

## Showing Up

Luke 23: 44-56; 24:1-11

Second Sunday after Pentecost (June 22), 2025

Ruth Carroll Sunday

Kyle Childress

*Women appear as courageous, paradigmatic disciples. They understand who Jesus is. They have faith. They minister. They show up, and they abide. They are last at the cross and first at the tomb. They are first to proclaim the resurrected Christ.*

-Jaime Clark-Soles

Would we have a church if it were not for women? A church? The Church? This church? Any church across the centuries? Would the church even exist if it were not for women?

I've asked myself this question many times over my 45 years of ordained ministry and I know we pastors talk about it and wonder ourselves. I'm not suggesting that we men do nothing in the life of the church. Only that it is the women who lead the way and show us what the church is to be like. It is women who demonstrate again and again what Christian discipleship looks like.

Dr. Bob Carroll and I talked many times about our heroic efforts at vacuuming our respective houses. We compared notes and came to the same conclusions. On perhaps a Saturday, we would take out the vacuum

cleaner and vacuum the house. Afterwards, we walked around inspecting our work and expecting our wives to praise us. After all, the floors were clean! We wanted our wives to praise us and recognize our extra efforts at household chores. Meanwhile, our wives rarely looked up. Between washing dishes, dusting, changing diapers, calming screaming children, refereeing family dramas, doing laundry, ironing, cooking meals, going to the store they did not notice our gallantry of vacuuming.

Well, Christian discipleship and being the church across the centuries has often been much the same. We men get much of the limelight while the women serve, minister, give, and care without fanfare.

It is certainly true of the Bible, and the New Testament, and especially the Gospels.

In Mark, after Jesus is arrested all of the men deserted and fled (14:50). None of the twelve male disciples are seen or heard from again, but women show up. At the cross, Mark records, “There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up from Jerusalem” (Mark 15:4-41).

Matthew pretty much repeats Mark though he lists the names of the women in a different order. Luke says, “But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at distance,

watching these things” (Luke 23:49). The women do go and see where the body of Jesus is laid, and then they come back a second time and prepare spices and ointments (v. 56).

In John there is no looking from a distance. Instead, four women are up close and uncomfortable at the foot of the cross: “Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene” (19:25).

It is pretty clear that it is the women who show up and stick around at the cross. They stayed and watched while the men disciples ran off, hid, denied Jesus, and stayed away. Helpless and powerless, yet the women were there. They showed up.

When Jesus was buried, there was nothing else they could do but show up. He was buried on the Sabbath day, and they had no opportunity to anoint the body with spices, but they were there. And early on that Sunday morning, there was nothing they could do but use what they knew to preserve the body against time and the elements. And so, they showed up. They were there.

All of the Gospels agree that the first witnesses of the empty tomb were women. In Luke, the women, who are once more unnamed, show up to anoint the body with spices and enter the tomb. They are perplexed by the missing body, but soon “two men in dazzling clothes” appear and announce that Jesus is risen. Then they remind the women of what Jesus

taught them before in Galilee, (by the way, that is the meaning of the word “disciple” – one who is taught; one who learns – Luke is telling us that women were disciples, too). The women remember what Jesus had taught them, they leave the tomb and announce the resurrection to the eleven guys and all the rest, presumably women, too (24:8-9). At the end of the story, we get the names of the women, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them” (24:10). The women are excited, doing what they’ve been taught to do, telling the news of the resurrection, and getting ready to head to Galilee and see the risen Lord, packing, organizing, putting food together, and then Luke says, “But these words seemed to [the apostles] an idle tale, and they did not believe them” (Luke 24:11). Talk about disappointment!

My point in all this is not to put the men down, but to lift the women up. It is the women who get the first news of the resurrection, and it is the women who go and share that good news with the rest of the disciples.

And here’s the deal: they are the first at all this because they show up. They show up at the cross and stay there; they show up when Jesus’ body is laid in the tomb, they show up getting the spices and ointments together and early on Sunday morning while it is still dark, they show up at the tomb. And they are the first to know the resurrection and even meet the resurrected Christ, because they show up.

So, hear me this Sunday morning, do not overlook this simple, central fact about faith and discipleship: the importance of showing up. We

might not feel like it, but we show up. We may not get what we expect, we might not be inspired like we'd hoped, and we assume we might not learn something new but showing up is the essence of discipleship. We show up in prayer. We show up for God and we show up for others. We show up and sing hymns, not only for ourselves but so we can be an encouragement for others. Showing up becomes a habit and just when we least expect it, God shows up and surprises us.

These women showed up. Even though when they came to the garden early while it was still dark, they were tired, frazzled, no sleep, crying from grief, exhausted from stress, traumatized by seeing their beloved friend and teacher tortured and crucified, and never knowing if they might be arrested and tortured as followers of this revolutionary rabbi, they almost gave up and turned around and went home. But they showed up.

And Luke adds the final indignity by pointing out that when the women announced that Jesus was risen, the male disciples dismissed them, saying that the women's "words were as idle tales." Yet, they did not give up. They kept showing up and they kept doing the mundane work without the spotlight.

Without these women showing up and giving their persistent testimony, it is likely that we would not have news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ today. We might have a Jesus of Nazareth Memorial Society where we sit around and tell stories of Jesus and do research and deliver

papers on what he said, and who conclude with something like, “Old Jesus was a great man who taught great things. Too bad he got killed.”

