

CHURCH SERVICE  
BARBARA A. MEYERS, LICSW  
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OPENING

We give away our thanks to the earth which gives us our home

We give away our thanks to the rivers and lakes which give away  
their water

We give away our thanks to the trees which give away their fruits and  
nuts

We give away our thanks to the wind which brings rain to water the  
plants

We give away our thanks to the sun who gives away warmth and light

All beings on earth: the trees, the animals, the wind and the rivers  
give away to one another so all is in balance

We give away our promise to begin to learn how to stay in balance  
with all of the earth. Amen

Dolores La Chapelle

MEDITATION

Women belong in all places where decisions are being made. It  
shouldn't be that women are the exception. Ruth Bader Ginsburg

## SERMON

### OUR SPIRITUAL WARRIOR MOTHERS

Next Sunday is Mother's Day – that one day in the year we save to remember and honor mothers – those women who have given birth in the traditional definition of giving birth. Today I would like to honor women who have birthed in a different way. Women whose passion, compassion, and courage have birthed ideas resulting in actions that have changed the world. These, too, are mothers through the act of birthing. I honor them today as Spiritual Warriors – warriors who were not dissuaded by societies or cultures that did not honor them because of their gender. I have chosen just a few women to highlight and invite you to think about other women who have broken barriers, women who would not be stopped because of their gender. These, too, we must remember to celebrate.

I begin first with a former client, Amara. She was born and raised in a Middle Eastern country where males are valued over females. Amara's father spent hard-earned money ensuring that his sons would receive the best musical education beginning at a young age. From the time she was 5 or 6, Amara wanted to play the violin, but her father refused. She was adamant and would not relent despite her father's anger and refusal. She continually pushed. Finally at 8, her father relented so Amara began the violin. First, imagine what it must have been like to be a girl studying the violin surrounded by only boys and young men? She was an apt and committed student anxious to please her teachers. She outdistanced all of her brothers. With all her hard work, Amara became a celebrated solo violinist performing with the national orchestra in her country and with orchestras throughout the Middle East, and in Europe. She was

invited to come here to this country to play and she and her husband ultimately decided to emigrate to the United States.

I share this background because when I first met Amara, she was grieving a miscarriage with the resulting medical intervention leaving her unable to have children. She was grieving the reality of never giving birth to a child. I completely understood this loss. Yet, in another way, I think of Amara as a mother. In her home country, there are girls who would love to play music, who can now look to Amara. She is their role model. She is the Mother of their aspirations. She led where they can now go. And there is more. Amara teaches violin. She has shepherded many young people in their musical journey. She is a Mother of Inspiration and Hope.

I want to turn to birthing an idea, planting the seed, and then getting men on board for they are in the power position. Frances Perkins was such a woman. She was educated at Mt. Holyoke College where becoming educated means responsibility. The founder, Mary Lyon, told the girls “Go where no one else will go, do what no one else will do.” After graduation, Frances married, retaining her own name, and moved with her husband to New York City. On March 25, 1911, Frances was witness to the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire. She watched in horror as 47 workers, mostly women, jumped from the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> floors to their deaths. 147 people died in that fire. Frances went into action and some would say that, as a result, the New Deal was born. She was named Executive Secretary of the Citizen’s Committee on Safety which addressed issues of fire safety as well as the health and well-being of workers and their families. Her leadership led to her being appointed to the NYS Industrial Commission created to enforce the laws of the Citizen’s Committee. In 1932, FDR asked her to serve in his Cabinet as Secretary of Labor, the first woman ever to serve in the Cabinet. She accepted and this

was the list of priorities she gave FDR: 40-hour work week, minimum age, unemployment compensation, workers compensation, end of child labor, Social Security, and universal health insurance. He agreed to them all. Frances Perkins birthed ideas that men enacted. It was not an easy fight but we have her to thank for making both our lives and our work environments healthier and safer. She is the Mother of the New Deal.

