



WEAVING GOD'S PROMISES

for Youth

LESSON 47

WOMEN WHO STRUGGLED FOR FREEDOM

You may summarize the stories to tell about all four women in one lesson, choose just one woman's story to tell, tell each one over four successive weeks, or some other combination that works for your setting.

SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY

Over the years, the Episcopal Church has designated a number of men and women to be specially commemorated in the Church calendar. Many of these people are individuals whom the whole Church regards as *saints*. Some of these people were martyrs, but many lived without persecution. Some are universally known, but some are known only in the Anglican Communion, and many are barely known to most people in the Church. Some were devout, all were faithful Christians, but none were perfect. All were models of the faith.

Today's lesson is about four 19th-century women whom the Church calls *liberators* and *prophets*. We also call them *saints* and *Easter people* because they represent the Good News of Christ's resurrection to the world. In our Baptismal Covenant, we are asked, "Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?" (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 305) These women surely answered loudly and persistently, "I will, with God's help."

Look for these special qualities in the lives of the people that we are studying today:

- vision and courage to stand against oppression and injustice
- prophetic voices speaking God's word

WHEN THE CHURCH CELEBRATES THEIR MINISTRY

July 20: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Amelia
Bloomer, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Ross
Tubman, 19th century liberators and
prophets

In the book *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, now published as *Holy Women, Holy Men* (NY: Church Publishing, 2010), you can find a short biography and scripture readings, arranged by date, for these saints. The suggested Bible readings during this lesson's Prayer time are those included in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* or *Holy Women, Holy Men*.



WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

In the nineteenth century (and even now), many people in the United States took for granted the idea that women and African-Americans had not the worth of white males. Servitude, oppression and inequality were all accepted as part of the fabric of American society and even as part of natural law. Some people opposed such unjust ideas and practices but felt unable or powerless to “change the system.”

But these four women—Elizabeth, Amelia, Sojourner and Harriet—courageously worked with prophetic vision for the liberation of all people. They worked to gain for the oppressed persons their rightful places as “children of God” as promised in the Bible. In doing so, they often had to challenge the common idea that the Bible itself justified such oppression. Their work was unrewarding, risky and even dangerous, and they did not live to see their prayers and hopes fulfilled.

But they forged the path for liberation of all people, and so they are true bearers of the prophetic word in our society. They are liberators not just of the oppressed—the women and the African Americans, for whom they so eloquently spoke and worked—but also of the oppressors who are slaves to unjust systems and hearts.

Thus in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, we call them “liberators and prophets.” They have given us a vision of freedom and dignity for all, fulfilling what we promise in our Baptismal Covenant, to strive for justice and peace.

We can also look around and ask whether people are still treated unjustly and oppressively. We know that there are still grave injustices in our world. We know that “equal pay for equal work” is still not a reality for many women. We know that African

American people still live under the burden of moral and economic debt that is bequeathed to them by the legacy of slavery. We know that Jews are too often still treated with hostility as if we can deny the heritage and religious tradition of our own Lord. We know that other groups still face discrimination and hostility.

So the work of these four women needs to be continued by us. Can we too see the vision of the reign of God as including all people? Can we live that out, by working for God’s justice in this world?



THE EPISCOPAL THREAD

The Episcopal Church has always been a church active in the world. Episcopalians are also active in working for justice and peace, and in promoting the “social gospel.”

The Baptismal Covenant makes clear that work for justice and peace is something for all of us to do. All of us who have been baptized reaffirm this promise whenever there is a baptism in the church.

In the Episcopal Church, we regard them as *saints* not because they performed any miracles or lived perfect lives without sin. We call them *saints* because of their fidelity to Jesus Christ and their lives of devotion to following his example. We call them *saints* because they are examples for us, not of earthly perfection, but of ordinary people living extraordinary lives dedicated to Christ. They all have special qualities that can teach us how we too can be faithful Christians, following in his footsteps as they did.

The Episcopal Church, in its triennial General Convention, makes changes to the Church calendar, as more individuals are recognized as holy people for us. The calendar on pages 19-30 of the *Book of Common Prayer* lists, by date, the names of people who are commemorated as of the printing of the 1979 Prayer Book. Since then, many more people

have been added. The companion book *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* is a resource for the special days to be observed in the Church, including the various “saints” as designated by the Episcopal Church. It was updated every three years to reflect the triennial changes made by General Convention, and in its last reprinting in 2010, its title was changed to *Holy Women, Holy Men*. The information in these books is arranged by date—usually the date of their death, not their birth. For each person or persons commemorated there is a special prayer, scripture readings and a brief biography.

