

Episode 187 Nobody's Mother

with Sandra Glahn

This transcript has been edited for clarity and space.

Sandra Glahn

I'm Dr. Sandra Glahn. I'm a professor of Media Arts and Worship at Dallas Theological Seminary.

David Capes

Dr. Sandra Glahn, good to see you. Thanks for being with us today on the Stone Chapel Podcasts.

Sandra Glahn

Totally a pleasure to be here on a gorgeous day.

David Capes

Isn't it a nice day and a nice setting as well. Now we've just had a conference here at the Lanier Theological Library. Give us an overview of what the conference was about.

Sandra Glahn

"See Her Story" was the title of the conference. It was put on by The Visual Museum of Women in Christianity. And we're trying to recover some of that visual history that doesn't get told about women in the early church, specifically. And across the world. What did women do?

David Capes

And you can find out more about that at the gallery.

Sandra Glahn

Yes. visualmuseum.gallery.

David Capes

This is the first web address I've ever seen using .gallery. Are there other .galleries ?

Sandra Glahn

There are. Apparently, it's used for art spaces.

David Capes

Okay! So visualmuseum.gallery is the place to go. There are some wonderful images and commentary about the interesting places where women are seen in the visual record. We talk a lot about written text. We talk a lot about archaeology. But there's this whole field of art that comes down to us through the ages that tells part of that story.

Sandra Glahn

Yes, in mosaics, frescoes, paintings, and inscriptions. Yes, all those places.

David Capes

Alright, for those who don't know, who is Sandra Glahn?

Sandra Glahn

I love to write. I love to travel. I love my husband of 45 years. I'm the wife of one husband, the mother of one grown child and then the Nana of one who was born about a year ago and is perfect.

David Capes

Yes, totally perfect in every way! You are at Dallas Theological Seminary, and how long have you been there?

Sandra Glahn

I've been teaching there since 1999. We came in 1981 for my husband to go to seminary. So, we've been part of the institution for a really long time.

David Capes

And you've done a number of important books, but the one we're going to talk about today is entitled *Nobody's Mother: Artemis of the Ephesians in Antiquity and the New Testament*. And it is published by IVP Academic. Have you been surprised at the reception this book is received?

Sandra Glahn

Here's my biggest surprise. I thought this would be a woman's book. Women looking at who was this woman mentioned in the book of Acts, Acts 19, Artemis of the Ephesians. We think that it might have influenced Paul as he's writing 1 Timothy. And since that's a so called "women's text", that's what I thought would be the response.

David Capes

A lot of women would read it and be really excited and happy about the book?

Sandra Glahn

Yes, exactly. It would be both. But I've been pleasantly surprised at how many of my brothers have come alongside and said that text has been a head scratcher. One of the texts I look specifically at is "she will be saved through childbearing". And what does that mean?

David Capes

1 Timothy 2:12?

Sandra Glahn

Well, 2:12 is the one about not teaching, and I don't touch on that. But 2:15 is part of the "why". And then the "why" follows in subsequent verses. And then it's the consolation prize, if you will. I mean, that's really kind of a negative way of saying it. I think Paul really cares about women. And he saying I've got bad news. And I got good news. But "saved through childbearing" is part of the good news.

In my tradition, I had really been taught that this means a woman's place is in the nuclear family. And there were a couple of ways that didn't make sense. It didn't seem to fit Paul's view of spiritual gifts. It didn't seem to fit his telling the Corinthians to think about staying single. And then my husband and I hit the brick wall of infertility and pregnancy loss. Then it didn't fit the life that I had. And so, it drove the question. But your original question was the response to it. And brothers have come alongside and said, I didn't feel comfortable telling women your place is in the home. And it didn't fit my understanding of Pauline authorship, and it didn't really fit his message in other places. And now, it makes a lot more sense. Like I said, that was a surprise.

David Capes

You began looking then at Paul and trying to understand 1 Timothy 2. But Artemis now becomes such an important feature. It's part of the subtitle of your book.

Sandra Glahn

Because people think she's a fertility goddess and I'm coming right out in the beginning saying, that is not what she is. Here's the logic. It really starts in the biblical text, 1 Timothy 1:3. Paul says to Timothy, I left you in Ephesus to teach certain people, not to teach false doctrine. And then we asked, well, then what were the false doctrines and we tend to just look in the letters to Timothy. But we forget that Paul is described in great detail in Ephesus, in Acts 19.

The first half is looking at magic, and how Jesus is better than the magic workers. And then the second half is the Artemis' silver workers saying, whoa, this Christianity thing is really cutting into our economics. It's a bad thing. And they fill the theater and they're chanting for two hours "great is Artemis of the Ephesians". So, I got my clues from the biblical text, actually long before I got them from the culture. It was those pointers in the text that made me ask, then who was she? And the reigning teaching has been she's a fertility goddess. And Paul had a fertility goddess on his mind, and that's why he said women will be saved through childbearing. And I got to digging and discovered she's really the exact opposite. She's nobody's mother.