Now I think about a woman who risked her life to give freedom to enslaved people. Harriet Tubman, a diminutive black woman, born into slavery herself, led men, women, and children to freedom in the years preceding the Civil War. In 1849, her owner had died and Harriet learned that his wife was about to sell her to another owner. Harriet had been trying to gain her freedom and hearing about being sold led her to make a decision. In her words, “there was one of two things I had a right to, liberty or death; if I could not have one, I would have the other.” She escaped from eastern Maryland using the Underground Railway, a loose-knit organization of free and enslaved black people and abolitionists. Once gaining her own freedom, she returned thirteen times to eastern Maryland from 1851-1862 to lead 70 family members and others to freedom. This was dangerous work, especially with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 which required the capture and return of free slaves. There was no turning back and she carried a gun to insure that no one would turn back and endanger all. In her years of rescue, Harriet never lost a person.

With the war, Harriet went on to work with the Union Army as a cook, nurse, armed scout and spy. She is credited with being the first woman to lead an armed military operation which freed 700 enslaved people from plantations in Combahee Ferry, South

Carolina. Harriet Tubman birthed enslaved people into freedom. We honor her this morning as a Mother of Freedom.

Now I would like to acknowledge Simone de Beauvoir who birthed the second Feminist Movement with the publication of her book, *The Second Sex*, in 1949. Simone challenged societal norms about women's roles in society. It was her belief that "one is not born a woman, one becomes one" through the pressures within a society. It is helpful to remember that this book arrived soon after women in this country were told to return home to their families because they were no longer needed to keep the factories going now that the men had returned home! Her writing birthed what would follow in this country – Betty Friedan with *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963; Gloria Steinman's co-founding *MS. Magazine*; Jill Ker Conway and women's history; and the women's revolution of the 1970's and 80's. As I look around here, I see women and men who can remember the profound transformations of that time. Where would we be today if these women had not had the passion, wisdom, and courage to speak up and out? And they spoke up and out despite the anger, rage, and disrespect that rained down upon them from both men and women. They spurred others on. They, too, are spiritual warriors to be celebrated. And I honor Simone de Beauvoir as the Mother of the Second Feminist Revolution.

I turn next to a woman who was a biologist, writer, and conservationist. She was a pioneer of environmental awareness and environmental protection in a way that made it accessible to the general public. Despite fierce opposition within the Federal Government and from industry, Rachel Carson published *The Silent Spring* in 1962. It focused on the harmful effects of pesticides on the ecosystem as well as on human beings. She taught us about the interconnections between nature, humans, and the chemical

industry. Rachel risked this at great cost to herself. She was labelled “a bird and bunny lover.” Ezra Taft Benson, Secretary of Agriculture” wrote in a letter to President Eisenhower that because she is unmarried despite being physically attractive, she is “probably a communist.” The industry discredited her as a communist or hysterical woman. They threatened legal action and published deceitful brochures and articles in support of pesticide use. We have seen this kind of story since with dangers like tobacco. Rachel was a scientist, she knew how to do research, and her information was well-documented. And people listened. John F. Kennedy’s Science Advisory Committee studied and validated her work.

Silent Spring laid the foundation for the U.S. Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Endangered Species Act. It also led to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency. And it helped birth the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970. Rachel Carson, the Mother of the Environmental Movement.

Rachel Carson birthed a movement that continues. There are younger faces like Greta Thunberg who carry her work forward. And that work is on behalf of the most important mother of us all – Mother Earth. She receives everything that we throw at her – our garbage, our bombs, our poisons, our disrespect for her very being. She suffers and yet she gives us beauty untold and the very resources that sustain our life here. She needs more spiritual warriors who will speak for her, act for her so that we may all live together on, in and with her.

Sixty plus years ago when I was a college student majoring in political science and history the only women who were mentioned were Betsy Ross, Clara Barton, and Joan of Arc. How the times have

changed! I did not know nor did my teachers know that there were women throughout the ages who were spiritual warriors. Women who refused to cower despite society's rules and laws to make them "other." They refused to surrender to their society's mores. We owe them our deepest gratitude for their passion and their courage. Whether we acknowledge it or not, these women live deeply within our souls. Let us celebrate these spiritual women warriors who birthed ideas, art, scientific inventions, civic actions that contributed to us and all of humanity. These, too, are Mothers.

## CLOSING

When I dare to be powerful – to use my strength in the service  
of my vision – then it becomes less and less important whether  
I am afraid.                      Audre Lorde

So, in the days, weeks, and months ahead, may we remember and honor the mothers who have been spiritual warriors for humanity and the earth and may we find that same courage, passion, and wisdom within ourselves. Go in Peace. I release the circle.