Where Holy Eucharist, Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer are offered daily in a church, these saints are often remembered on their day of commemoration. The officiant or celebrant will use the opening collect and the readings for the day’s worship. Often a brief homily will offer thoughts on why this person is important to us and what we can learn from her or him.



GATHERING

Check-In

Invite group members to sit comfortably, giving them an opportunity to visit with each

other, establish friendships and build community. Relationships are an important dimension of Christian formation, so a few minutes of visiting will enrich their spiritual development. This is also the perfect time to “check in” with your group members by asking them to share how they are feeling at the time or what kind of a week they had.



PRAYER

Materials:

- small table with cloth to cover it
- taper candle or one pillar candle
- matches
- cross

After all the group members have a few minutes of fellowship time, gather them together for a simple opening prayer.

Ask one of the members to light the candle(s) while saying these words from Psalm 119:105:

- Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

Explain that you are inviting the light of God to be with all of you. (You might consider posting that reading in the meeting room.)

Invite the member who lit the candle to read this prayer, an adaptation of the prayer prayed on the day that we celebrate the ministries of these women (from *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*):

- God, whose Spirit makes us free: Be with us as you were with Elizabeth, Amelia, Sojourner and Harriet. Help us to help all your people be safe and free from danger. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. *Amen.*

Or use any prayer from the *Book of Common Prayer* or from any book of prayers, or make one up yourself.

Carefully extinguish the candle.



TELLING THE STORY

Set the scene:

- Most adolescents will have heard of the Underground Railroad. Bring in a map of the eastern United States to show where the four women in the story lived and the route of the Underground Railroad.

Stories about today’s saints are printed on pages 6-8 for you to use during storytelling. If you know additional interesting stories about your saint-for-the-day, share them with the group.

There are a number of books on the Underground Railroad and on the story of the Drinking Gourd.

Encourage participants to read more about these four amazing women and the Underground Railroad.

Let the youth hear the story without analyzing it for them or discussing it. For now, simply let the story sink into their minds and hearts.

ACTIVITIES: ARTS, CRAFTS, GAMES, DRAMA, ETC.



Select one or more activities to supplement and enhance today’s story. For each lesson, there are five suggested activities, one from each of the REACT categories. For a detailed explanation of REACT, see page 10 of the Introduction. All activities are meant to reinforce the concepts that were central to the day’s lesson.

Additional activity ideas can be found on pages 2-6 in the Appendix (also downloadable) where we’ve provided suggestions and directions for a variety of general activities (craft recipes, music, drama) that can be adapted to any lesson. Also included are outreach and service projects that can be done at any time.

Note: The activities for lessons 36-48 have been slightly modified to include an optional, ongoing project for your group, a project we call the *Saints and Easter-People Project*.

- On a weekly basis, group members will listen to the stories of the saints and will glean important and interesting facts about them. By doing some additional research on the person—either at home or during meeting time—participants will locate such things as pictures, quotes, dates of birth, accomplishments and even representative symbols of each person studied. By the end of the project, they will have compiled a book to be published in hard copy or online that will serve as a reference for the entire congregation, a teaching tool for all ages, and a fascinating addition to the church’s personal library.
- If your group decides to take on the project, we’ve provided a template for your use, *included in your download of WGP for Youth, Year 2*.
- The template is in PowerPoint, thus making it easier to manipulate and later print out or share online, either by e-mail or on your church’s website.

ACTIVITIES FOR THIS WEEK’S SESSION



WEAVING THE FAMILY OF GOD

Lesson Box

Materials:

- 1 3" x 5" index card for the day's *scribe*

- pen or pencil
- a file box in which to store the cards

Ask for a volunteer or assign a student to act as class *scribe*. Then, ask the group to articulate the most important lesson gleaned from the day's reading. As a prompt, you might ask:

- What makes people continue with arduous, dangerous tasks even when it means putting their own lives at risk?
- How crucial were God, faith and prayer to these women?

Once the group has agreed on its wording, ask the *scribe* to write the lesson on the card, date it and file it in the box. By the end of the year, you will have a wonderful and thorough summation of the lessons covered—in the participants' own words.



