



## FINDING YOUR VOICE

Remarks by Kay Shurden of First Baptist Church of Christ

Women have a hard time finding their voice. We may talk a lot and laugh a lot and scold our children, but speaking up for ourselves and what we believe in is off limits to many of us.

Why? Why are we not clear and straightforward—truthful—about things in our families and in our society, things happening in our communities? Why are we reluctant to speak out?

Some of it may have to do with personality...People pleasing, it's called. People might be upset with us if they don't like what we say. And our job in life is to please as many people as possible. To voice an unpopular opinion may make us less pleasing.

But another, more invisible force is at work to keep us silent on issues at stake in the larger society. It is culture's assignment to women: don't rock the boat, soothe the powers that be, keep your opinions to yourself, play second fiddle, don't hog the limelight, be quiet, be sweet, smile, don't talk -- certainly not about anything important.

The only thing wrong with that assignment is that nothing changes unless it is acknowledged. Unfairness becomes the order of the day unless one speaks out. Women have eyes and minds and voices and we need to let our voices reflect what our eyes see and our minds know.

Finding your voice will not immediately change things that are unfair. But something important happens when you speak up. It changes you. You hear yourself speaking and that act empowers you. You're no longer hiding. You're facing the truth, your truth, and you join humanity's struggle to make the world a better place.

Something else can change too. Your voice empowers other voices. Strong women speaking out have led movements and changed lives. Think of Rosa Parks, or Margaret Sanger, or Eleanor Roosevelt. Others fell in line because they dared to speak out. One voice can speak truth to power and empower others to find their voices. A chorus of voices begins a movement.

I'm writing this because I need to hear it. I'm one of those people-pleasers, someone who hides anger behind a smile. Someone who usually keeps my opinions to myself. I well remember once, in a family uproar, my son asking me, "Mom, don't you have an opinion?" I was being my usual, keep-everything-on-an-even-keel self. Don't rock the boat!

That anger, those opinions, are what we need to empower ourselves and our movements. Speaking up will give us hope that situations can change for the better.

Augustine said, "Hope has two beautiful daughters; their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are, and Courage to see that they do not remain as they are."

Your voice is an instrument of hope. Use it.