

100th Anniversary of Amendment Giving Women the Right to Vote

The Wired Word for the Week of August 23, 2020

In the News

A century ago, on August 26, 1920, the U.S. Secretary of State proclaimed that the 19th Amendment to the Constitution had been ratified. The words "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged ... on account of sex" were added to the U.S. Constitution. Though some hurdles, including racism, still remained -- and still do -- in places, legally the passage of this amendment ended a long struggle for women's suffrage in the United States, a movement that sought to give women the ability to vote and run for office.

Today, Sen. Kamala Harris is running for Vice President on the Democratic ticket, after similar attempts by Gov. Sarah Palin (R) and Rep. Geraldine Ferraro (D). This week, President Trump announced a posthumous pardon to celebrate suffragette Susan B. Anthony -- convicted of voting in 1872 -- to mark this anniversary.

In the mid-1800s, women in several countries, including the U.S. and Britain, formed organizations to fight for suffrage. Among the leaders were Millicent Fawcett in Britain and Carrie Chapman in the United States. Women were granted unrestricted voting rights by Wyoming Territory in 1869, followed by Utah Territory in 1870. The first countries to grant national-level voting rights to women were New Zealand (1893) and Australia (1902). Other countries followed soon after, with limited voting rights granted to women in Sweden, Britain, Finland and some U.S. states.

At the start of World War I, many suffrage organizations shifted their focus to supporting the war effort. But when men went to fight in the war, women took on many roles that had been traditionally held by men, and this caused a shift in thinking about the capabilities of women. Such changes gave additional momentum to the suffrage movement. In November 1918, the British Parliament passed the Eligibility of Women Act, allowing women to be elected to Parliament.

In the United States, the suffrage movement began at the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, the first women's rights convention in the world. Organized by abolitionists Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the convention demanded the recognition of women as equal members of society. Stanton wrote a document that included 11 resolutions, with the ninth calling for women's suffrage, which Mott feared would be contentious. Stanton remained adamant, however, and said, "To have drunkards, idiots, horse racing rum-selling rowdies, ignorant foreigners, and silly boys fully recognized, while we ourselves are thrust out from all the rights that belong to citizens, is too grossly insulting to be longer quietly submitted to. The right is ours. We must have it." Finally, all 11 resolutions were passed, with help from the vocal support of

Frederick Douglass, the ex-slave and abolitionist editor of the *North Star*. "Right is of no sex," he argued; woman is "justly entitled to all we claim for man."

After the abolition of slavery, several women's suffrage associations emerged, and in the 1880s they merged into one group. Stanton became president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), with Susan B. Anthony serving as vice president. NAWSA became a national parent organization to hundreds of local groups that campaigned for the right to vote. In the early 20th century, NAWSA began to recruit celebrities to support the cause, along with organizing parades and rallies. Their members wore white uniforms and carried banners calling for women's suffrage.

In 1914, a more radical organization was formed: The Congressional Union, later renamed the National Woman's Party (NWP). At the beginning of World War I, the NWP criticized the government for supporting democracy abroad while denying women the right to vote at home. Members of this group picketed and held demonstrations in front of the White House. In June 1917, NWP members were arrested on the charge of obstructing traffic, but they were not deterred. They continued their efforts in the face of arrests, jail time, hunger strikes and force-feedings.

In November 1917, 33 suffragettes from the NWP were arrested for picketing outside the White House. Taken to the Occoquan Workhouse in Virginia, they were clubbed, beaten and tortured by guards in what came to be known as the "Night of Terror." Male guards restrained the party's co-founder, Lucy Burns, tying her hands to the bars above her cell and forcing her to stand all night. Dorothy Day, who went on to establish the Catholic Worker houses, was slammed over the back of an iron bench. Dora Lewis was thrown into a dark cell and was knocked out when her head hit an iron bed. Her cellmate, Alice Cosu, suffered a heart attack and received no medical care until the next day. As terrifying as the night was, it led to greater public support for the suffrage movement.

At the same time, NAWSA continued its work under the leadership of Carrie Chapman Catt, president from 1915 to 1920. Chapman Catt distanced herself and NAWSA from the NWP, calling their behavior unladylike. In 1916, she set up a publicity bureau in Washington, D.C., to exert face-to-face pressure on members of Congress. Finally, 72 years after the Seneca Falls Convention, the 19th Amendment was ratified and women were given the right to vote.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Women's Suffrage Movement -- Facts and Information on Women's Rights. *HistoryNet*](#)
[Seneca Falls Convention. *HistoryNet*](#)

['Night of Terror': The Suffragists Who Were Beaten and Tortured for Seeking the Vote. *The Washington Post*](#)

[For Black Women, the 19th Amendment Didn't End Their Fight to Vote. *National Geographic*](#)

Applying the News Story

Reflect on the struggles and successes of the women's suffrage movement as you think about the rights and roles of women in the church, the community, the nation and the world.