David Capes

Nobody's mother. So how did she get this reputation?

Sandra Glahn

Well, we think that one major source is Jerome in the fourth century. He describes her as being polymaston, or many breasted. [We get this from statues of Artemis]. But those are probably not breasts on her statue. It's probably some pectoral-like kind of armor. One of the ways we know this is

that her hands are ebony, her feet are ebony, her face is ebony. The rest of her is white marble, which doesn't really match her other skin tones. There are a couple different ways we know that.

David Capes

Where looking at images of statues and objects of Artemis that have been found. And it's a very common image. If you go a gift shop in Ephesus today, they'll sell you an image of her.

Sandra Glahn

Yes! Somebody bought me one and I said no, no, no, I'm not a fan of Artemis. You misunderstand. She was the enemy.

David Capes

She was! She wasn't a pleasant person. Not a mother, not a nurturer.

Sandra Glahn

Not at all! Not a nurturer. She killed children and killed women about as often as she killed men, maybe even more often.

David Capes

So how did you parse out the truth?

Sandra Glahn

Great question. When you go to Ephesus today, which I'm sure you've done, they will give you what I call the synoptic Ephesus. And they'll talk about what was going on in the seventh century BC and the fifth BC and down to the fourth century AD, and we've got 11 centuries there. And all we really need to know if we're looking at the biblical text is who was she, at the time of Paul.

The PhD work I did was at the University of Texas at Dallas, in the humanities, with a focus on Greek and Ephesus. And I wanted historians who didn't know anything about Paul to vet my work of how do I figure out just what's happening in the first centuries BC and AD. And through the guidance of my historian teachers I used tools of analysis. One tool of analysis is the inscriptions. One tool is the statues. One tool is the stamps. One tool is the literature in the book of Acts which is actually the best literature we have on that. I divided the evidence by those categories and made them the chapters in the book.

And one of those chapters is looking at coins and statues that have those bulbous images all over her front, and asking what they were. They were probably Hittite magic sacks. When you figure that out you put together the magicians in the book of Acts, and the story of Artemis. I had read them as completely two separate spiritual forces. And then I looked in the inscriptions and discover well, they're actually magic curses that have Artemis behind them. So, we see an overlap.

David Capes

The power of Artemis is behind these curses. She's really a frightening figure.

Sandra Glahn

She's terrifying.

David Capes

When you think about it, she's meant to be. Because these gods and goddesses were meant to intimidate people who are not followers.

Sandra Glahn

That's right. And also, she was perceived by women at the time to be the one with the power if you didn't tick her off, to either deliver you safely in childbearing, or to kill you painlessly with a euthanizing arrow. And in the mythological story that Homer tells of her life, she watched her mother give birth to her twin Apollo. And her mother writhes for nine days giving birth. Artemis goes to daddy Zeus and says no way am I doing that. Make me immune to Aphrodite's love arrows. I don't want marriage. I don't want sex. I don't want any of that. And so, she's a confirmed virgin and she hunts.

Most who know anything about Artemis, think of her as a hunter. But when you look at the image with the bulbous structures there has been, particularly in the West, the association with mothering and nurturing. She's been perceived as a nurturing goddess and she was anything but. There is just no, no, no evidence.

David Capes

Are there other places where we've gotten the wrong impression by looking too facilely at the evidence?

Sandra Glahn

I can't really answer that because I've been stuck for about 25 years in this dark Artemis hole. And at one point I came out and my husband says, you know, John Wayne died, right? I guess it's every scholar's curse.

David Capes

Yes. Sometimes you don't know what's going on in the world because you're so locked into your work. But it strikes me that there's probably a lot of those kind of stories that we tell as common knowledge assumptions. But if we really looked at them, we would decide, they don't really hold water. The evidence is not there.

Sandra Glahn

There is one that comes to mind now that you say that. We've had the idea in the West, that there was temple prostitution all over the Roman world. And again, there's really not any evidence that happened. It's probably rooted in geographer Strabo, from the first century, who says at some time in the past, Corinth had orgies on the top of the hill. But it wasn't contemporary with him. He just got it as hearsay. And that's the evidence we ran on. You start looking at the architecture, the images, the writings, and you find nothing. If anything, there are some confirmed virgins. Not that there's not immorality going on. But it's not a part of the temple cult as we've sometimes thought.

David Capes

Right. You come to the bottom line as you look at Paul, and try to analyze Paul and the figure of Artemis and what we're learning from her. What are your thoughts when he says in 1 Timothy 2:15, "she'll be saved by childbearing"?

