

*United Methodist Women Sunday*

*“Maturing in Faith Together”*

[Titus 2:1-6](#)

Good morning, church! My name is Moore Fatmata Conteh. I am one of the three preachers who will be delivering the message today as we celebrate the ministries of the United Methodist Women, and I thank God for this opportunity.

Today’s scripture is part of the Apostle Paul’s letter to Titus, who was one of his associates in ministry. In the New Testament, the letter to Titus follows the letters that Paul wrote to Timothy, another associate who was ministering in Ephesus. Both letters are filled with words of encouragement and guidance that Paul had for his associates. The Apostle was serving as their mentor, trying to pass on what he had learned in ministry to these young pastors.

Here is some background information about Titus. He worked closely with Paul, accompanying him to important church meetings in Jerusalem and supervising the collection for the mother church there. Titus also served as Paul’s emissary when there were troubled relations with the Christian believers in Corinth. And Titus received this letter from Paul, from which we read today, while he was in Crete helping to build up the Christian communities that Paul had established there.

In the first chapter of Titus, Paul gives the young pastor specific instructions on whom to elect as leaders of the church and how to handle those who claim to be teachers but are misleading other Christian believers with false doctrines. In the second chapter, the Apostle moves from addressing the issues of church leadership and false teachers to providing instructions on how to guide various groups within the church. In today’s scripture reading, we see Paul’s approach when it comes to dealing with both the older and younger generation of men and women in the church community.

He tells Titus to guide older men into leading lives of temperance, dignity, and wisdom, into healthy faith, love, and endurance. Meanwhile, younger men are advised to live disciplined lives. Concerning women, Paul asks Titus to guide older women into lives of reverence, so that they may become models of goodness to others. It is through their example that younger women will know how to love their husbands and children, be virtuous and pure, keep a good household, and be good wives.

Honestly, many of us do not like what Paul says about women in Titus and elsewhere. He was very much against women’s leadership in the church. In his letter to Timothy, Paul wrote, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man. She must be quiet.” In his first letter to the Corinthians, he wrote, “Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission.” And as revealed in today’s scripture reading, Paul believed a woman’s proper place was at home as a good wife and mother. Actually, according to other translations, Paul was asking women to be submissive or obedient to their husbands!

Of course, we cannot apply Paul's words that reflect the culture of his time to our social context today. If so, I would not be standing before you. The hierarchical relationship between men and women that Paul advocates for is no longer the dominant view in our culture and society. And, we in the United Methodist Church believe that men and women are equal partners in life and ministry.

However, there is something in today's scripture that I want to point out to you. Paul gives Titus separate instructions concerning the older and younger men. Yet, when it comes to instructions concerning women, they are only addressed to the older women. Regarding the younger women, Paul says that they will know what to do by following the example set forth by the older women in their lives.

This is true for many of us. Whether it was our mothers, grandmothers, or the many other wise women who graced our lives, so much of what we know and believe were passed down to us by example. The older women in our lives have helped us to grow in faith and become who we are now. This was the case with me, too.

Over the years my mom has taught me countless things and tips about life and service. It is hard to remember them all but there are some just seem to stick with me and these lessons have really impacted my life.

My mom taught me scriptures during teenage years. Joshua 1 verse 8, proverb 3 verse 5, and Colossian 3 verse 23, these have equipped me to grow in faith and prayer as I carried them on throughout my life.

I learned about diligence in service to the church and others, forgiveness and creativity from the young leaders camp that was organized by the United Methodist Women Sierra Leone Annual Conference. I learned about sense of humor from many amazing women who have invested in me. My heart is full of gratitude this morning, as I remember these women who helped me to become who I am now. Now Jennifer Willhoite will tell us about her grandmother and what she learned from her.

-----

Good morning! Grandma Alice always said she was a jack-of-all-trades and master of none. She kept bees and a garden; she read books and wrote 3 of her own. She rode her bike, loved practical jokes and was a dedicated do-it-yourself-er. When she needed shoes to match the dress she wore for my wedding, she just painted a pair she already owned. When she wanted a unique cornice box above her curtains, she used a scroll saw to cut out wooden dragons and painted them herself. She was curious, intelligent, playful, pragmatic and rarely shied away from something because it was new or different.

Perhaps this came from the fact that she was the daughter of a pastor and one of 5 children, a group that included an oldest daughter and two sets of fraternal twins. They were a rowdy bunch and often created such a racket with their games and experiments that their father would come down from his minister's office and declare that the Kingdom of God would arrive the day all 5 of them finally went to school.