But we would not have the church of the Living Christ. The church is the community, the body of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit of the Living Christ, who seeks to embody Jesus in the world today. Without women who showed up in the Gospels, in the Bible, and across the centuries, we likely would not know about the Resurrection and New Creation of God in Jesus Christ of service and mercy, healing and love breaking into this old world of violence and bigotry, hatred and meanness. We likely would not know anything about it. We would not have the church.

For 53 years, Ruth Carroll has shown up. She, Dr. Bob, and eventually, a passel of children, showed up to Austin Heights in January 1972 and Ruth has been here ever since.

She was on the Pastor Search Committee that brought Jane and me here in April 1989 for interviews and for me to preach in view of a call. During that weekend, the committee set up an interview with Rev. Larry Wade of Zion Hill First Baptist Church in his office. We arrived before Rev. Wade, so I nervously walked around, while Ruth sat down on the curbing beside Jane and talked. Jane and I commented later, we were impressed with a doctor's wife who would get down and sit with us on a parking lot curb in her sun dress and keep us company. There was no pretension.

A couple of years later, one afternoon while I was here at the church, I started feeling abdominal pain, and soon became nauseous. I started getting worried, so I called Ruth at Dr. Bob's office. She listened patiently and said it sounded a lot like appendicitis and perhaps I should go to the ER. Sure enough, she was right, and I ended up having emergency surgery that night. Jane needed to be at the hospital with me, and one-year-old Emily needed a grandmother to take care of her. So, Emily's first ever night away from home and away from us, was in Ruth Carroll's bed.

When Jane was pregnant with Callie, she commented to Ruth, "When you love the first one so much, it is hard to believe that there will be enough love for a second one." Ruth, mother of four children, wisely explained that love has this amazing capacity to grow. Ruth reassured us not to worry because the love Jane and I had for one another grew to include Emily and would soon grow to include brand-new Callie. Sure enough it did.

This past Tuesday evening, the Nacogdoches City Commission honored Ruth with a special recognition for her years of work with city planning and in developing the historical overlay. Back in the early and mid 1980's Ruth did the slow, patient, detailed, nitty-gritty work of writing letters, doing research, applying for grants, and doing the paperwork helping preserve the history of the oldest town in Texas. Come to find out, before having a historical overlay, you had to have a city planner and Nacogdoches did not have a city planner. So, Ruth showed up time and

time again, persistently working to help us develop a position and budget the money and hire a city planner, which eventually did things like saving and restoring the old Zion Hill church. All out of the spotlight; all without fanfare. Ruth Carroll showed up and served.

In fact, if we want to use Greek words for Ruth's work of service at Austin Heights and in town, we could just as easily say Ruth "ministered." The same word is used in the Gospels for service or minister. New Testament scholar Jaime Clark-Soles says, "The only other characters who are said to "minister" in the Gospels besides women are the angels and Jesus. But when referring to women, the English translations use the word "service," instead of "minister."

The same word, "service," or "minister," is the word "*deakonia*." It means "servant leadership." It means leadership through caring, attentiveness, openness, and giving up power. This is why the women in the Gospels are remembered. They showed the others, the men, what it means to be disciples, servants, and ministers. Showing up at the cross, showing up to care for the body, showing up at the empty tomb and listening so they would know what to say to the male disciples whether the men were open to listening or not.

Jimmy Carter once was talking about an informal group of peacemaking elder statesmen and women he worked with called The Elders, which included people like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu and others. Carter said that the peace treaties that he and the Elders



negotiated, “the only ones which stick are the ones where women are at the table.” He said, “They are the glue of the community. They gave birth to the children in the villages, they are connected to others in the community, they collaborate rather than compete” (Jaime Clark-Soles, *Women in the Bible: Interpretation*, p. 117).

Theologian Stephen Long, who teaches at Perkins along with Jaime Clark-Soles, has asked that when we look for political leadership why is it, we only look at politicians, warriors, or wealthy businesspersons? Even if we consider artists, university people, or cultural leaders, we look at all of them through the lens of domination and power.

Long asks why don't we look for caregivers? Instead of looking for war leaders or business and commerce leaders, why not those who attend and serve and care for others? Feminist theologian Virginia Held says we should be looking for those of us who know about changing diapers. Anyone who has not changed diapers should be placed under suspicion, she says. Politicians and CEOs should be asked when they last changed one. If they have not, they should not be entrusted with power (Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*, p. 10-14).

Stephen Long once taught a course at Marquette University on “Violence, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation” which concluded with Catholic students staying for two weeks in Protestant households in Northern Ireland while they also observed peacemaking efforts. One place they visited, was a Catholic-Protestant daycare. A student asked how these

Catholic and Protestant women how they came together and were told, “Babies still need to be cared for; their diapers changed” (Stephen Long, *Truth Telling in a Post-Truth World*, p. 160-161).

Perhaps it is no accident that the Gospels highlight the service and ministry of women showing us what the church is supposed to look like. Women who show up, women who care, women who change diapers, women who care for us when we’re hurting and suffering.

Thank you, Ruth Carroll, for your ministry and service. We are more the church because of you. Thanks be to God.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One True God, Mother of us all. Amen.