

“Providers”

1. Years ago, my sister Delia was a part of the singing group “Up With People”
 - a. You may remember that group, which was based in the US but performed worldwide
 - i. Up with People started in the 1960s. It had an optimistic, kind of hippie vibe
 - ii. They describe themselves as an organization “to harness the energy of youth, to amplify their voices, and to build bridges of understanding.”
<https://upwithpeople.org/who-we-are/about-us/> <https://www.nextavenue.org/up-with-people-more-than-a-show/>
 - iii. They did this by gathering 20-somethings from around the world to form traveling performance groups.
 - iv. Of their most visible performances, they were featured at Super Bowl Half Time shows in the 70s and 80s, and at the Indy 500
 - v. My sister was in one of the groups in the 1980s, and traveled to sing and dance in the US and Europe. She was in it for one or two years, and it was a transformative experience for her.
 - vi. Years earlier, I remember mom and dad hosting female singers from Up With People who had come to perform in Monterrey, my home town.
 - vii. I remember going to hear them sing
 - viii. By the time my sister decided to join them, she had been thinking about it for a long time, I am sure having had conversations with the young singers we had hosted and met.
 - ix. The steps she took to prepare for her time with Up With People seemed a bit severe, to my young mind.
 - x. Delia of course had to quit her job, but she also sold her car.
 - xi. It wasn’t just that she was going away for a while: she was preparing herself to enter a whole new world for some time.
 - xii. During her time in Up With People, my whole family drove over 13 hours to see her perform in Baton Rouge, LA, the closest venue to us in her US tour.
 - xiii. She danced and sang with a group of 20 or 30 young people. It was great fun and we could tell she was having the time of her life.
 - b. Once her time with Up With People was done and she returned home, she shared many of her experiences, and I remember she was part of the Advance Team
 - i. As you can imagine, there are a lot of logistics involved in going from city to city
 - ii. Not only are there issues with where they would perform, but there also was the question of local transportation, lodging with host families, etc.
 - iii. Somehow she got herself a role in this important team
 - iv. It was grown up stuff as a 20-something, leaving your group behind right after a performance, going to the next city and making sure all the details were taken care of, to ensure a good next stay and performance.

- v. And then after the new performance, traveling ahead right away to the next town and prep for the group all over again.
- 2. Today's brief Gospel lesson got me thinking about logistics because the passage gives us a rare look at the traveling group Jesus led
 - a. We know from the information in the gospels that Jesus was a wandering preacher and healer, who traveled lightly and moved regularly among towns in Palestine, connecting both with Jewish people and non-Jewish people in neighboring areas
 - b. We know that he picked up followers along the way
 - i. He'd ask people directly to follow him (like Peter, James and John who had been fishing and then dropped everything to follow him)
 - ii. He'd teach increasingly massive crowds, and people were so enthralled with him, they'd stay out in even deserted places for as long as they could to listen to him
 - iii. There were people who would follow him from town to town, seeking healing for their loved ones, or wanting to keep learning from what he was sharing
 - iv. And then there were people (as the ones mentioned in today's passage) who had experienced healing themselves, which led to a life-changing moment which made them drop everything and travel along with Jesus
 - c. If you've ever wondered about the logistics of Jesus' group, this answers as many questions as it raises
 - i. As I said, he was always traveling, maybe with a home base in Galilee, like the center of a wheel from which he'd radiate out
 - ii. I wonder if Jesus may have been a bit of a nightmare to work for, though, considering that his travel itinerary seems so random and spontaneous.
 - 1. Can you imagine being his advance team? We do know of some instances where Jesus sends a couple of disciples to prepare the way for them (like when they went out to prepare for Passover during what we call Holy Week)
 - 2. But I'm likely overthinking all this, since I'm referencing it from a 21st Century perspective of planning
 - 3. For one, hospitality was a cultural value, and people out did one another hosting others, especially someone important like Jesus
 - 4. And I imagine that once people who followed him wrapped their heads around the fact that he was a traveling preacher/healer, that they'd be open to go with the flow
 - d. What is key to note is the important role of women in the leadership of this group
 - i. We always talk about "the disciples," and we picture twelve men (they're named individually in places in the Gospels) and we interchangeably call them "disciples" or "apostles" (and apostle is someone "sent out" to perform a task)
 - ii. Yes, this passage acknowledges "the twelve" but then goes on to say there were many others who came along – and proceeds to mention ALL WOMEN.
 - iii. We need to pause there for a moment