Grandma Alice was born in Japan and grew up speaking Japanese and English. She moved back to the United States as a girl and then studied in France. Her sister, Dorothy, went to university, became a doctor

and moved to India where she practiced medicine and fell in love and raised a family. Alice's twin brother went to engineering school despite being told his dyslexia would prevent him from even being accepted. And then Alice herself moved to Congo after falling in love with my grandfather and becoming a preacher's wife. Coming from the family that she did, there weren't many things Grandma Alice believed she couldn't do if she just kept her mind and heart open, tried her best and stayed connected to her family's values: learning new languages and cultures, doing well in school, staying curious and keeping the faith. In fact, that's how she signed all of her letters to me: "Keep the faith".

One day, after tending the garden and riding our bikes around the neighborhood like we were both school girls, we sat down to our usual lunch of cheese and mustard sandwiches and I asked her what she meant when she said, "Keep the faith". In her typically direct manner she replied, "I mean pray, have a relationship with God, do good in the world and don't check your brain at the door when you walk into church." I was pretty relieved. I was a young Doubting Thomas, full of persistent questions about faith, God, souls, heaven, death and religion. I pestered my Sunday School teachers, my parents and my minister regularly for answers to issues that wore heavy on my heart. Grandma knew this about me and she encouraged it. She said, "Keep asking those questions Jennifer. That is how you are building your faith in God."

And before we hopped on our bikes again, she told me a story of rebellion—a small rebellion, but a rebellion nonetheless. This is a story that made me laugh and made me braver as a woman. And this is how it goes:

*When I came back to the United States from Congo, I visited the retirement community I live in now. Just like now, it was like a small town only everyone was retired and everyone had once worked for the church. There were lots of rules and guidelines for our community because we wanted every aspect of our lives together to reflect our faith. We grew a lot of our own food, repaired clothes, bikes, homes and cars for each other, sang in the choir, took turns hosting Bible study and served the community around us. When I first visited, I met with the Board of Directors, a group of men who showed me the community and shared the values with me. I thought it was splendid so I paid my deposit and made arrangements to move in as soon as possible.*

*Right as I was leaving, they pulled me aside and said, "We understand you didn't know this today, but in the future, you'll need to only wear skirts or dresses while living here. We do not believe it is Christian for women to wear pants like you're wearing now." I asked them how they believed women could fully participate in the community work of gardening, sewing, repairing, rebuilding and serving without being able to wear pants. I asked them if they had ever tried to build a patio in a skirt or bike to the grocery store in a dress. They assured me they hadn't and weren't planning to. I asked them what the women of the community thought of this rule and that I'd like to hear from some of the female Board of Directors. They told me that women weren't on the Board of Directors and that they didn't need to ask their opinions anyway because it was clearly an issue of faith. And then they made it clear they were not open to any more questions.*

I asked my grandmother what she did next and her answer put me in fits of giggles and made me cover my mouth in shock. She said, "I went home and converted all of my skirts and dresses to shorts and pants and then I moved into the community with my new wardrobe."

What happened next, apparently, was a series of meetings and discussions and, no doubt, arguments in the community. My grandmother insisted all of these include the women. She told the Board of Directors that she would be happy to follow all guidelines and rules so long as she knew they were set by members of the whole community. She told them when she reflected on her faith, she could not ignore that Jesus included men and women in his healings, his teachings and his group of disciples. She told them her faith made her wonder why the community was made up of men and women, but the leadership was only made up of men. And then she reminded the Board of Directors that Jesus often showed his faith in God by questioning men and women—and she meant to follow his example which is why she was questioning the rule on pants and the makeup of the Board. She told them she wasn't interested in a fight, but she was insisting on a conversation—one that Jesus taught her to have.

And that's how Grandma Alice taught me to keep the faith. Not to cause trouble for trouble's sake and not to disrespect others simply to hear your voice over another's, but to question the status quo and insist on an inclusive conversation. To stay curious, to stay involved and to stay connected—even when the world demands skirts and you know the job requires pants.

-----  
Good Morning to my UMC Campbell family. My name is Khadie Mattia. I feel privileged to be standing here this morning talking to you all. Just a brief background on myself.

