

Remembering Mothers of the Early Church
Mother's Day, May 9, 2021
Maple Grove UMC

This morning, we name and celebrate women in the early church.
We learn of them chiefly through the letters of Paul to the first believers.

They did not own buildings. They could not afford them and Christianity was not legal in the Roman world. Rather, they met in homes, and homes were the domain of women.

From Paul's letter to the church in Rome, Chapter 16

"I commend to you our sister Phoebe a deacon of the church at Cenchrae ("Sen-cree-aa") and I ask that in Christ you extend to her a welcome that is worthy of the saints. Give her whatever help she may need from you. For she has helped a great many people and she has been a support to me.

My greetings to Prescilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus who risked their lives for me. Not only I, but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. My greetings also to the church that meets at their house.

Greetings to Mary, who has worked so hard among you.

Greetings to Andronicus and Junia, who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles and they were in Christ before I was....

Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa those women who worked hard in the Lord.

Greet my dear friend, Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.

Greetings to Rufus, a chosen servant of the Lord. And to his mother who has been a mother to me.

For the times you walked the city streets and ministered to the poor:
Julia, Junia, Mary, Persis, **We remember you.**

For the times you preached the Word of God, **We remember you.**

For the times you opened your homes to others, Phoebe and Prescilla,
We remember you.

For leading the church at its dangerous beginnings, for the years you spent in
exile, Tryphena and Tryphosa, (Try-Feen-a) (Try-Foe-Sa), **We remember you.**

For the women and men you nurtured, Mother of Rufus, **We remember you.**

For the times we feel forgotten, **We now remember you.**

For all our sisters, **Known and unknown**, who ministered in the early church:
Phoebe, Prescilla, Julia, Junia, Mary, Persis, Tryphena, Tryphosa, And Mother of
Rufus, **We remember you.**

Naming - Aphia

When he was in prison, Paul wrote a letter commending a former slave to the
care of the community. It begins:

*From Paul, a prisoner for Jesus Christ, and from Timothy, our brother, to
Philemon, our beloved fellow worker and Apphia, our sister, and the church that
meets in your house, Grace and peace to you from God and from Jesus, God's
anointed.*

Who do people say we are? Wife? Mother? Sister? Daughter? Who do we know
we are? Daughters of the Living God.

Uniting - Chloe

Like today, early Christians struggled over differences. We learn this from
Paul's first letter the Church at Corinth:

*"I appeal to you my brothers and my sisters, for the sake of Jesus Christ to settle
your differences instead of disagreeing among yourselves. Be united again in*

belief and in practice. It has been told to me by Chloe's people that there are serious dissensions among you. But consider: Is Christ divided?"

O God, You are One, eternally One, One God of all the earth's people. You bring forth all your children and you know us each by name. You are Life. There is only one Life. One Source of all our living. All that you are, all that you do, all whom you have brought forth, all that is, is meant to be a blessing.

Silenced – Mary of Magdala

Whenever our scripture speaks of the Galilean women who followed Jesus, Mary Magdalene heads the list.

In the New Testament, she is named as the woman who was cured by Jesus of 7 demons then followed him and financially supported his ministry.

By every account, she and two other women went to the tomb to tend to Jesus' body in death and to these women, to Mary, Christ's resurrection was first made known. Hers is the first voice of that good news; the first apostle of the resurrection. And yet, the Gospels reveal that the men who followed Jesus did not believe her or any of the women.

Ancient scrolls from the second century discovered in the twentieth century, in caves in the Judaeen desert by the Dead Sea, name Mary of Magdala as a central figure in the early church, on par with Peter himself.

And yet, women continue to be told that they cannot be leaders in Christ's church.

Our prayer

You lift me up, Creator of Life, You entrust me with your mission. You reveal your way to me. Be with me when I am silenced or silence myself from fear.

Help me remember all the others who have been silenced, whose leadership, denied: The last, the least, the lowest.

Give me an honest heart. Help me say what I ought to say, so I will not hesitate to call the question no matter the risk.

Your Word, Who is Truth says "Keep my word, Speak the truth, and the truth will make you free and keep you true in Me" May it be so.

Rising – Tabitha

Luke tells us in the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 9:
Now at Jaffa, there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, in Greek, Dorcas, who was tireless in doing good and in charitable giving.

She fell ill and died and they prepared her body and laid her in an upper room.

*Now Peter was nearby in Lydda (**Lee-Dah**) and when the disciples heard he was in that town, they sent women with an urgent message, to come as soon as possible.*

So Peter went back with them at once, and when he arrived, they took him to the upper room where all the widows were gathered in tears displaying all the tunics and other garments Dorcas had made when she was with them.

Peter sent them all out of the room then he knelt, and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, Tabitha, get up! She opened her eyes, looked at Peter and sat up. Peter gave her his hand and she stood up. Then he called in the saints and widows and presented her to them alive. The whole of Jaffa heard the news, and many became believers.

Now and then, here and there, we are rising, rising from the dead.
From silence, from bondage, **We are rising.**

From exploitation, from violence, **We are rising.**

Against all odds rising from the dead, **We are rising.**

Like the sun, Like the moon, **We are rising.**

Like Incense, like bread, **We are rising**

Like Dorcas, **We are rising.**

Here and there, **We are rising,**

Rising from the dead.

Into hope, into freedom, **We are rising.**
Into speech, into significance, **We are rising.**
Into the future, here and there, everywhere,
We are rising, rising from the dead.

Mothers

And finally, a special word for mothers.

We first remember Ann, whose child, in her womb, leapt when encountering Mary with child. Mary, who brought Jesus into the world and believed in him, raised him to love and serve and offer himself, and who began a chain of faith that continues today.

From Paul's first letter to Timothy:

I am reminded of your sincere faith. A faith that first lived in your grandmother, Lois and in your mother, Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.

Let us now praise mothers, and mothers of mothers.

For young mothers and old mothers, first time mothers and experienced mothers, and all those whose love is like that of mothers.

For all mothers who have lost a child and children who have lost their mothers and mothers who raise other mother's children.

Mothers of those in prison and mothers in prison. Mothers whose home has never had children, mothers whose children will never come home.

We praise God for mothers. May God's grace and peace accompany them,
And follow them all the way home.

Let us pray:

We thank you, God, for all these women, for linking our lives backwards and forwards making a chain of witness and hope and compassion long enough and strong enough to circle the whole of your church including us, this very day. May we, too, live our faith and share it in Christ's name. Amen.