

The Power of Women's Service

**Delivered by Rev. Julia Jobbagy,
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Celebrating the 110th anniversary of the Unitarian Women's Association of Romania (UNOSZ),
the 20th anniversary of Nők Világa / World of Women magazine,
and the 10th anniversary of the International Women's Convocation (IWC)
Translated from Hungarian

On June 1, 1828, Teréz Brunszvik opened the first Hungarian kindergarten in the Habsburg Monarchy.

On June 25, 1863, Olympia Brown, a prominent feminist, was ordained as the first Unitarian female minister of the USA.

On October 24, 1901, Mária Derzsi gave birth to her first child, Ferenc. Ferenc Balázs.

On June 17, 1928, Amelia Earhart, the first female pilot, flew across the Atlantic ocean.

In 1930, Borbála Bedő, the first Unitarian minister in Transylvania, was admitted to the Unitarian Theological Academy.

In the summer of 1943, Unitarian high school girls from Kolozsvár went out to the villages of Szeklerland, where they helped with manual work the families of men fighting on the fronts of the Second World War or who had already fallen.

In June 1945, Rózika Gálffy, at the age of 14, sews her first dress and bakes her first bread. She did it for her own confirmation.

On June 16, 1963, Valentina Vladimirovna Tereshkova, the first female astronaut, travels into space.

Known, less known, or unknown individuals. Women. Heroes. It doesn't matter if they became heroes on a plane, at the university, in the pulpit, or at home. It doesn't matter if they became heroes as well-known experts, doctors, manual workers, inventors, mothers, or grandmothers. They all are heroes. I believe that they are the ones who, through their daily work, their deeds and their wills weave, knit, patch the invisible web that holds the world in its corners.

Women are the keepers of this secret knowledge. The knowledge over which women nod at each other wisely. Women who are the backbones of their families. Women who are at the forefront of fighting for rights. Women who build homes and educate the future generations. They all know something and they all know the same thing. We have no word for it. It's so special that it can hardly be true. But this

something exists. This is that special something that echoes the providence and infinite love of God in this earthly existence. It has a scent. Do you feel it? On your mother's lap.

The scent that comforted you and soothed your soul. It has a taste. You felt its absence every time you tried to cook a dish of your grandmother or your mother's. It always lacked something. That pinch of Something that has power. History testifies to it. The power of women can change systems. It has the ability to create. Our children can testify to it. The power of women beautifies; church embroideries stand in silent testimony. Works of art. Our folk costumes. Our traditions. And so much more through which we dream, work, laugh, and weep.

This is the way we are connected with God. This is the way we are co-workers of God, serving in the noblest sense of the word. This is what we all do. We serve in many ways. Fighting for rights, offering strengthening sermons, inventing, putting in untold hours of unpaid work, baking fresh bread, or nurturing children.

Serving is difficult. It is the truth. Somehow these two walk together. Serving is difficult because it requires total commitment, real passion. It's hard because we must often sail against the wind. As a woman, as a second-class citizen. Serving is hard because very often there is no appreciation, honorarium, or fame. It is difficult because it often involves sacrificing and compromising. But the power of this special secret lies exactly in these difficulties; it is the difficulties that strengthen us to rise up and start again.

The examples listed at the beginning of my speech are only some prominent events of women's life. Teréz Brunszvik lived in Hungary, Russia and Switzerland. She undertook the education of her sister's children. She founded 11 kindergartens and participated in the establishment of the first Hungarian women's education institute. She wrote, played the piano, drew and painted.

As a young girl, Olympia Brown had to face to be considered less intelligent because she was a woman. The chemistry teacher said that it's enough for girls to study only for to look intelligent in a conversation. She struggled to study theology and later to become a minister. But it was not enough. She had to fight for to be accepted as a minister by the church members. 67 years later, Borbála Bedő walk on a similar path at home in Transylvania.

Although she obtained a pastoral diploma, according to the decision, she could only be entrusted with teaching and mission work. She could also hold a pastoral position, but only until she got married. The fact of marriage entails the termination of the pastoral position. The official position was accompanied by the position of some male students of the Academy of Theology who expressed in an official document to the leaders in highest position that women should not receive any document regarding employment, should not wear a robe, and so on...

Amelia Mary Earhart was an American aviation pioneer, the first major female pilot. She had taken many journeys that would have been a test of strength for men as well, setting many records, but on the road that brought her fame she was only a passenger, she could not take the lead position because she was a woman. Tyereskova was indeed the first woman in space, orbiting our planet 48 times. However,

weightlessness was hard to bear physically and mentally, from which Soviet experts concluded that the female body was less suitable for spaceflight.

And we could go on writing this list, endlessly. With all the women who engaged in this never-ending, blessed service with their own work, their own strength. We could write this line further, with your story. With yours, who fought to have your work recognized. With yours who works at universities or other workplaces day by day. With yours, who serves as a minister, a teacher to those around you. With yours, who, as a grandmother, always cook the most delicious things for someone else and prays for others. With yours, who, as a mother, gets up to do the housekeeping when others are still sleeping. With yours, who is always there when you need help. Life stories, women's destinies. In constant service, day by day.

I was given the task to remind you that being a woman is good. And really good! Not despite of its difficulty, but with it. This will make always the female soul special and brilliant.

This is perhaps what opens up the secret I talked about at the beginning of my speech. So come and remember and be strengthened in the belief that you are needed, that you are important. And I know that your, our struggle now, in this strange reality is harder than ever, but it can be more useful and effective than ever because we are co-workers of God.

Source of life, please allow the tired lungs of the world to breathe deeply from this female power - and let it start to heal slowly.

Let it be so!