

## Worship resources

- **Service of remembrance**
- **A communion liturgy for domestic violence awareness**
- **Sermon – Clinging to the Threshold of Hope**
- **Domestic violence sermon**  
**Remembrance: Where Healing Begins**
- **Sermon – For of Such are the Kingdom of Heaven**
- **Women, violence and the church**  
A service of confession and healing
- **What if your church held a vigil to honor victims**

# Remembering Victims of Domestic Violence and Abuse

## *Remembrance: Where Healing Begins*

*This service was adapted from one planned by the Women @ Fourth Church Connect and the Center for Whole Health, a program of Chicago Lights at Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago.*

### **Ringing of the Chimes** (*silence is kept*)

#### **Gathering Words**

O God, come to our assistance.

**O Lord, hasten to help us.**

The Lord our God gives us salvation and victory.

**The Lord our God brings us light and life.**

God's right hand has done wonders.

**So let us proclaim the works of our God.**

**Hymn**      *God of All People Everywhere* (words below) Jane Parker Huber

#### **Response**

Now hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

**Thanks be to God!**

**Reading**      *I Got Flowers Today* (words below)

**Psalter**      Psalm 55 (selected verses) (*responsive by paragraph*)      *The Message*

Open your ears, God, to my prayer; don't pretend you don't hear me knocking. Come close and whisper your answer. I really need you.

**My insides are turned inside out; specters of death have me down. I shake with fear, I shudder from head to foot. "Who will give me wings," I ask—"wings like a dove?" Get me out of here on dove wings; I want some peace and quiet. I want to walk in the country. I want a cabin in the woods. I'm desperate for a change from rage and stormy weather.**

This isn't the neighborhood bully mocking me—I could take that. This isn't a foreign devil spitting invective—I could tune that out. It's you! We grew up together! You! My best friend! Those long hours of leisure as we walked arm in arm, God a third party to our conversation.

**And this, my best friend, betrayed his best friends; his life betrayed his word. All my life I've been charmed by his speech, never dreaming he'd turn on me. His words, which were music to my ears, turned to daggers in my heart.**

Pile your troubles on God's shoulders—God will carry your load. God will help you out. God will never let good people topple into ruin. But you, God, will throw the others into a muddy bog, cut the lifespan of assassins and traitors in half.

**And I trust in you.**

**Prayers for Healing**

adapted from Caroline Sproul Fairless

God of grace, you nurture us with a love deeper than any we know, and your will for us is always healing and salvation. God of love, you enter into our lives, our pain, and our brokenness, and you stretch out your healing hands to us wherever we are. God of strength, you fill us with your presence and send us forth with love and healing to all whom we meet.

**We praise and thank you, O God.**

God of love, we ask you to hear the prayers of your people. We pray for the world, that your creation may be understood and valued. Touch with your healing power the minds and hearts of all who live in confusion and doubt, and fill them with your light. Touch with your healing power the minds and hearts of all who are burdened by anguish, despair, or isolation, and set them free in love.

**Hear us, O God of life.**

Break the bonds of those who are imprisoned by fear, compulsion, secrecy, and silence. Fill with peace those who grieve over separation and loss.

**Come with your healing power, O God.**

Restore to wholeness all those who have been broken in life or in spirit by violence within their families; restore to wholeness all those who have been broken by violence with our family of nations, restore to them the power of your love; and give them the strength of your presence.

**Come, O God, and restore us to wholeness and love.**

Let us name before God and this community gathered those, including ourselves, for whom we seek healing...

*(those gathered may name individuals silently or aloud)*

...that they in our remembering may find sanctuary and shalom.

**In our homes, our workplaces, our communities, our churches, and in this world.**

We lift up before you this day all those who have died of violence....

*(those gathered may name individuals silently or aloud)*

**...in that place where there is no pain or grief, but life eternal.**

O, God, in you all is turned to light, and brokenness is healed.  
Look with compassion on us and on those for whom we pray, that we may be re-created  
in wholeness, in love, and in compassion for one another.

**So, let it be so!**

**Remembering**

*(during the silence, those gathered may come to the Common Table and  
light a votive candle in remembrance and prayer for someone (or for  
themselves) living with violence or who has died from violence)*

**Unison Prayer**

**God of comfort and strength, revive us when we are weary, console us when we are  
full of woe, and set our feet anew in the way Christ leads us. Protect us from sin so  
we may always be glad disciples, diligent in service and bold in witness for our risen  
Lord, Jesus Christ, Savior of the world. Amen.**

**The Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal**

The grace of God be with us all, now and always.

**Amen.**

Bless the Lord.

**The Lord's name be praised.**

\*\*\*\*\*

**"God of All People Everywhere"**

Maryton LM

*("O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee")*

Jane Parker Huber, 2001  
For the Presbytery of Chicago  
Task Force on Family Violence

Henry Percy Smith, 1874

God of all people everywhere, Your love for us is ours to share.  
Yet victims suffer cruel blows. And words can kill where power grows.

