ORDINARY WOMEN

SPEECH FOR

LIZ LEWIS

Hello!!! What a blessing it is to be with all of you at this service!! Today we acknowledge and celebrate women… you may think you’re ordinary, but I **KNOW,** as does God, and deep down inside it’s no secret that each and every one of you is beyond **EXTRAORDINARY**! Women really do hold up more than their fair share of the world and the sky … as well as their families, their faith… their friends… their communities. We don’t have to brag about it or shout or call attention to ourselves. We know. Women are everything… they… **WE**… are strong and wise, nurturing and faithful, resourceful, resilient, dependable, and kind…. and many **MANY**, more adjectives. To be a woman is to acknowledge a feeling that comes from within. It’s an inner happiness… a sense of peace and satisfaction that spreads warmth to her heart, brings a glint to her eye, and leaves a beguiling, knowing smile on her lips. To be a treasured part of the sisterhood of women means that we are there to help other women with the support they might need by presenting and sharing a good example…. Being a woman means being strong and resolute, finding patience when it seems impossible, having layers of resourcefulness- mental and emotional strength, maintaining the ability to love and accept in spite of problems and challenges, being creative in the face of adversity, finding humor and positivity when fortunes fail. Being a strong woman means having the ability to present an elegant and dependable face even when it seems impossible. Being a strong woman means knowing how and where to connect with one’s faith to get through the struggles of life. To be a woman is to be a positive force for those with whom we share our lives. We may look somewhat ordinary, but that’s the **LAST** thing we are!!

None of us have had an easy path in life but we have had as our mentors and inspiration mothers, daughters, grandmothers, sisters aunts, and neighbors who quietly, dutifully, wisely and mostly unknowingly lead the way for all of us… as we do for them. To be a part of this sisterhood is one of the greatest blessings of our lives. It may not always seem that way, but if we think about what life would be like without the strength and love of the women in our lives, the consequence is not even imaginable. It’s impossible to picture a world without a woman’s touch.

In Proverbs 3:15-18 we learn,

 “She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all the paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed.”

If it is frowned upon to boast or to “toot our own horn,” It might be an equal transgression to **fail** to acknowledge how wonderful and worthy of love and praise the women in our lives are. Many times we don’t understand or focus on or appreciate that to our families, friends, and community, we really are that “tree of life.” Probably because we’re all too busy keeping all of those plates spinning in the air at once!!! (**Wait for the laugh**).

I will start the momentum of acknowledgement and hopefully when this service has been completed, you will find a little time… between spinning your own plates… to acknowledge the women who make such a special difference in your lives. And when you think of your “extraordinary ordinary woman list,” don’t forget to look at the younger girls in your lives. Now is the time to welcome them into that sisterhood of support and faith, blessings and inspiration. We were all taught by strong, older, caring, nurturing women and it is our job to nurture the next generation. As we look at those young women, be inspired by their sense of wonder and discovery… get in touch with what it means to dream, recall a time when you began to blossom and discover all that you might do and learn and share and contribute as you searched for and found your place in this world.

My late grandmother, (**give her name**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ was my everything. **Really**. She was the woman who raised me and her love and faith stay with me every day. She is alive in the words that run through my head and heart as I search for solutions to the problems of life. Somehow her voice manages to come through and touch me. She guides me every day. She would always say that God’s Wisdom is needed in every mother’s life. The crown of an excellent woman is of great value, and the crown of an excellent mother/woman reveals character beyond reproach. The crown of an excellent mother/woman comes to God in daily prayer, is sensitive to the Holy Spirit, and lives in hope for the eternal. I live my life every day holding my grandmother as my beacon to help me through every phase and challenge of life. She may have thought that she was ordinary… after all she had much more important things to do than praise her own actions… let alone second guess them! But in the act of living what most might have perceived as an ordinary life, her impact and legacy is extraordinary. And like the ripples on a lake when a rock is tossed in and skims the surface, her innate ability to nurture and care for others… to put the needs of everyone else before her own, has had a tremendous impact and a far reaching and lasting effect on those who grew strong … directly and indirectly… because of her love and attention.

