

“Now just as I gave you the ‘three r’s’ the other evening as a suggested ‘mantra’ for redefining the purposes of our International Anglican Women’s Network—relevant, radical and responsive—so now I offer you three distinctive theological principles by which you might begin to address the pressing issues of injustice currently negatively affecting too many of our sisters. We do now have a work to do. Issues of health, poverty, education and peace are, in many instances, not merely urgent. They are desperate. They will require every ounce of our intellectual endeavor, every possible expression of our moral courage and, under every circumstance, our instinctive preference must be to look not to our own interests but to the interests of others. Our preference must always be for Christ-like humility in the service of others.

“I believe, however, that the challenge is eminently achievable:

We can do it because we are women

We will do it because we are Anglicans

We must do it because we are Women of God.

“Sisters, let us now turn to the substantive agenda before us today. In closing let me offer a second short prayer also from the New Zealand Prayer Book.”

God of Peace

Let us your people know

That at the heart of turbulence

There is an inner calm that comes

From faith in you.

Keep us from being content with things as they are

That from this central peace

There may come a creative compassion

A thirst for justice

And a willingness to give of ourselves

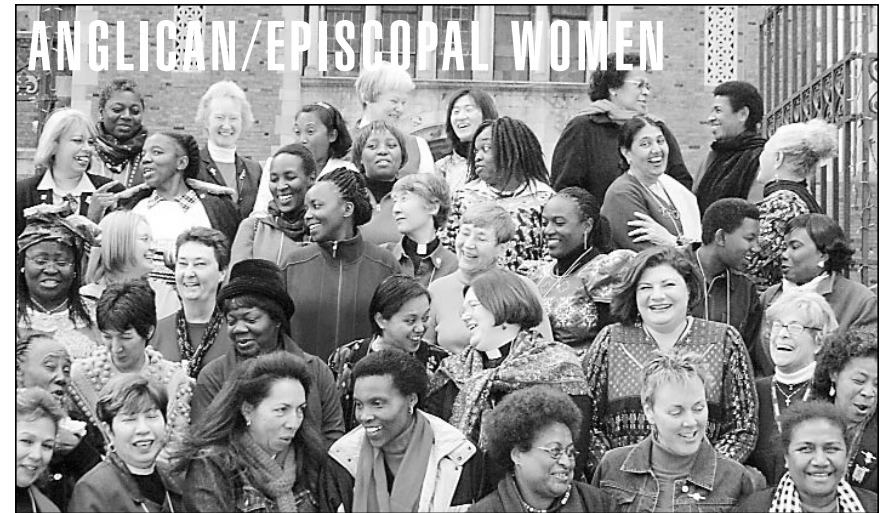
In the Spirit of Christ. Amen.

Dr. Jenny Te Paa serves as the Dean of the Anglican Theological College in Auckland, New Zealand. She prepares students to serve God’s mission through theological education and ministry programs, which are designed to foster critical thinking, theologically literate, socially activist and transformative servant leaders.

For more information about this theme and Episcopal women’s mission and ministry, visit the Women’s Ministries web site at www.episcopalchurch.org/women.htm.

For information about the international mission engagement of the Episcopal Church, visit the Anglican and Global Relations web site at www.episcopalchurch.org/agr.

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WORLD MISSION SUNDAY | Scripture for the Journey

Women of Faith, Hope and Action

BY DR. JENNY PLANE TE PAA

In early 2005, led by Archdeacon Taimalelagi Fagamalama Tuatagaloa-Matalavea, first woman appointed as the Anglican Observer to the United Nations, 41 Anglican women representing 27 provinces of the Anglican Communion and 40 Episcopal women from The Episcopal Church came to New York. They spent two weeks with thousands of other women attending the 49th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Their mission: to review 10 years of progress on women’s rights and related issues around the world, since a similar gathering took place in Beijing, People’s Republic of China, in 1995. Realizing that they had a mission to accomplish within the Anglican Communion, they submitted a report to the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), along with a resolution with far-reaching implications (see <http://www.aco.org/acc/meetings/acc13/resolutions.cfm#s31>).

Their time of worship and prayer included extensive Bible study and theological reflection led by Dr. Jenny Plane Te Paa, Dean of the Anglican Theological College in Auckland, New Zealand. One reflection has been adapted below.

As you read Dr. Te Paa’s reflection, try to imagine the situation of women and girls around the world. Then reflect on the women and girls in your church and your community. In God’s eyes they are an interdependent part of God’s mission. Think of circumstances at home and abroad that may impact their lives today. Then, read the three scripture passages Dr. Te Paa mentions. Reflect on God’s call to us as individuals and as a church. How can we best support women and girls as they strive for full membership, spiritual growth, and use of their talents in the Body of Christ?