In the complexities of life, keep us from being numb to strife.  
Open our eyes to inner sight. And tune our ears to other's plight.

So when we hear the cries of pain, grant us the grace to be humane.  
Grant us the heart to love and care, to be Your presence sanding there.

## I got flowers today!

It wasn't my birthday or any other special day;  
We had our first argument last night;  
And he said a lot of cruel things that really hurt;  
I know that he is sorry and didn't mean to say the things he said;  
Because he sent me flowers today.

I got flowers today!  
It wasn't our anniversary or any other special day;  
Last night he threw me into a wall and then started choking me;  
It seemed unreal, a nightmare, but you wake up from nightmares;  
And I woke up this morning sore and bruised all over — but I know he is sorry;  
Because he sent me flowers today.

I got flowers today!  
And it wasn't Valentines Day or any other special day;  
Last night he beat me and threatened to kill me;  
Make-up and long sleeves didn't hide the cuts and bruises this time;  
I couldn't go to work today because I didn't want anyone to know — but I know he's  
sorry;  
Because he sent me flowers today.

I got flowers today!  
And it wasn't Mother's Day or any other special day;  
Last night he beat me again, and it was worse than all of the other times;  
If I leave him, what will I do? How will I take care of the kids? What about money?  
I'm afraid of him, but I'm too scared and dependent to leave him! But he must be sorry;  
Because he sent me flowers today.

I got flowers today....  
Today was a special day — it was the day of my funeral;  
Last night he killed me;  
If only I would have gathered the courage and strength to leave him;  
I could have received help from the Women's Shelter, but I didn't ask for their help;  
So I got flowers today — for the last time.

\*\*\*\*\*

*If you or someone you know is being abused, call the National Domestic Violence  
Hot Line toll free at (800) 799-7233 for assistance and guidance.*

# Gathering Around the Table

*This communion liturgy might be used for World Communion Sunday  
or during a service of remembrance and healing*

One: While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take, this is my body."

**All: As we eat this bread made of flour, we reflect that both this bread and some among us have been pounded by human hands.**

One: The flour is mixed with salt.

**All: We reflect that salt is painful to wounds. We pray that we would not reinjure our sisters and brothers by our words or actions.**

One: The salt and flour are mixed with oil.

**All: We reflect that oil is also used for healing and blessing. We pray for the healing of our sisters and brothers. We ask for God's blessing upon them.**

One: God, we ask you to bless this broken bread and the broken bodies and spirits of our sisters and brothers. We ask that as we eat this bread you would continue the process of healing.

Then Jesus took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is the cup of salvation which is poured out for many."

**All: As we drink from this cup, we reflect that both the wine and some among us have been crushed by human hands.**

One: Wine can be used to cleanse wounds.

**All: We ask God to cleanse us spiritually, emotionally, and physically.**

One: God, we ask you to bless this crushed juice and the crushed bodies and spirits of our sisters and brothers. We ask that as we drink from this cup you would begin new growth that will bear much fruit. The gifts of God for the people of God. Come, all is ready.

Adapted from *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches*, Carolyn Holderread Heggen

## **Clinging To the Threshold of Hope**

A Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Kevin E. Frederick

Scripture: Judges 19, selected passages  
Black Mountain Presbyterian Church  
Black Mountain, North Carolina  
July 14, 2002

Our Old Testament Passage today is a highly unusual text, not just because it deals with the graphic violence of rape and murder but because it seems to convey a message devoid of any hope or grace. Although the book of Judges is included extensively in the three-year cycle of lectionary readings of scripture for worship services, the lectionary readings conclude with the close of chapter 18. I can't recall having ever heard a sermon delivered on this text. But in my studies of relational themes throughout the scriptures, I have spent as much or more time with this passage than any throughout the Bible. I think this scripture has something to communicate to the church in a society where violence profoundly impacts the private lives of so many people.

Included in your guide to worship is a blue sheet with some statistics on domestic violence. You may want to make notes on the backside of the sheet during the sermon. Before I read from Judges 19 let me strongly suggest that you read chapters 19-21 on your own and reflect on the implications of this one man's actions on the entire nation of Israel. As I read this text, ask yourself a complex question. Why would such a passage as this be included in the canon (or the collection) of writings we know as Holy Scripture?

### **Judges 19**

In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite, residing in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. But his concubine became angry with him, and she went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there for some four months. Then her husband set out after her, to speak tenderly to her and bring her back. He had with him his servant and a couple of donkeys. When he reached her father's house the girl's father saw him and came with joy to meet him. His father-in-law – the girl's father — made him stay, and he remained with him three days; so they ate and drank, and he stayed there. On the fourth day they got up early in the morning, and he prepared to go; but the girl's father said to his son-in-law, Fortify yourself with a bit of food and after that you may go. So the two men sat and ate and drank together and the girl's father said to the man, Why not spend the night and enjoy yourself? When the man got up to go, his father-in-law kept urging him until he spent the night there again. On the fifth day he got up early in the morning to leave; and the girl's father said to him, "Fortify yourself." So they lingered until the day declined, and the two of them ate and drank.