CLOSING PRAYER

Before the group leaves, say a closing prayer to send them into the church worship service

or back to their homes with God's love and blessing.

The prayer can be very simple, such as this one:

- Dear God, If not for the courage of four simple women, many would have died as slaves, never having the chance to taste the sweetness of freedom. If not for the dreams of four simple women, many would have lived their lives in quiet desperation, never daring to believe that they were worthy of more. We thank you, God, for Elizabeth, Amelia, Sojourner and Harriet, four simple women, four incredible women. Their love and faith in you carried them through their

hardships and made our world a better place for us all. Bless them, and keep us in your love. *Amen.*

End with a dismissal used in church, such as:

- Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

The group responds:

- Thanks be to God!



SUGGESTED HYMNS

- "Lift Every Voice and Sing," #1, *Lift Every Voice and Sing II* (NY: Church Publishing, 1993)
- "Oh, Freedom!" #225, *Lift Every Voice and Sing II* (NY: Church Publishing, 1993)
- "We Shall Overcome," #227, *Lift Every Voice and Sing II* (NY: Church Publishing, 1993)
- "There is a Longing in Our Hearts," #147 *Voices Found* (NY: Church Publishing, 2003)



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THE STORIES OF FOUR WOMEN WHO STRUGGLED FOR FREEDOM

Today we will hear a stories of four women who were important in the Church. Sometimes we call such people *saints*. We might also call them *Easter People*. In our church, a saint is somebody who loves God and who tried to do what God asked. Some of these people are famous, and you may already know their names—St. Patrick, St. Nicholas, for example. But many saints are not famous at all. They didn't do anything amazing that the whole world knows about; they simply did God's work. There may be saints like that whom you know—people like your grandmother who cared for her children when they were sick, your uncle who quietly gave his life savings to his church, or the stranger on the street who smiles and listens to homeless people and gives them hope and friendship. Saints are regular people like us who do God's work. For the next few weeks in church school we will be hearing about some of the saints our Church wants us to know about.

Note: You may summarize the stories to tell about all four women in one lesson, choose just one woman's story to tell, tell each one over four successive weeks or some other combination that works for your setting.

Let me tell you about four amazing women who lived around a hundred years ago in the United States. They were all born in the early 1800's and died in the late 1800's early 1900's. Their names are Elizabeth, Amelia, Sojourner and Harriet. When they were born, African-Americans were still slaves in the South, and women were not allowed to vote. Men did not think women could do much, and whites did not think that blacks were worth much. These four women fought to uphold and affirm the dignity of every human being, even when their country did not. But today our church

recognizes their leadership and calls them liberators and prophets.

The Story of Elizabeth Stanton

Elizabeth Stanton and Amelia Bloomer were friends. Elizabeth spent her whole life trying to help women. She did this by talking to people about how unfairly women were treated. She preached hundreds of sermons and made hundreds of speeches all across the country. What a speaker she was!

It rankled Elizabeth that women were not allowed to vote, or own any land by themselves, or take certain jobs, just because they were women. They were not allowed to be priests in the church. And when they did work in a job, they got paid a lot less than men did. All of this unfairness made Elizabeth angry, and she scolded the church as well as the government for letting this situation happen. To her, people read the Bible in ways that were not right, in ways that made it look like women should not be treated equally to men.

Elizabeth also met with other women to form groups that would study the Bible and to form the groups that would fight for women's rights. She was far ahead of her time, in her struggle to help women. Eventually many of the reforms that she wanted for women did happen, but not until after she died.

The Story of Amelia Bloomer

Amelia Bloomer, Elizabeth's friend, also worked to help women. Her big project was making more comfortable clothes for women. She hated the tight corsets that women had to wear, which gave lots of women bad health problems. One day, she printed a picture of herself in her newspaper called *The Lily*. This



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THE STORIES OF FOUR WOMEN WHO STRUGGLED FOR FREEDOM (CONT.)

was a picture of her wearing a pair of loose-fitting Turkish Trousers. She also began wearing these pants in public. This was at a time when women only wore long dresses. Soon, other women began to wear them, and the puffy billowy pants that we call “bloomers” (named after Amelia) were born. People were outraged and thought she was indecent! From the pulpit, many priests attacked the women who wore these clothes. She got to be very popular because she was so willing to argue with the clergy.