The Big Questions

1. Why do you think it took the suffrage movement 72 years to gain the right for women to vote? What resistance have women faced in the past? What about today?
2. "Right is of no sex," argued ex-slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass; woman is "justly entitled to all we claim for man." Discuss.
3. The "Night of Terror" in 1917 led to greater public support for the suffrage movement. When have you seen great evil turned into good? How does this connect to the cross of Christ?
4. What roles and rights do women have in your church community? In Luke 10:39, Mary takes a place as a disciple at the feet of Jesus without asking for permission (just as women claimed the right to vote), and in John 11:27, Martha is one of the first to call Jesus "Messiah." Where do you see changing roles for women in the church, if anywhere?
5. Where do women still face inequality in the United States? Around the world? What can be done? Where have women been privileged over men in the United States?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Numbers 27:6-7

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: The daughters of Zelophehad are right in what they are saying; you shall indeed let them possess an inheritance among their father's brothers and pass the inheritance of their father on to them. (For context, read 27:1-11.)

Zelophehad was an Israelite man who died in the wilderness, leaving no sons. His daughters were five young women who advocated for themselves to have the right to inherit property from their father. Moses brought the case before the Lord, and God ruled in their favor.

Questions: In what ways have sons been favored historically, and how are they sometimes favored today? What is the value of giving daughters equal standing in the home, church and community? Where, if anywhere, do you find biblical support for equality between men and women?

Judges 4:4-5

At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment. (For context, read 4:1-10.)

In response to the cries of the Israelites, God sent judges to lead the people. One was Deborah, described as "a mother in Israel" (Judges 5:7) -- a strong, courageous and independent woman.

Deborah was both a prophet and a judge, and an early indication that God calls both women and men to leadership. Prophets were both truth-tellers and fortune-tellers in the Bible: They could see the truth about problems in society and predict the consequences of those conditions.

Although Deborah was a powerful judge and a prophet, she did not attempt to fight her battles alone. She summoned a military man named Barak and delivered God's command, "Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand" (4:6-7).

Questions: What guidance can you gain from the leadership of Deborah the prophet and judge? Why do you think she partnered with the military man Barak, and what does this teach you about shared leadership?

Matthew 15:28

Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly. (For context, read 15:21-28.)

Jesus went to the district of Tyre and Sidon and encountered a Canaanite woman who asked for his help. Although he ignored her at first, and then told her that he was "sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (v. 24), she persisted. When he said, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs," she answered, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table" (vv. 26-27). Her strong advocacy for herself and her daughter caused Jesus to praise her faith, heal her daughter and perhaps even change the course of his ministry. At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus told his followers to "make disciples of all nations" (28:19), not just the lost sheep of Israel.

Questions: For what people in need are you willing to advocate today? How persistent are you in pursuit of justice and healing? What does the Canaanite woman challenge you to do in the world today?

Luke 8:1-3

Soon afterwards [Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources. (No context needed.)

Luke tells us that Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and other women provided for Jesus and the disciples "out of their resources." They were fully invested in the mission and ministry of Jesus, and it appears they were among the people Jesus depended on for support. Joanna is particularly interesting because she is described as "the wife of Herod's steward Chuza." Through her support of Jesus, she was part of a movement for change.

Questions: Why do you think Joanna, connected to Herod through her husband, was supporting Jesus? Was she supporting him as a secret act of rebellion or resistance to the regime in power,

or with the full awareness of her husband? Or did she provide cover for her husband, who maybe would have lost his job if he had publicly supported Jesus himself? Discuss.

For Further Discussion

1. In Romans 16:1, Paul commends Phoebe to the Roman church as his emissary, carrying his epistle to the Romans. In addition to being called a deacon (or minister), she is a benefactor of the church and of Paul. What does this say to you about the leadership of women in the first-century church? How should it shape our views of leadership today?

2. TWW team member Henry Brinton has written a novel titled *City of Peace* (Koehler Books, 2019), set in Occoquan, Virginia. The forthcoming sequel, *Windows of the Heavens*, contains the following scene:

"The prison is where suffragettes were imprisoned," said John Jonas, "after they protested for the right to vote."

"Right here?" asked pastor Harley Camden. "Didn't know that."

"Some were even beaten."

"Really?"

"Yes. When they were first taken to the workhouse, they were clubbed. One was thrown into a dark cell and she hit her head, which knocked her out. Her cellmate thought she was dead."

"Unbelievable," said Harley, shaking his head.

"They called it the 'Night of Terror,'" said John, "and it galvanized support for the cause."

"That makes sense," Harley said, thinking of Civil Rights workers being beaten and thrown in jail in the 1960s. "Sometimes a great injustice can advance the cause of justice."

"But the suffering continued," said John. "Rats ran in and out their cells. The women had no privacy. It was like they were being kept in a zoo, with U.S. Marines standing guard."

"All because they wanted the right to vote."

"Which they got," John said, "three years after the Night of Terror. It's amazing how people are imprisoned in one generation for something that seems so noble in another."

When have you seen a person imprisoned for a noble cause? What movements are we suppressing today that might look very different in the future?

3. Women and men have an equal right to vote, but what gender roles should be distinct in church and society today, if any? On what basis do you take this stand?

4. For what cause would you be willing to join a movement and protest today, if any? How is your position grounded in your Christian faith?

5. How does the Bible help or hinder the view of women as equal children of God, in your opinion? Where do you find evidence that the Bible empowers or disempowers women? What does Jesus show or tell you about the role of women in his earthly life? In the kingdom on earth? In the kingdom to come?

Responding to the News

Allow the courage and persistence of the suffragettes to inspire you to take a stand for a cause you believe in, and to take action in your church or community to make a needed change.

Prayer

God of justice, we thank you for the brave women and men who have worked hard to change the world as it is into the world as it should be. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.