

Summary of exploration paper: Are women authorised to publicly proclaim the gospel in the gathered community?

I believe the primary question with relation to women's ordination is 'Are women *authorised* to proclaim/preach/speak the gospel in the gathered community of the church?' This authorisation may come from Jesus himself, from God the Father, from the Holy Spirit, or from the apostles of Jesus. This document is a summary of a paper that examines some of the New Testament texts pertaining to this question.

In the Lutheran Confessions, the authority of the pastoral office *is* the authority to publicly exercise 'the office of the keys' through the forgiveness of sins, the public preaching of the Gospel, and the administration of the sacraments. Nowhere in Scripture does Jesus command anyone to be a pastor. Rather, Jesus *authorises* certain people for certain tasks of ministry: the preaching of the gospel, the forgiveness of sins, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion.

How does Jesus authorise certain people for certain tasks of ministry in the Gospels? He does this in various ways: by *commanding, commending, permitting, blessing, and sending*.

In the Gospels and Acts, we find that women are repeatedly and consistently authorised (commanded, commended, permitted, blessed, sent) to proclaim, preach, or speak the good news. Some examples include:

- The prophetess Anna speaks publicly in the worshiping community in the Temple of the redemptive work of the child Jesus.
- In Luke 15 Jesus parallels his own mission to 'seek' and save what is 'lost' with the work of a diligent woman to 'seek' her 'lost' coin, and parallels the joy of God over one repenting sinner with the joy of the woman. This is done in the context of people grumbling that Jesus eats with sinners – that in fact, he will use any means to reach the lost.
- In John 4 Jesus reveals himself as the 'I AM' and as the Christ to the Samaritan woman. She becomes the evangelist to the town, doing the *hard work* of *sowing the word*, with the result that many people *believe* in Jesus as the Saviour of the World. Jesus *authorises* her public proclamation by *commending* her and *blessing* her proclamation through bringing people to faith. The word of the woman and the word of Jesus have the same effect in people's lives.
- In John 20:17-18 Jesus *commands* Mary Magdalene to announce the good news of his resurrection to the apostles. She becomes the 'apostle to the apostles.'
- In Matthew 28 God the Father, through the angel of the Lord, *commands* the women at the tomb to *preach/proclaim* the good news of Jesus' resurrection to the male disciples.
- Again in Matthew 28, Jesus chooses the women to be the first to meet him. He explicitly authorises them by *commanding* and *sending* them to *preach/proclaim* the good news of his resurrection to the disciples.
- In Luke 24 women disciples, who were present when Jesus taught his disciples in private, are commissioned to *preach/proclaim* the good news to the disciple community. The disciples disbelieve the women's good news. Later, Jesus chides the disciple community for being 'foolish and slow of heart' in disbelieving the good news which has been proclaimed by the women.
- Also in Luke 24, Jesus *authorises* the disciple community, including the women present, with *preaching* repentance and *forgiveness of sins* in his name to all nations. He *authorises* women and men with the office of the keys, that is, the power and authority to forgive sins.
- In John 20 Jesus *sends* his disciples, including the women present, with his own authority: 'As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.' He *authorises* them to forgive sins and *gives* the gift of the Holy Spirit.

- In Acts 2 the Holy Spirit empowers the men and women present on the day of Pentecost to *publicly preach* the wonderful deeds of God among the people of all nations present for worship in Jerusalem, in languages they have not learned before, so that people may call on the name of the Lord and be saved. Peter's Pentecost sermon text explains what God is doing in allowing both men and women to prophesy, that is proclaim, the authoritative Word of the Lord in public in this mass gathering. This public preaching creates and constitutes the church as thousands are baptised.

In the Gospels and Acts, Jesus gives to both men and women the commission of the office of the keys. The evidence is clear: God the Father, the risen Jesus, and the Holy Spirit separately and together commission and authorise both women and men to proclaim the good news publicly in the community, to forgive sins, and to take up the office of the keys, or, in our terms, to be pastors of the church.

In the epistles, Paul recognises women as gifted and called or sent in the church to proclaim the good news. Some examples include:

- In Romans 16:1-2, Paul recognises Phoebe as a minister of the church in Cenchrea, who has been set over many people in the church. He asks the Roman church to provide for her needs as a minister of the church as she proclaims the gospel.
- Also in Romans 16, Paul greets his fellow workers in the gospel, including Timothy, and the husband and wife team of Priscilla and Aquila. He recognises this husband and wife as pastors of the church that meets in their house.
- In Romans 16, Paul recognises Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis as women who are doing the hard work of proclaiming the gospel in word and teaching, just as other church leaders and pastors are doing.
- Still in Romans 16, Paul recognises Junia, (a woman) as an apostle, one who is sent by Jesus to proclaim the gospel and exercise the office of the keys.
- In Philippians 4, Paul pleads with Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord. These are fellow workers (ie, pastors and evangelists) with Paul, women who have contended at his side in the preaching of the gospel, just like Timothy and Epaphroditus.
- In the Corinthian church, women pray and prophesy, that is, speak clear intelligible words in the worshipping community for the edification of the church, the conviction of sin and the right worship of God (1 Corinthians 11-14).

It is clear from the epistles that Jesus Christ, Lord of the church, has given some women to be apostles (eg Junia), some to be prophets (eg the women in the Corinthian church), some to be evangelists (such as Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis) and some to be pastors and teachers (eg Phoebe). Paul also recognises these giftings and callings of women in the church.

The paper that this document summarises has shown that Jesus is not just 'a nice man who was kind to women and treated them well.' In the Gospels and Acts, Jesus repeatedly and consistently authorises women to preach the good news through *commending* them, *commanding them to preach*, *sending* them with his own authority, *blessing* their proclamation, giving them *authority to forgive sins*, and choosing them as his witnesses to *preach* the good news to all nations. God the Father, through the angel of the Lord, and the Holy Spirit also *command, authorise and empower* women to preach and proclaim the good news publicly. It has also shown that Paul, far from denying the legitimacy of the pastoral ministry of women, *recognised* their authority to preach and lead the church by *commending them, working beside them, and upholding their call and gifting* as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

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