

Lesson 24: Support Women

“If you want something said, ask a man; if you want something done, ask a woman.” Margaret Thatcher (British, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, 1925-)

Sojourner Truth

When I got up North, I met many men abolitionists giving some great speeches about ending slavery, but there were some powerful women too. One of them was Sojourner Truth.

She was a big woman who'd been a slave in New York. Like me, she worked as hard as a man. She always felt we women were as worthy of rights as the men.

I heard about her speaking up one time when a man tried to say why women couldn't have rights. He was trying to say women were helpless and men had to help women into carriages and over mud puddles. Sojourner said, “Nobody every helped me into a carriage or over mud puddles. Ain't I a woman?”

She was right when she said, “We do as much, we eat as much, and we want as much as a man.” She told that man who said, “Women can't have rights 'cause Jesus wasn't a woman.” Sojourner looked that man in the eyes and said, “Mister, where your Jesus come from? I tell you where He came from- God and a woman. Man had nothing to do with Him. If that first woman God ever made could turn this world upside down all by herself, I know all these women here today can turn it right side up again. Now that they are asking to do it, you men better let them.” You know that brought the women to their feet.

I remember talking to Sojourner about what life would be for colored women after we were all free. What we found out was that after the War was over and we were all free, it was time to fight some more.

We had to fight for the right to vote, the right to be go where we wanted to go and sit where we wanted to sit.

I met Miss Susan B. Anthony at her home in Rochester, New York. She helped me with some of my passengers headed to Canada. Miss Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were some strong women, and they had a dream that women in this country would vote. They marched in the streets and spoke at rallies. I marched with them sometimes. Once someone asked me if I really believed women should be able to vote. I looked at him and said, "I suffered enough to believe it."

I remember one time when I was in Rochester, Miss Anthony took me to a rally with her. I remember coming in the room and sitting down, but I must have fallen to sleep. The next thing I knew somebody was calling my name and shaking me. I wasn't sure what they wanted me to say, but I told them, I had worked on the Underground Railroad and "My train never jumped the track and I never lost a single passenger." I guess they liked that, because they cheered.

Marching with Miss Anthony was all about getting the right to vote for women, but colored women had more problems than voting. Colored women decided we needed our own meetings and groups. We knew we were the ones that had to take care of our children. We wanted to make sure our children got an education. We organized to help poor folks with food, clothes, and to do all that we could for our people.

I was right there with Josephine Ruffin, Mary Church Terrell, Ida Bell Wells-Barnett, and Frances E. W. Harper when we formed the National Association of Colored Women. Our motto is "Lifting As We Climb."

Yes, I've been fighting for freedom and rights for a long time and taking care of folks the best I could. Now that I am too old to get out there and march myself, I want to keep the women encouraged. I told them that the Lord is with you, so you women keep on fighting.

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Lesson Learned: Seek women for comradeship, support, joint efforts and advocacy, and as mentors.

Harriet Tubman was a woman of action and she sought out other women to work towards improving life in America for everyone.

Women are strong and when dedicated to a cause, they are unstoppable.

Women can and should work toward supporting each other. Older more mature women are important in the development of self-esteem and leadership in younger women.

Support Women

Discussion questions:

1. Can you name some women in your life that you feel are great leaders?
2. What are some of the traits these women demonstrate that make them great leaders?
3. What are some of these traits that you share with these great leaders?