**A Day with Disabled Women**—Many women, old and young, are disabled and cannot participate in the life of a church unless they endure great difficulty. Why not take the Church to them. Visit a hospital for disabled military women, a rehab center for women recovering from strokes, or any of the other numerous entities that serve disabled women.

**Stand Up Straight**—There are numerous women in every community who through a variety of circumstances are crippled but want to be healed. Determine ways that your church can help women immediately stand up straight. Perhaps something as simple as a visit to a nursing home by a hair stylist and make-up artist from your church (or hired by your church) will make a world of difference to some women. Ideas that will likely have a more lasting impact would be for a group of women from your church to volunteer for Habitat for Humanity to help build a house

for a woman, or for a group of women from your church to find jobs for five women who have been unemployed a year or more.

## **VI. Poetry**

**Vashti** by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

She leaned her head upon her hand  
And heard the king's decree  
"My lords are feasting in my halls,  
Bid Vashti come to me.

"I've shown the treasures of my house,  
My costly jewels rare,  
But with the glory of her eyes  
No rubies can compare.

"Adorn'd and crown'd I'd have her come,  
With all her queenly grace,  
And, 'mid my lords and mighty men,  
Unveil her lovely face.

"Each gem that sparkles in my crown,  
Or glitters on my throne,  
Grows poor and pale when she appears,  
My beautiful, my own!"

All waiting stood the chamberlains  
To hear the Queen's reply,  
They say her cheek grow deathly pale,  
But light flash'd to her eye:

"Go, tell the King," she proudly said,  
"That I am Persia's Queen,  
And by his crowds of merry men  
I never will be seen.

"I'll take the crown from off my head  
And tread it 'neath my feet  
Before their rude and careless gaze  
My shrinking eyes shall meet."

"A queen unveil'd before the crowd!  
Upon each lip my name!  
Why, Persia's women all would blush  
And weep for Vashti's shame!

“Go back!” she cried, and waived her hand,  
And grief was in her eye:  
“Go, tell the King,” she sadly said,  
“That I would rather die.”

They brought her message to the King,  
Dark flashe’d his angry eye;  
‘Twas as the lightning ere the storm  
Hath swept in fury by.

Then bitterly outspoke the king,  
Through purple lips of wrath  
“What shall be done to her who dares  
to cross your monarch’s path?”

Then spake his wily counselors  
“O King of this fair land!  
From distant Ind to Ethiop,  
All bow to thy command.

“But if, before thy servants’ eyes,  
This thing they plainly see,  
That Vashti doth not heed thy will  
Nor yield herself to thee,

“The women, restive ‘neath our rule,  
Would learn to scorn our name,  
And from her deed to us would come  
Reproach and burning shame.

“Then, gracious King, sign with thy hand  
This stern but just decree,  
That Vashti lay aside her crown,  
Thy Queen no more to be.”

She heard again the King’s command,  
And left her high estate,  
Strong in her earnest womanhood,  
She calmly met her fate,

And left the palace of the King,  
Proud of her spotless name  
A woman who could bend to grief,  
But would not bow to shame.<sup>10</sup>

**The Lineage** by Margaret Walker

My grandmothers were strong.  
They followed plows and bent to toil.  
They moved through fields sowing seed.  
They touched earth and grain grew.  
They were full of sturdiness and singing.  
My grandmothers were strong.

My grandmothers were strong.  
Smelling of soap and onions and wet clay.  
With veins rolling roughly over quick hands.  
They have many clean words to say.  
My grandmothers were strong.  
Why am I not as they?<sup>11</sup>

**Women** by Alice Walker

They were women then  
My mama's generation  
Husky of voice – Stout of  
Step  
With fists as well as  
Hands  
How they battered down  
Doors  
And ironed  
Starched white  
Shirts  
How they led  
Armies  
Head ragged Generals  
Across mined  
Fields  
Booby-trapped  
Ditches  
To discover book  
Desks  
A place for us  
How they knew what we  
*Must* know  
Without knowing a page  
Of it  
Themselves.<sup>12</sup>

**VII. Songs That Speak to the Moment**

The song selections support the theme of visibility by highlighting the fact that Jesus sees the needs of “All” his children. Additionally, the selections bring to light the responses or thoughts

that may result from an encounter with Jesus. The first selection is a favorite spiritual of the black church that confirms that Jesus knows and will meet every need, particularly those of women. Upon seeing the woman as well as her needs, Jesus touches her and removes that which has concealed her dignity and self-worth. It is then that the woman praises and worships him.

### **His Eye Is On the Sparrow**

(Verse)

Why should I feel discouraged,  
Why should the shadows come,  
Why should my heart be lonely,  
and long for heav'n and home;  
When Jesus is my portion?  
My constant Friend is He:  
His eye is on the sparrow,  
And I know He watches me;  
His eye is on the sparrow,  
and I know He watches me.

(Chorus)

I sing because I'm happy,  
I sing because I'm free;  
For His eye is on the sparrow,  
And I know He watches me.

(Verse)

"Let not your heart be troubled,"  
His tender word I hear,  
And resting on His goodness,  
I lose my doubts and fears;  
Though by the path He leadeth,  
But one step I may see;  
His eye is on the sparrow,  
And I know He watches me;  
His eye is on the sparrow,  
and I know He watches me.