A wise woman once said, “The challenge is not to be perfect, it is to be **whole**.” And being whole includes self-acceptance. It includes acknowledging our limits and doing our best to work with them. It includes living a Godly life and turning to our faith for strength. It includes our natural ability and instinct to nurture. But I want all of us to make a pact and that is to acknowledge and respect that being whole no longer includes accepting that we are ordinary, because honestly speaking, we all know we have a special, secret, superpower…. and yes, it is that even though we may seem average, or plain, or occupied with something other than our own exultation, we are, each in our own unique ways, **EXTRAORDINARY**!

I have to share a little bit with you, and it’s something I think most if not all of you can relate to. I am a mental health therapist by trade. As you can imagine, my job can be quite time consuming. Between research, preparation, meetings, completing reports, being mentally and emotionally present during sessions, and on and on and on, there is always the enormous possibility that I am mentally and physically exhausted…. because don’t forget, then I have my home and my family, and my church and community commitments. My husband often tells me he has no idea from where I get the energy to keep going… In fact his nickname for me is Duracell…. I suppose I DO keep going and going and going…. (**Wait for the laugh**) … (**Note- it’s the energizer bunny that keeps going and going but if you feel more comfortable saying Duracell, it’s up to you**). The truth is… and here is one of my little secrets… being constantly engaged in life and busy with all of my responsibilities is exhausting but it provides a deep sense of satisfaction and accomplishment and I thank God for all of the strength He gives to me… every minute of every day. I have also found … honestly… that it’s more tiring to do nothing… so… keep me busy! (**Wait for the laugh**).

Proverbs 31: 26 says, “ She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.”

What better beacon of the strength of womanhood do we have but our own guiding light, Ellen G. White? Her strength and sensitivity, her devout spirit and her passion to share her mission have guided generations aligned in her faith. Although she may have entered this life in an ordinary manner, there was nothing less than extraordinary about the life and time and message of Ellen G. White.

In “The Signs of the Times” of December 1903, Ellen White wrote, “Early in my public labors I was bidden by the Lord, "**Write, write the things that are revealed to you.**" At the time this message came to me, I could not hold my hand steady. My physical condition made it impossible for me to write. But again came the word, "Write the things that are revealed to you." I obeyed; and as the result it was not long before I could write page after page with comparative ease. Who told me what to write? Who steadied my right hand, and made it possible for me to use a pen? — It was the Lord.” It was the Lord who gave Ellen White the strength, but it was Ellen White’s sensitivity and acceptance of the possibility of miracles that made her an extraordinary woman.

As an acknowledgement of the power and strength of women, I find it fascinating that in this passage from the “Review and Herald” of June 1906, Ellen White refers to the church in the feminine… “When will the church do **her** appointed work? **She** is represented as an angel of light, flying through heaven with the everlasting gospel to be proclaimed to the world. This represents the speed and directness with which the church is to prosecute **her** work.” Ellen White is profoundly in touch with the context of womanhood. She knows the church is a feminine vessel, capable of holding the spiritual lives of her followers.

It’s been said that, “The true calling of a Christian is not to do extraordinary things, but to do ordinary things in an extraordinary way.” As women and as Godly women, we have the double blessing and “whammy” of living our lives, no matter how seemingly ordinary, but in acknowledging our power and ability to do and be EXTRAORDINARY.

To all of you women of God, to you sister and aunts, to you mothers and daughters… to you grandmas and friends, neighbors and teachers, you are Women of God. Trouble may come your way, you may suffer from the hands and fates of this worldly plane, but you have protection. God is your armor and your womanhood is your secret weapon. We are all peaceful warriors for our faith. As life goes on, continue to place your love and trust and focus on God and remember that He lives in us. He gives us strength and compassion, patience and (**if you want to make a little joke you can say**) … the ability to cook!! (**Wait for the laugh**). He gives us a sense of humor and the gift of laughter. Through our trust in God we will see the light of our extraordinary potential. We will learn that being ordinary is only superficial and that all of God’s work starts from within.

It’s been said that this is a Jamaican proverb… maybe you can tell me if it actually is, but even if not, these are words in which to find meaning and purpose. “A strong woman became strong because of the pain she has faced and won.” I know we are all strong, incredible, extraordinary and Godly women. I celebrate our struggle because it brings us strength. I celebrate our humbleness because it brings us dignity. I celebrate our resilience because it gives us hope. God is all mighty and he gave us the gift of womanhood. You… **we** … are all precious gems… brilliant, faceted, priceless gems and I am proud to be in your sisterhood. Thank you all!