Sandra Glahn

I mean, the title gives it away. She's nobody's mother. But what about the phrase "saved through childbearing". My hypothesis is that Paul, as he's so commonly does, is borrowing a local saying. We see him do that up on Mars Hill, when he says, one of your own poets said, God is near to us. And he's always looking at the current context to say, how can I build a bridge? I think he is taking the number one fear of women, which is childbirth, because that is the number one killer of women. The number one killer of men at the time is war, but for women it's childbirth. And there's pressure to give birth to children because of war. The emperor has all kinds of incentives for you to build his empire, and give them an army. There's pressure on women to give birth.

I think Paul is a friend to women. I think he's concerned about their biggest fear. And I think it's in the context of a stronghold, which is childbirth. And whether you're protected in childbirth. He's telling Timothy, a woman isn't going to die. I don't think he's saying it for everyone for all time, I think he has a habit of looking at whatever city he's in, at the stronghold. And saying Jesus is better. And I think we see something like that with the magic workers.

In the beginning of that section of Acts it's talking about people bringing their handkerchiefs or aprons to Paul and he touches them and they're healed. That is not normative. But it is fighting a stronghold. And you see the result where they see Jesus is stronger than magic workers. They burn their magic books. Then you might ask, well, what about the other stronghold which is childbearing? The text says a woman will be saved through childbearing if she continues in the faith.

And then the very next line is, this is a faithful saying. But we have a new chapter heading there which makes it read "this is a faithful saying, if someone aspires to be an elder, that person aspires to a good thing". I think we need to be matching it with what came before it rather than after. Then I started looking at does Paul ever do that [that is, place the phrase "this is a faithful saying," after the "faithful saying"]? Yes, he does. In fact, it's a little bit like half and half. So that didn't actually tip the scales very well, for us.

David Capes

Yes, but it's not a bad argument. Because all those chapter divisions, periods and paragraphs are things that editors add later on. When you say she will be saved, you're not talking about eternal salvation. Even though that's a word that can be used for eternal salvation.

Sandra Glahn

It can be. There are really only two ways you see "shall be saved". And that form of the word "shall be saved", its future. You see it used to talk about eternity, but you also see it used for physical death. And I think that is how he is using it here. But I don't think that he coined the phrase. I think he's saying you

want to talk about saved through childbearing, I'll give you saved through childbearing. Jesus is better than the magic workers or Artemis.

David Capes

All the way. It struck me about how bad Jesus could be for the economy as you go through the Acts 19 part. It wouldn't be good for the economy because followers would no longer buy magic protection. And then obviously, for the magic workers. For those who don't know, when you say magic, you're not talking about illusions at the circus.

Sandra Glahn

Right. I'm talking curses, talking about calling on supernatural powers, or love potions. It's not always negative. It's controlling things through the supernatural and thinking that you can appease the gods by doing that.

David Capes

And we've discovered these magical types of objects like bowls, amulets, and such all over the world at the time. Because they thought that by wearing those items or using these items, they could actually have power over the supernatural.

Sandra Glahn

Right. Paul was saying, if it's made with hands, it's not really a god. He never comes out and says anything negative about Artemis. In fact, the city clerk says he hasn't slandered the goddess. He's a good Jew. He's never going to mention the name of another God. Now, Luke, he might pull up the name of Hermes when he's telling his story. But Paul, you will only see him go around the corner to say, gods that are made with hands are not gods.

David Capes

The book has done beautifully and people have been very interested in it. I think you've struck a chord. What are you going to do next?

Sandra Glahn

IVP came back and said, we would like a woman's place in the story. Re-looking at Bible stories where you take for instance Tamar in Genesis, and it's sorted. So, we might even just skip it in our series. But then we don't realize Tamar's encounter with Judah is essential to his character arc. Where the very next time we see him after he's encountered her, he's giving his life for Benjamin. He had trafficked his brother, Joseph. Now he's offering his life for Benjamin. What changed? Well, it's an encounter with somebody who took seriously the promise of Messiah coming through his family, even when he didn't value it.

David Capes

And Tamar was mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus. She's one of four or five women that are mentioned. There's all kinds of theories about all that. But I think it shows the importance of women and the story. And Judah says of her, she was the just one. She was the one who was righteous, and she did the right thing. She did the truthful thing. It's remarkable. We don't tell those stories.

Sandra Glahn

We don't tell them. That's what IVP wants me to do. To go back to some of those texts where we have tended to cameo women, when we do tell their story. We might have a study of women in the Bible, but we pull them out of their context. But we need to actually tell the story as it was written to see where these people fit in the plot. The midwives in Moses' day are named. We have their actual names. That's pretty unusual [Exodus 1:15, Shiphrah and Puah]. Their story gets told five times in the Old Testament. They are all named. Why are we not talking about them?

David Capes

Well, it's fascinating. And we're grateful, first of all, for the book that you've done. You've clarified a lot of things about some of the methods used throughout history and how we should be re-looking at the assumptions. And then bringing us, I think, to the right conclusion about how we should be reading Paul in 1 Timothy 2. Sandra Glahn thank you for being with us today on *The Stone Chapel Podcasts*..

Sandra Glahn

Thanks for having me. I enjoyed it.