(Verse)

Whenever I am tempted,  
Whenever clouds arise,  
When songs gives place to sighing  
When hope within me dies,  
I draw the closer to Him,  
For care He sets me free;  
His eye is on the sparrow,  
And I know He watches me;



His eye is on the sparrow,  
and I know He watches me.<sup>13</sup>

### **All I Need**

All I need is a touch from you  
No one else can do the things you do  
Take the wrong in my life and make it right  
All I need is a touch from you

Lord I'm standing in the need of prayer  
When I call Lord I know you're there  
Reach your hand down from heaven  
And pull me through  
All I need is a single touch a touch from the master, Oh God  
All I ever need is a touch from you

If you touch me  
I'll change my lose to win  
If you touch me  
I shall live again  
Take the wrong and make it right  
All I need is a touch from you  
All I need is a touch

Touch me  
Touch me  
Touch me  
All I need is a touch (5x)

All I need is touch from you (2x)<sup>14</sup>

### **Great Grace**

(Verse)  
What the years have concealed  
is now being revealed  
I can see clearly  
Your favor was with me  
You covered me all of my days

(Pre-Chorus)  
Thank You Lord for being so gracious.  
Thank You Lord, how your grace surrounds us  
Thank You Lord, Your mercy protects us and it keeps us from all harm

(Chorus)

Great grace is covering me  
This is a season of grace  
Great grace is covering me  
This is a season of grace  
This is a season of grace

(Vamp)

Thank you for your grace  
Your amazing grace  
Thank you for your grace  
Your amazing grace<sup>15</sup>

### **I'm Free**

I'm free  
Praise the Lord  
I'm free  
No longer bound  
No more chains holding me  
My soul is resting  
It's such a blessing  
Praise the Lord  
Hallelujah I'm free  
(Repeat as lead)

(Chorus)

My soul is resting  
It's such a blessing,  
Praise the Lord,  
Hallelujah, I'm free<sup>16</sup>

### **Alpha and Omega**

(Verse)

You are Alpha and Omega  
We worship you our Lord  
You are worthy to be praised (2x)

(Chorus)

We give you all the glory  
We worship you our Lord  
you are worthy to be praised.<sup>17</sup>

### **Notes**

1. "Congressional Resolution—Women's History Month." Butler University. Online location: <http://www.butler.edu/diversity/websnap/documents/CongressionalResolution.pdf> accessed 21 December 2010
2. National Women's History Project. "Women's History Month." Site hosted by Library of Congress. Online location: <http://womenshistorymonth.gov/about.html> accessed 20 December 2010
3. "The First International Women's Day." Aurora GCM Limited. Online location: <http://www.internationalwomensday.com/first.asp> accessed 21 December 2010
4. Lehman, Jeffrey. The African American Almanac. Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2003. pp. 3, 77–82.
5. New York Public Library Schomburg Center. "Images of African Americans from the 19th Century." New York Public Library. Online location: [http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/images\\_aa19/](http://digital.nypl.org/schomburg/images_aa19/) accessed 21 December 2010. Also see The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. African American Women. Archives Library Information Center. Online location: <http://www.archives.gov/research/aic/reference/womens-history.html> accessed 21 December 2010
6. The History Channel. A&E Television Networks. Online location: <http://www.history.com/search?search-field=african+american&asset-type=Videos> accessed 29 December 2010
7. National Public Radio. "Interview with Shirley Chisholm." 2003. NPR. Online location: <http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=96516491&m=96509941> accessed 29 December 2010
8. Haskins, Jim. Black Stars: African American Entrepreneurs. Toronto, Canada: John Wiley & Sons, 1998. pp. 47–51.
9. *Ibid.*, pp.147–150.
10. Watkins Harper, Frances Ellen. "Vashti." African-American Poetry of the Nineteenth Century. Ed. Joan R. Sherman. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992. pp. 133–135.
11. Walker, Margaret. "The Lineage." African-American Poetry of the Nineteenth Century. Ed. Joan Sherman.
12. Walker, Alice. "Women." Trouble the Water: 250 Years of African-American Poetry. New York, NY: The Penguin Group, 1997. pp. 157, 422.

13. "His Eye Is on the Sparrow." African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #143.
14. Wilson, Courtney. "All I Need." SongLyrics. Online location: <http://www.songlyrics.com/brian-courtney-wilson/all-i-need-lyrics> accessed 28 December 2010
15. Alessi, Mary. "Great Grace." Online location: <http://www.maryalessi.com/html/lyrics2.asp> accessed 28 December 2010
16. Brunson, Milton Brunson. "I'm Free." Mylyrics. Online location: <http://www.allgospellyrics.com/index.php?sec=listing&id=565> accessed 28 December 2010
17. Houghton, Israel and New Breed. "Alpha and Omega." LyricsMania. Online location: [http://www.lyricsmania.com/alpha\\_and\\_omega\\_lyrics\\_israel\\_and\\_new\\_breed.html](http://www.lyricsmania.com/alpha_and_omega_lyrics_israel_and_new_breed.html) accessed 28 December 2010