But she was also kind to them, and to everybody else. She became known for her hospitality to traveling clergy and reformers. (We can guess that these were the ones brave enough to talk with her!) She was also known for her kindness of heart and her love of truth and right. When she got older, she worked to establish churches, libraries and schoolhouses.

The Story of Sojourner Truth

Now let us meet Sojourner Truth. “Sojourner Truth” was not her real name. She was born Isabella, a slave, and she was known as “Belle.”

With the help of some Quaker friends, Belle escaped from slavery. She ended up in a very poor part of New York City and saw how much people needed food, homes and warm clothing, so she set up a homeless shelter for women and worked there for a long time.

When she was 46, she heard God say to her, “Go east.” She went to Long Island and to Connecticut, finally ending up at a Quaker farm looking for work. “What is your name?” they asked her. She said,

“My name is Sojourner.” (A sojourner is a person on a journey.) Then they asked, “What is your last name?” She had always used her slave master’s last name, but she now thought, “The only master I have now is God, and His name is Truth.” So that is what she gave as her last name: *Truth*.

Now called *Sojourner Truth*, she became a traveling preacher. She would go to religious revivals for white people and boldly ask if she could speak. Right away, people could tell that she was wise, witty and six feet tall. Not many people said “no” to her. When she spoke, she told a lot of stories from the Bible, and not many people knew that she could not read or write a single word. She just knew much of the Bible by heart. Then she would end her sermons by singing a hymn that she made up and talking about the evils of slavery. Her most famous speech, which you may hear someday, is called “Ain’t I a Woman,” for she struggled not only for the freedom of African-American slaves but also for the liberation of women. She has been called “Miriam of the Later Exodus,” remembering Moses’ sister Miriam when the Hebrew slaves were freed from Egypt.

The Story of Harriet Ross Tubman

Harriet Ross Tubman was also born a slave. We know that she suffered beatings and a severe injury as a child, but she grew up to be strong and defiant. She refused to look “happy and smiling” to her slave owners. She loved to listen to Bible stories, especially the story of Moses and the Exodus.

When she was 24, she escaped to Canada. But she had to leave her own family and the other slaves behind. She could never forget them. Working



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with Quakers, she made more than 19 trips back and forth from Maryland to Canada with escaping slaves, between 1851 and 1861. She led more than three hundred people to Canada and to freedom, as part of the “Underground Railroad.” She was so good at this that \$40,000 was offered for anyone who could capture her. That was a huge amount of money in those days! Mostly for this brave work, she is known as “Moses of her People.”

Her work to free the slaves was very dangerous, but Harriet said that God guided her struggle against slavery. God had given her omens, dreams and warnings whenever danger was near, to protect her. She also saw the coming of the Civil War in a vision.

But before the war began, she went to New York and opened her home to African-American orphans and to helpless elderly people who had nowhere else to go. She also set up some schools for African-American children, even though she could not read or write herself.

When the war did come, Harriet joined the Northern Union Army as a cook and nurse. She cared for both Confederate and Union soldiers, helping anyone who was hurt, no matter what side they were on. She was also a spy and secret scout for the army. One day, she led 300 black troops on a raid to free 700 slaves. This action made her the first American woman to lead troops into military action.

Harriet Ross Tubman was the most well-known “conductor” of the Underground Railroad. This was a secret network of people and places that hid escaped slaves on their dangerous journey to freedom—north usually to Canada. Another “conductor” was a one-legged sailor named Peg Leg Joe. Joe hired himself out as a worker on plantations. While he was there, he made friends with the slaves and taught them what sounded like a simple folk song, “Follow the Drinking Gourd.” But hidden in the lyrics of this song were the directions for following the Underground Railroad. The Drinking Gourd is the Big Dipper, which points to the North Star. If the escaped slaves followed the stars north, and then followed the rest of the directions in the song, they would eventually come to the Ohio River, where Peg Leg Joe would be waiting to ferry them across to the free states on the other side. From there, sympathetic people would guide them from one hiding place to another, until they finally arrived in Canada or in other safe places in the North.

On page 13 are the lyrics to the song “Follow the Drinking Gourd.” The phrase “When the sun comes back, and the first quail calls” refers to the coming of spring, when it is safest to travel. “The dead trees” would have the signs that Peg Leg Joe marked, to show the fugitives that they are headed in the right direction.



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TWO WOMEN: TWO FEATURES

“A WOMAN CALLED MOSES” TELEVISION MINI-SERIES ABOUT HARRIET TUBMAN

Group members watch the 1978 mini-series about Harriet Tubman and learn about her life, her struggles and her accomplishments.