I was born in Sierra Leone in a family with 11 children. (9 boys 2 girls.) I am the 8th child and the first-born girl. My parents were Muslims but sent me to a Roman Catholic elementary school and an Anglican high school. My mother passed away when I was 16. Needless to say, as a young woman trying to find my way with God and remotely resemble a Titus woman (which is still a work in progress.) I had the opportunity to look at my journey from various lenses.

From 12 to 17, I spent most of my days at an all-girls boarding school which was the first girls high school in the whole of West Africa. The school's motto is "Non sibi sed Omnibus." (not for one's self but for all) And the first stanza of the school song goes "We want to build on a firm foundation on the Rock of Integrity." We want to set a good example of truth and loyalty. If we can meet success or failure, with courage and humble grace; And work with zeal, for our ideal in the world to take our place. We want to build on a firm foundation to keep life's golden rule, for Christ the great architect made the plan we follow in Annie Walsh School!

Very early on in life, I learned about mentorship and maturing together in Christ at that school. We were often placed in a dormitory with 16 other girls ranging from age 12 to 20 and we created our own little family of adopted sisters and mothers. The older girls were entrusted to mentor the incoming young girls. We cooked, prayed, played and studied together. We were taught that the action of one member of the family impacted all. And when we were home for the holidays, we referred to any woman older than us in the community as either "aunty" or "sissy". In that respect, it was the older woman's place to mentor us young women.

Maturity is evident when energy is mandatory and fulfillment and passion are at its lowest. It is during these times that individuals give to each other and true character emerges. An important character trait to have is respect. As women of this church we must always respect each other and to be a good mentor you must understand that respect draws people to the truth.

One of the key issues discussed in Titus 2 is gossip. In Romans 1, the apostle Paul connects gossip as a character trait. “they are gossips.” (V.29) — or as I like to translate, “GOSSIP”, **G**athering **O**f **S**atan’s **S**ervants **I**nitiating **P**eople. Gossip is a sin no matter where you find it, whether it’s in the aisles at church or in the aisles of the grocery store, but it is especially deplorable in the church setting, where gossip works the satanic ploy of undermining the *unity* of the spirit and Christ’s call to love one another as he has loved us.

One reason gossip can be so difficult to define is that it so often masquerades as something more mundane. I’m sure you have witnessed plenty of prayer requests shared on someone’s behalf that seemed to include unnecessary details or salacious information. You’ve probably heard your share of “words of concern” that bordered on insinuation or improper speculation. Maybe you’ve offered such words yourself. I know I have.

Discerning the will of God is actually simple, and it does not require a special sign from above or other extraordinary insight to make the right choice.

I am convinced that being of service to others is truly rewarding. No one person was made to exist alone. We were created to be in relation with **all** of God’s creation. We can become good listeners and selfless communicators as we teach young women about the world Christ envisioned for us that goes far beyond this physical life.

T.S Elliot once said “It is not enough to understand what we ought to be, unless we know what we are; and we do not understand what we are unless we know what we ought to be.” If you don’t know yourself the world will try and tell you who you are. We live in an imperfect world, but you know who is perfect? GOD! If you plant deep roots in Him early on nothing can get in your way. Part of being “women in the church” is reminding other young women who they are in Christ so they don’t become lost in the physical world.

As women in the church, we should pray and ask God for the tools that will allow us to lead young women who need discipleship. We must be willing to make a commitment and provide the space in our lives to meet them on a regular basis (preferably weekly), for one to two hours and do something together. Whether that be sharing and exchanging cultural recipes, talking about the world we live in today, or simply laughing and listening to experiences different from our own.

You don’t have to be a Bible scholar or senior citizen to be a mentor. If you love the Lord and have seen Him at work in your life, then God’s mandate is to share this with someone. It’s easy to become enveloped by the world’s call on our life and forget God’s instructions to invest in the next generation — they are the future of the church!

To mentor younger women to “*be*” who they should be and not merely “*do*” what they should do takes more than words. It takes a role model, someone who lives by what they say.

I am still finding my way in becoming the godly woman Paul was talking about in today’s scripture - a woman who “neither gossips nor drinks, but models of goodness” - a woman who knows how to love her husband and children and keep a good house. I ask God to create in me a pure heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me, so that I may live a life that is pleasing to Him and will hold in confidence all personal matters committed to my keeping.

Men and women of Christ, encouraging one another, we should learn and teach from scripture, as well as life experiences that grow and shape us. May we nurture and mentor our brothers and sisters in Christ through godly relationships with one another!  
Amen.