**Proverbs 31:10-31**

**Ode to a Capable Wife** (NRSV)

10A capable wife who can find?  
    She is far more precious than jewels.  
**11The heart of her husband trusts in her,  
    and he will have no lack of gain.**12She does him good, and not harm,  
    all the days of her life.  
**13She seeks wool and flax,  
    and works with willing hands.**14She is like the ships of the merchant,  
    she brings her food from far away.  
**15She rises while it is still night  
    and provides food for her household  
    and tasks for her servant-girls.**16She considers a field and buys it;  
    with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.  
**17She girds herself with strength,  
    and makes her arms strong.**18She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.  
    Her lamp does not go out at night.  
**19She puts her hands to the distaff,  
    and her hands hold the spindle.**20She opens her hand to the poor,  
    and reaches out her hands to the needy.  
**21She is not afraid for her household when it snows,  
    for all her household are clothed in crimson.**22She makes herself coverings;  
    her clothing is fine linen and purple.  
**23Her husband is known in the city gates,  
    taking his seat among the elders of the land.**24She makes linen garments and sells them;  
    she supplies the merchant with sashes.  
**25Strength and dignity are her clothing,  
    and she laughs at the time to come.**26She opens her mouth with wisdom,  
    and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.  
**27She looks well to the ways of her household,  
    and does not eat the bread of idleness.**28Her children rise up and call her happy;  
    her husband too, and he praises her:  
**29“Many women have done excellently,  
    but you surpass them all.”**30Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,  
    but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.  
**31Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,  
    and let her works praise her in the city gates.**

**Meditation**

1. These words from Proverbs are known as the Hymn to the Good Wife or the [Capable] or Perfect Wife.

To some she is the example of the mold that women are to fit into to live life as just the right kind of lady. Maybe so – heaven knows I have met some very fine Christian women in my life who fit this description very well.

1. But I have known just as many fine Christian women – wives, mothers, single women, widows – who don’t fit into this mold very well at all. I mean, verse 13 says “She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.” Or how about a little later where it reads, “She is like the ships of the merchant, she brings her food from far away.” These are certainly virtues – all of them – but Proverbs 31 doesn’t even begin to tell the whole story of who a fine Christian woman can be and is.
2. First off, she doesn’t have to be a wife. Some women never marry and many lose husbands through the pain of divorce or death. No matter how much we love the roles that God gives us as wife or mother, those roles weren’t who we first were. It reminds me of what one of my Clinical Pastoral Education teachers at the hospital where I served as Chaplain in Saint Paul during seminary said to me once. We were talking about how I introduce myself. He apparently had overheard me say , “HI, I am Chaplain Ruth” and he said, “Is Chaplain your name?” And I said, “no.” And he said, “tell people your name first and then tell them what you do.” So from then on I learned to say, “Hi, I am Ruth and I am the Chaplain here…” It was a small difference but I kind of liked it. I was Ruth first and then I was a chaplain. Yeah.

You are that beautiful person God made you to be first – and then you are all the other things you are – wife, mother, nurse, teacher, volunteer, office manager.

1. Do you notice how Proverbs 31 lifts up the virtue of womanhood through what the wife does for everyone else around her and heaven knows we do that. Give of our time. We give of our energy. We give of everything we have for the people we love and we get a real joy out of that. Truthfully, for many of us that is part of how we live out our lives as Christian people. But may we never forget that sometimes we need to be a little more like Mary and not Martha. Rather than being so busy serving others we need to take time at Jesus’ feet and just be fed by his word.

1. I am so thankful we live in a time where women are honored and respected for having qualities that are found in Proverbs 31 and for the other qualities God might give us, too. In our midst we have women of so many gifts and talents – women who are smart and good with numbers and who are well read. Hats off to you! Women who dress sharp and know how to tell a good joke and change a tire. Hats off to you! Right here, women who can care for livestock and mow the lawn, make a pie, balance the books, give the kids a bath, sew a bunch of quilts, check your blood pressure, roll out the lefse and play “Ode to Joy” on the piano. Hats off to you! Amazing women who can remember recipes and psalms by heart, are always sure to send the birthday cards or a note of encouragement, women who scrapbook up a storm, crochet one mean prayer shawl, can teach a roomful of junior high kids how to do algebra, and finally help make this place the unique, purposeful, blessed worship community that it is – Hats off to you.
2. The writer of Proverbs, who is sometimes thought to be Solomon, but was probably a number of other writers who wrote the wisdom literature of the Bible, wrote a beautiful hymn to a Capable Wife when he wrote Proverbs 31, but it was not complete. Time and God show us still how the hymn is still being written. Keep on writing it with your lives, my sisters, by using all the talents and gifts God has given you to serve Him [God] well and proclaim his [God’s] grace all your days.

Let us pray – and as we pray this I want you to hold your hands on your lap and focus them:

Blessed be the works of your hands, O Holy One.

**Blessed be these hands that have touched life.**

Blessed be these hands that have nurtured creativity.

**Blessed be these hands that have held pain.**

Blessed be these hands that have embraced with passion.

**Blessed be these hands that have tended gardens.**

Blessed be these hands that have closed in anger.

**Blessed be these hands that have planted new seeds.**

Blessed be these hands that have harvested ripe fields.

**Blessed be these hands that have cleaned, washed, mopped, scrubbed.**

Blessed be these hands that have become knotted with age.

**Blessed be these hands that are wrinkled and scarred from the demands of life.**

Blessed be these hands that have reached out and been received.

**Blessed be these hands that hold the promise of the future.**

Blessed be the works of your hands, O Holy One.

**Amen.**