1. It was out of the ordinary for anyone to leave their community and join a traveling preacher.
 2. That wasn't normal and likely was looked down upon.
 3. Think of the implied judgement if your child said "I'm leaving home to join the circus!" Well, multiply it times 100
 4. And it was even more unusual, clearly frowned upon, for women to leave the protective context of community to then join a traveling troop of followers (even if they were following a rabbi!)
 5. And yet here they are, this daring group of women who literally risked everything to choose a "new family," to attach themselves to this wandering family
 6. The author names three and says many others were also part of the group.
- iv. These women (and likely the men as well) had a direct connection to Jesus, being personally impacted by his healing power and his wise teachings and radically inclusive hospitality
 - v. And in addition, these women were there to offer them everyday support
 1. Remember: they were the same courageous women who stood by the crucified Jesus while all the men had fled,
 2. and the same inspiring women who first witnessed and proclaimed the news of Jesus' resurrection
 - vi. And their role was significant in the overall picture of what Jesus was doing
 1. The passage says they "provided for them out of their resources."
 2. Another translation says they "ministered" to them (by the way, the Greek word used there is where we get Deacon from)
 3. And the women bankrolled the effort out of their own pocket.
 4. They offered their "resources," which is the Greek word that Jesus used when he told a young man to sell "everything he had" and follow Jesus. Well, seems like these women were doing just that.
<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1247/kjv/tr/0-1/>
<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5224/kjv/tr/0-1/>
3. These women were disciples, followers of Jesus, and they were also the providers, and I know you could easily come up with a list of the dozens of women in this church (and the larger community) who are providing for us all
 - a. This isn't a stewardship sermon – though I suppose it could be
 - b. In the church's 200-year history, we have been blessed by the tireless, creative and faithful leadership of women,
 - i. and today we also know that group includes non-binary and transgender individuals
 - ii. And I mention them as part of the grouping because they all experience to some degree the biases of a male-dominated culture
 - c. By centering their experience, much like the gospel writer was doing, we bring out to the open their contribution, perhaps overlooked or taken for granted
 - d. Our providers give of themselves, their resources, and their hearts in a generous and sacrificial way

- e. Our providers shine both in the limelight, and behind the scenes.
 - f. Our providers dream up new directions, detail plans and make things run
 - g. Our providers teach us, model for us, feed us, and ensure we will be financially secure
 - h. Our providers are our mothers and grandmothers, our spouses, sisters and aunts, our neighbors, teachers, committee chairs and volunteers, elders, deacons and pastors
 - i. Among our providers are Lisa, Sarah, Colleen, Jenny, Jen, Dianne, Brook, Missy, April, Barb, Hanna, Joy, Sunny, Jo, Sandy, Julie, Rachel, Pam, Anna, Sherry, Katie, Leah, Carol, Mary, Carola, Janet, Gwen, Linda, Jacquie, Amy, Tracy, Mary Ann, Jodi, Clare, Glinda, Stevi, Kik, Jerrica, Karlene, Marsha, Leigh Ann, Kathy, Monta, Jayne, Kathja, Amber, Lori, Karen, Marquita, Rebecca, Edith, Sharon, Breanne, Pat, Cindy, Lynne, Ann, Shelley, Vernet, Nataline, Pauline, Tess, Judy, Madonna, Denise, Heather, Emily, B, Carolyn, Alexa, Kelleigh, Izzie, Debbie, Damaris, Irene, Kimberly, Johanna, Joanna, Iohanna, Nancy, Marilyn, Jayme, Marietta, Kelly, Charlotte, Peggy, Bonnie, Norie, Sharon, Donna, Janet, Cara, Nancy, Stephanie, Gracen, Nelly, Margy, Clara, Kayla ... and I could keep going so please say those names I've not yet gotten to...
4. We are blessed by the people who give of themselves faithfully to family, church and community in the name of Jesus. We give God thanks for all these faithful women.