



“A Hebrew Scripture #MeToo”

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Scripture (NRSV):

II Samuel 11:1-15

1 In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

2 It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. 3 David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite."

4 So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. 5 The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

6 So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. 7 When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. 8 Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. 9 But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. 10 When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?" 11 Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing."

12 Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, 13 David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

14 In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. 15 In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die."

Sermon:

Parents: this is a gruesome piece of scripture to read on a Sunday morning. And yet, not surprisingly, we so often come to scripture on Sunday morning, thinking that it will give us comfort.

It does not.

Nor is it meant to, most of the time.

Most of the time, it is shockingly uncomfortable.

Today is certainly a case in point. I invited parents to send their kids out of the sanctuary because today, scripture tells us, in a rather dry, distant way, about a rape.

About a violent and vile abuse of power, of the victimization of and silencing of, another human being and taking it away in the name of male lust.

And it is about murder. Murder of an innocent man, to cover up the male lust of his leader. Who just happens to have the power of the king, and as a king, can order a murder.

This is a brutal story. This is ugly scripture.

What shall we do with such a passage of "holy scripture". (After we send the little kids out of the room.)

Well, for starters...admit it is there.

Let go of the blinders that say, it isn't "rape".

Yes, it is.

This man, David, took this woman, married to someone else, let's say happily married to someone else. And he had sex with her. David had his people "get" her. He "lay with her". "Then", and only then, does she "return to her house."

No, first David got his way. Fulfilled his lust. Because he was king. Because he could. Don't tell me she "wanted it". Don't tell me "she was asking for it". Don't tell me "she shouldn't have been bathing on the roof, she shouldn't have been naked".

That won't work.

Bathsheba is doing what her religion requires. First, it tells her she is female, and that her body, fertile and life-giving as it is, is impure. And then, it tells her that to become pure again, she *must* bathe, re-purify herself, every month when her menstrual cycle is completed.

So Bathsheba does what is expected, what is required. And she does this in her own home, in a world in which homes were places for dinner and sleep, but not much else. There were no bathrooms as you might expect in our own homes.

But that is beside the point anyway....this is my point:

DO NOT BLAME THE VICTIM.

Stop that right now. The church has been doing it for centuries.

Let it stop, right now.

Let's stop whitewashing the evil of domination, the vile reality of rape, the abuse of one person by another person, inflicting pain and trauma because of selfishness, power, greed, lust.

How many women have had to rise up to be heard? Hundreds, and hundreds...because we steal the voice of those we abuse. We don't believe them, or we threaten, or intimidate, or shame them. Bathsheba doesn't say much, she is silenced by the power of her king.

LET US LISTEN TO BATHSHEBA. LISTEN TO URIAH.

Good people. Innocent people. Trusting people, who trusted their leaders and were betrayed by them. Murdered even, by the abuse of the power of the one they trusted, served, honored.

Why, oh why, does scripture enshrine such stories and then parade them in front of us on Sundays, when all we really want is a little comfort, a little love from God?

They are a warning.

Because human abuse destroys the design of God's love.

Because this story is about God's design for justice, honor, integrity, respect in all aspects of life, by all people, high or low, powerful or not, male or female, child or adult.

And its absence.

Because this story shows us the absence of God's wisdom and love and presence in David.

Blinded by lust.

Blind to God's way.

Blind to all God's commands.

At the very least most of us know the famous 10, and right there in the decalogue are two: do not covet your neighbor's house, family, goods or wife. And...you shall not murder. Both in Exodus and Deuteronomy, there they are.

And mighty King David ignores both. And does evil. And, suffers the consequences of doing evil; of power misused and people abused. Dreadful consequences.

It seems to me that we should read this story, and the story of the rape of Tamar (a few chapters later) and the story of the murdered concubine, and the story of the rape of Dinah...these horrific biblical stories need to be known, because the Bible, our sacred book, is a book of songs, and praises, but also a book of warning.

And we are being warned: warned against violating others. Warned against abuse of power. Warned that we do not know enough and are not wise enough to act unselfishly; with restraint.

So, we are warned to put God at the very heart of our lives, our dreams, our work, our passions...so that we do not become enslaved to/addicted to/twisted by, our **limited understanding** of life, and dreams, and work and passion.

Yes, we are being warned: away from the arrogance that is so rampant in the world and among those in power.

Warned against, the arrogance that objectifies other human beings.

The arrogance that uses others selfishly.

The arrogance that denies the full humanity and agency of other human beings.

And from this arrogance comes:

The darkness of war,

The darkness of human trafficking.

The darkness of abuse,

The darkness of people without compassion or humility, the darkness of people with hearts of stone.

Against this darkness shines the light of God in Christ:

Jesus spoke to women, and touched women and healed women and listened to women and called them sister, and daughter, and friend.

- He took a woman bent double under the crushing load of rejection and suffering and raised her up, straight and strong, whole and rejoicing! (Luke 13:11)
- He let his compassionate power heal a woman isolated for countless years by disease, and gave her a name and family, and a home again. (Mark 5:25-34)

- He took a dead girl, on the very cusp of new beginnings, and gave her back her life, and told her parents, “give her something to eat”... “give this girl fullness of life!” (Luke 8:51-55)

And after doing all he could, to heal, and restore, to illuminate God’s design for human community with justice and joy and welcome and safety, when he could do no more, He died rather than give up the promise, he sacrificed himself rather than run and let someone else bear the burden of the world’s hate, arrogance, cruelty.

And because I believe in the resurrection, bodily or otherwise, I believe that his last act of generosity, of love and determination...has not been in vain. Jesus lives, and we live in Jesus.

We are the heirs of the vision of God in Jesus.

Jesus told his friends, “those who believe will do greater things than I” (John 14:12)

We can. We must.

We are the builders of a safe, generous, welcoming, community.

We are the makers of places where women and girls can be known and loved in the fullness of their humanity, and with respect and honor.

We are the people who share the burden with the abused, and stand with them, and listen to them, and believe them!

We fight with them.

We believe in their power to heal,

We encourage their resilience and courage!

Westminster people:

This is what Jesus desires. This is God’s vision for the world.

Where there is no more need for #MeToo.

Where there is no more reading of terrible texts, because their warning time is over and done.

Let us live, and work, and hope and strive and long for and dream into the words of the prophet Jeremiah, written long, long ago:

31:34 No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, (says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.)

Alleluia, Amen.