Note: This mini-series is about four hours long and is best watched in two to four sessions.

Materials:

DVD of “A Woman Called Moses” (Burbank, CA: Jaffe Productions/NBC Studios, 1978) available for purchase at Amazon.com

TV and DVD player or computer with Internet access and monitor

optional: refreshments and drinks

paper cups and napkins

Preparation:

The mini-series can be easily purchased or downloaded for a small fee at a number of websites. Simply type “A Woman Called Moses” into your browser. The site mentioned above is one of the most reliable and trustworthy sites for downloading films.

“AIN'T I A WOMAN?” SOJOURNER TRUTH'S FAMOUS SPEECH

Group members listen to a reenactment of a speech Sojourner Truth gave in 1851. The speech is performed by well-known American poet, Alice Walker.

Materials:

computer with Internet connection

Directions:

Click on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EsjdLL3MrKk> to watch Alice Walker.

Note: Make certain you have permission to view films in a church setting. To show films in a church setting, you must have a Church Video License. Visit <http://www.cvli.com>.



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WHAT IS YOUR VISION?

All four of the women in today's stories had distinct visions about what they hoped the future would hold for people who were suffering from oppression of some kind: slaves, women, the poor, the underfed and underpaid, etc. And each of these women dedicated her life to doing what she could to advance her vision.

Group members reflect on those societal problems they see as most pressing and what their visions are for their futures. In addition, each will name a single, achievable action that he/she could take to make a difference with an issue.

Materials:

- 2 sheets poster board
- masking tape or poster putty
- large markers

Preparation:

On one sheet of poster board, draw a circle in the middle with spokes radiating out from it (like a bicycle wheel)—one line for every member of the group. Within the circle, write *What's Your Vision?*

On the second sheet of poster board, draw the same schematic. In this circle write, *What Can I Do?*

Directions:

1. First, remind group members that, even though the four women of today's lesson took on seemingly insurmountable tasks, each one of them chipped away at the task little by little. By combining their efforts with the efforts of others, true and lasting gains were made.
2. Ask group members to name problems and issues in society they'd like to see remedied. The issues can be "small" or local in nature, or they could be far-reaching and global. List each response on a different line, with the name of the group member.
3. Then, ask each group member to name something that each one could and would do to help with each situation. Remember, one small act can have a ripple effect and can, ultimately, make a difference. Some examples are found below.

Close:

- Follow up with the youth to see how many of them have taken up their missions and accomplished their task.

Examples:

PROBLEM	SOMETHING I CAN DO
We have a divided Congress.	Write to my senator and representative.
Kids in school are being bullied.	Start a group with teachers to address the issue.
The speed limit in the state is too high.	Start a petition and send it to the capitol.
Teens in our town/city need a teen center.	Arrange to talk with the town government about the possibility of establishing one.



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FOLLOW THE DRINKING GOURD: THE SONG AND ITS HISTORY

Group members listen to a brief history of the Underground Railroad and will learn about the history and meaning of the coded song, “Follow the Drinking Gourd.”

Materials:

computer with Internet access

copies of the song lyrics for *Follow the Drinking Gourd* (p. 13), 1 per participant

Preparation:

Make enough copies of the lyrics for every members of the group.

Directions:

1. Distribute copies of the lyrics for “Follow the Drinking Gourd.”
2. Click on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBOP8t2h1FQ> to see and hear the history of the Underground Railroad.
3. Invite group members to discuss what they learned about the song and the Underground Railroad.

FOLLOW THE DRINKING GOURD

(Refrain:)

Follow the drinking gourd!

Follow the drinking gourd.

For the old man is a-waiting for to carry you to freedom

If you follow the drinking gourd.

When the sun comes back, and the first quail calls,

Follow the drinking gourd.

For the old man is a-waiting for to carry you to freedom

If you follow the drinking gourd.

(Refrain:)

The riverbank makes a very good road,

The dead trees will show you the way.

Left foot, peg foot, traveling on,

Follow the drinking gourd.

(Refrain:)

The river ends between two hills,

Follow the drinking gourd.

There's another river on the other side,

Follow the drinking gourd.

(Refrain:)

When the great big river meets the little river,

Follow the drinking gourd.

For the old man is a-waiting for to carry you to freedom,

If you follow the drinking gourd.