God of Justice and Compassion
You give us a Work to do
And a baptism of suffering and resurrection
From you comes the power to give to others
The care we have ourselves received
So that we and all who love your world
May live in Harmony and Trust. Amen
(The New Zealand Prayer Book)

“I am always a little overwhelmed when entrusted with responsibilities such as leading Bible Studies, preaching, offering Biblical and theological reflections. To this extraordinarily talented, theologically savvy, Biblically experienced and thoroughly ‘traditionally’ grounded group who also just happen to be beautiful, compassionate and deeply devoted Anglican women, I thank you for the privilege you have afforded me this morning.

“I have three short scriptural pieces that I want to ask us to consider this morning. These are three that I use frequently in my own scholarly work, especially when I am trying to make sense of my own call to ministry as a single, lay, indigenous woman blessed with the professional responsibility of being a theological educator. My job, as I see it, is to prepare students to become ‘critical thinking activists capable of exercising transformative ministries anywhere in God’s world’. My job is to ensure students are well equipped to function as Anglican advocates for God’s mission and ministry.

“**The priority issues** you have already identified for today—women’s health, women’s education, women as agents of God’s peace, and poverty—are all an integral part of the ministries I expect all students of theology to address. Each of these issues has an increasingly urgent sense of poignancy attached to them, especially when we consider the continuing plight of too many of our sisters in various parts of God’s world. I want therefore, as a teacher, to use these three scriptural pieces to identify three overarching theological principles which might well be helpful in addressing the challenge of developing our own enduring mission ‘vision.’ This vision is not just so the ‘people do not perish’ but in order that all may flourish and become more fully whom God intends they become.

“My first scriptural reference is from Paul’s letter to the **Romans 12:2**. This passage is one I often use for my farewell speech to ‘valedicting’ students: *Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good, acceptable and perfect.*

“In this piece I find the powerful urging of the Spirit insisting that we are never to be passively accepting of things the way they are, especially ‘unjust things’, even in the face of our apparent helplessness to change or transform the situations we are being confronted with. What Paul is doing here is encouraging us always to use that spectacularly underdeveloped part of ourselves—the life of our minds—to truly deeply, critically, imaginatively, and analytically figure out how best to effect social transformation. This social transformation is not merely for its own sake but in order that what we are doing is indeed ‘good, acceptable and perfect’—that what we are doing is indeed the will of God and not simply a whim of our own. Using our innate capacity for ‘rea-

son’, alongside of Scripture and Tradition, is our unavoidable theological responsibility as Anglican women of God. *May I suggest the theological principle at work here is that of ‘intellectual endeavor’?*

“My second scriptural piece is from **Mark’s Gospel 7:6-8**. Here is a piece which I find especially challenging and yet powerfully encouraging in my own academic field of Race Politics and Theological Education. The reason I am so impassioned about race politics has to do with my life-long commitment to indigenous rights: the naming and working to redeem the historic legacy of injustice arising out of the colonial experience which has left such an indelible ‘stain’ upon all colonial ‘agencies,’ including our Church. I yearn for redemptive justice to prevail in all post-colonial Anglican sites. I believe many parts of our Church globally, including my own Province, are proving themselves more than willing to accept the challenge for transforming away from being the stereotypical colonial overlords. However, given our Church’s inherently unjust, overly patriarchally represented existing structures, the challenge to ‘transform’ is made that much more difficult.

“**In an ironic twist** to this challenge to ‘transformation’, a phenomenon I have noted with increasing alarm is the tendency among predominantly male leaders of previously marginalized/dominated post-colonial faith communities to assert uncontested and uncontested culturally-based practices to be part of our contemporary ecclesial tradition. For example, there are senior clergy who still insist women have no place in ministry especially in leadership because it is ‘culturally unacceptable’ or ‘against tribal tradition’. It is time these men sorted their ‘traditions’ out. Is it Christian first or tribal first? They cannot have it both ways!

“The threat to one’s own power base, the inability to share power let alone to devolve it, invariably leads to bizarre behavior. Even in my own indigenous community, it is not uncommon to witness male tribal leaders ‘teaching human precepts as doctrine’—evidence of the abandonment of the commandments of God in favor of holding on to human tradition.

“In this respect, women, particularly those of us who are tribal people ourselves, have to set a new ecclesial standard for our Church. We have to be courageous enough to say to one another that only those *traditions* that are theologically defensible are deserving of protection and perpetuation. It is only those things which are acceptable to God which are worthy of our attention. The other more important consideration is to remember that as women we are more than ‘cultural beings.’ We are God’s created human beings, created equally in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, there can be no question of our ‘acceptability’ in God’s sight. There is still a significant work of transformation yet to do.

“*May I suggest the theological principle at work in this second example is that of ‘moral courage’?* We all need to exemplify the highest levels of moral courage to continue on the journey for justice for all.

“My third scriptural piece is from **Philippians 2:1-7**. In this Paul is imploring us to model Christ’s personal example of profound humility. Once again, for us as Anglican women, the call to servanthood ministry is unmistakable: *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.* What an unavoidable challenge this poses. This piece is so open and simple, so irrefutably clear in its urgings to us all. *Can I suggest the theological principle at work in this final piece is that of ‘humility’?*