

BWA leaders note ‘What women these Christians have!’

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BRISBANE—J. Merritt Johnston, executive director of Baptist World Alliance Women, urged women to live Jesus-shaped lives so the world will note, as a 4th century pagan intellectual did, “What women these Christians have!”

Delivering the final keynote address of the BWA Women’s Summit in Brisbane, Johnston explained Libanius made the comment after hearing a story of John Chrysostom’s mother, Anthusa, who was renowned for her dedication to Christ.

After summarizing who makes up the BWA sisterhood, Johnston noted as she has traveled around the world to meet with BWA Women in their home countries, “It’s overwhelming to me, the good that I see you doing.”

While people often feel overwhelmed by all the challenges happening in the world, she asserted, “There is good happening. And as I travel it is often, very often, the women that are leading that charge.”

Johnston said if the world could see what she sees and hears about the work of BWA Women, the world would be saying, “What women these Christians have!”

The evidence

As evidence, Johnston spoke of the work BWA Women have done with the United Nations promoting equality for women worldwide, a goal experts have suggested is at least 300 years away from being achieved.

Johnston said it's not only equality the BWA Women U.N. participants are fighting for.

"We're fighting not for equality, but eternity," she said, noting she sees BWA Women standing strong in the worst situations.

Before the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, for example, BWA assembled a group of Baptist women in Ukraine to pray. Johnston sent a message to check on the women to find out if they were OK when the situation worsened.

"Yes," came the reply. "We're in the basement of the church, and we can feel the walls shaking."

Yet with bombs as the background accompaniment, the Ukrainian women sang "Count Your Blessings," Johnston recalled, saying, "What women these Christians have."

She spoke of "sisters in Manipur" who were stripped naked and paraded through the streets and whose churches and homes were under attack.

One "sister just had her home burned down," but she wouldn't be homeless because her Baptist sisters would stand with her, Johnston said.

She pointed to Scripture for the answer to the question: "How am I supposed to live the good news where I am?"

The world sees limitations—a 300-year timeline to equality. Yet, Johnston said, "time and time again women" like Jesus' mother Mary, Mary Magdeline and the other Mary bore witness—to the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The world may "see through the lens of limitation, but the Lord sees through the lens of love," Johnston observed.

“Jesus loves you,” she said. “Jesus loves me,” but sometimes “we forget what it is to feel loved.”

Because Jesus loves “you, we have the best news,” that needs to be shared with those who do not know Jesus yet.

She urged women to live into the charge in Luke 4:18-19, to proclaim the good news, so that the world would note, not only “What women these Christians have,” but even more, “What a God these women have!”

General secretary’s address



Elijah Brown offers the opening address of the BWA Women’s Summit in Brisbane. (Photo / Calli Keener)

BWA Women is a fully integrated ministry arm of the Baptist World Alliance. In BWA General Secretary and CEO Elijah Brown’s opening address to the BWA Women’s Summit, he affirmed women’s equality and disavowed limitations upon how God uses them.

“BWA Women,” Brown began. “You are at the heart of the Baptist World Alliance, just as you are at the heart of the biblical narrative.”

Providing a list from Scripture, he backed up his claim, noting, Shiprah and Puah were the midwives fighting for justice and stood against government oppression to bring forth life.

Rahab provided refuge to strangers. Ruth “embraced isolation and risk ... to provide for her family,” and Hannah’s “prayer and sacrifice sets in motion the search for a king ... and gives rise to a deepened worship and understanding of God,” Brown said.

“It was Huldah, who was trusted to provide theological reflection and insight into the ways of the Lord.”

And he noted, Esther bravely prevented a genocide. Elizabeth sensed the Spirit in ways her husband, a priest, did not, and she bore and reared “the voice of one calling in the wilderness.”

Mary the mother of Jesus changed history. Mary Magdelene and the other Mary were “commissioned as the first evangelists with a transformative declaration that ‘Jesus is risen,’” Brown said.

He said Mary the mother of Mark likely owned the home where the Last Supper was hosted and where Jesus gathered with his disciples after the resurrection, the home where the disciples reflected on the Holy Spirit’s outpouring at Pentecost and perhaps where the first church in the world was organized.

Lydia was the first Christian in what is today, Europe. Priscilla, with her husband planted a church. Junia was well known to the apostles and imprisoned for her faith, Brown reminded the women.

“We could go on,” Brown said, because the Scriptures are clear: “women are equal custodians of faith leadership.”

Brown noted, “the BWA continues to affirm the calling God places on the

lives of women to serve him fully and completely.”

Yet, Brown observed, women continue to face “disproportionate levels of gender discrimination,” forced marriages and higher levels of violence—including “sinful domestic abuse.”

Women “often face religious persecution in ways less visible than men,” including “house arrest, abduction and loss of custody.”

Brown noted, women “even within the church, are too often discounted and dismissed.”

“I am sorry,” he said. “And BWA affirms every woman, equally alongside men,” to be created in God’s image and filled with the same Holy Spirit as the resurrected Jesus when they accept him.

“You are equally called to join Jesus in his redeeming mission in the world today,” Brown said, whether as ordained pastors or in other equally important ways.

Brown pointed to the first sermon given in the church by Peter: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams and even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those last days.”

Brown noted his prayer is for everyone in the world to have an opportunity to know Jesus and affirmed the important role BWA Women play in helping to accomplish that mission.

He prayed for God to “do it again”—send a global revival and pour out his Spirit as he had at Pentecost—“and Lord, let it begin right now, and right here, with BWA Women.”