

The Music in My Soul

If you had the chance to ask anyone in Frontier Ventures who my favorite singer is they will probably say “Bob Dylan”. And that would be an understandable but incorrect answer! He is someone I quote often, and whose song writing I appreciate. But he is not my favorite *singer*.

I have a list of favorites and they are all women. That list includes Emmy Lou Harris, Judy Collins, Brandi Carlisle, Adele, Florence Welch (Florence and the Machine), and Patty Griffin. Many of them are also amazing songwriters, and I am enabled to see and feel their view of life and the world through their music.

As an example, Patty Griffin’s song “Careful” shows up regularly in my station. It is a plea for the world to be careful with what she refers to in various ways as “all the girls”: women, girls, daughters, mothers, wives and partners, leaders, artists, and more. I often use it to pray for the women in my life, and the women of the world, women in the movements I have the honor to work with, women who have started such movements in various places, and women who serve in leadership. I pray for women in our current national and global era, with its profound mix of an emerging awareness of what it’s like to be a woman in this context, while at the same time we also see more and more instances of systemic oppression, abuse, and harassment.

The Women I Have Raised

I have three daughters. Our oldest did a double major in history and women’s and gender studies as the other. She later combined the two fields in her MA work, in which her thesis compared the treatment of women by Christians, Jews, and Muslims in medieval Spain.

Our middle daughter majored in women’s and gender studies at Penn State before getting her master’s degree in social work. Our youngest was a Performing Arts major, but she also took courses in women’s and gender studies.

All three studied at so-called liberal institutions. I was sometimes asked by well-meaning friends, “How are you handling that?” My answer was simple: I asked my daughters to give me their favorite books or notes on a significant lecture. And, then we talked. In other words, I leaned in. I learned. A lot.

What I learned with my head, impacted my heart, and it affected what I did. But....

Sometimes Hearts and Hands Lag Behind Our Heads

Imagine a fish who learns late in life it is actually amphibious. It may now *know* it’s capable of living out of the water, but the shifts in how it feels when out of the water, or the length of time it feels comfortable, might take longer. There could be old habits that lag. The fish might suddenly panic, “I need to get back in to the...” and then realize, “oh right, I am ok out here.”

Sure, it’s a trivial, made-up example, but I use it to share that in some ways I feel like that fish. My inner world and actions are still catching up to what I “know in my knower.” I know that:

God made us, humanity, in God’s image; male and female God has created us.

My journey has convinced me of the so-called egalitarian view of women and leadership (to single out just one facet of our theme). However, I know that there are times I do not live fully from that mental knowledge. There are times when the systemic nature of things blinds me to ways I am not seeing (which is blindness, I know!).

To overcome this, I try to press in. I ask for feedback regularly about how I have contributed to the ways women colleagues of mine experience feelings of not being seen, not having a place. My colleagues are gracious, but I am grateful that they are also direct and clear.

And Our Theme?

First, the history of mission is full of wonderful and yet also paradoxical examples. One can find ample evidence of women leading the way in mission: as pioneers, as mobilizers, as examples of courage and sacrifice and creativity. They are wonderful examples.

And yet the paradox: in some cases women are “allowed” to do things in the field that they were prevented from doing at home. They could plant churches “over there,” but not pastor them “here.” I won’t comment here on the implied racism and cultural superiority this reveals except to name it.

However, my main point here is about how women were viewed in mission. Sometimes, more often than we will want to admit, that view has been something like, “go and lead, just don’t lead us.”

Now What

I pray you will read and digest the contributions in this edition. I pray you will absorb the profound mystery of all humanity made in God’s image, and what that mystery says about God’s way of seeing women. And I pray we, myself included, will continue to adjust ourselves, our heads, and our hands, and our hearts to be more aligned with God’s thoughts, actions, and heart. ❏