When the man with his concubine and servant got up to leave, his father-in-law, the girl's father said to him, Look the day has worn on until it is almost evening. Spend the night. See the day has drawn to a close. Spend the night, and enjoy yourself. Tomorrow you can get up early in the morning for your journey. But the man would not spend the night. He got up and departed, and arrived opposite Jebus that is Jerusalem, (approximately two to three miles from Bethlehem). He had with him a couple of saddled donkeys and his concubine was with him. When they were near Jebus, the day was far spent and the servant said to his master, "Come let us turn aside to this

city of the Jebusites, and spend the night in it." But his master said to him, "We will not turn aside into a city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel; but we will continue on to Gibeah." They turned aside there to go in and spend the night at Gibeah. He went in and sat down in the open square of the city, but no one took him in to spend the night.

Then at evening there was an old man coming from his work in the field. The man was from the hill country of Ephriam, and he was residing in Gibeah. (The people of the place were Benjaminites.) The old man said, "Peace be to you. I will care for all your wants; only do not spend the night in the open square." So he brought him into his house and fed the donkeys. They washed their feet and ate and drank. While they were enjoying themselves the men of the city, a perverse lot, surrounded the house and began pounding on the door. They said to the old man, the master of the house, "Bring out the man who came into your house so that we might have intercourse with him." And the man the master of the house went outside and said to them, "No my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Since this man is a guest in my house, do not do this vile thing. Here are my virgin daughter and his concubine; let me bring them out now. Ravish them and do what you want to them; but against this man do not do such a vile thing." But the men would not listen to him. So the Levite seized his concubine and put her out to them. They wantonly raped her, and abused her all through the night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go. As the morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, until it was light.

In the morning, her master got up, opened the doors to the house, and when he went out to go on his way, there was his concubine laying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold. "Get up," he said to her. "We are going." But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey and the man set out for his home. When he had entered his house, he took a knife, and grasping his concubine he cut her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. Then he commanded the men whom he sent, saying, "Thus shall you say to all the Israelites, 'Has such a thing ever happened since the day that the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt until this day? Consider it, take counsel, and speak out.'"

May God add meaning and understanding to the reading of this Holy Scripture.

### **Clinging To the Threshold of Hope**

Domestic violence: one might think it to be a marginal issue in most Presbyterian faith communities . . . but it isn't. Last fall Betsy Warren, the director of Interlace, a local program designed to assist victims of domestic violence, gave a Minute for Mission for our annual Peacemaking offering. The session had voted to direct the local portion of that offering towards Interlace. Interlace is a multi-agency program designed to connect victims of domestic violence with a variety of specific services. That afternoon Betsy had three phone calls from different women that had attended worship that morning. They were calling her for help for themselves.

In my 18 years of ministry, the issue of family violence has periodically surfaced in my work. I recently served for three years on a board of directors of a shelter for women fleeing from domestic violence and I learned first hand how pervasive a factor domestic violence is in our society. More startlingly I learned of the impact misguided and untrained pastoral counseling has had; in some cases creating far greater problems for the victim, even leading to the death of one woman. If her pastor hadn't insisted that she return home to a violent husband she might still be alive today. Both the lack of specialized training for church leaders and the silence of the church

on domestic violence have contributed to the injustice done to all victims of domestic violence whether they be women, children, or in some cases, men. For all who profess Christ as Lord and Savior and who seek to follow him, his universal calling to Christians to serve “the least of these” certainly includes all victims of domestic violence.

If someone you know were to confide in you, perhaps a friend or colleague, a family member or even a child, and tell you they were suffering in an abusive relationship, would you know how to respond? Would you know where to point them for help and would you know that the assistance they receive would be beneficial? It is time that we all break the code of silence and educate ourselves regarding this issue and communicate in a clear voice the will of Christ for all families, the most intimate of human relationships.

Lets turn to the scripture text for some help with this issue. “In those days there was no king in Israel, all the people did what they thought was right in their own eyes.” This frequent refrain found throughout the book of Judges including to a partial degree here at the beginning of chapter 19 and completely at the close of chapter 21, communicates the basis of the problem in the entire nation of Israel. Each male looked to himself as being the defining authority on right and wrong. In so doing the whole nation disregarded the Law of Moses. The story of the Levite and his concubine serves both as an example of the social deterioration of a whole nation and as an illustration of themes found in distorted family relationships today.

Levite is a term used to describe members of the tribe of Levi, a people set aside by God, called to provide religious leadership to the nation of Israel. They served as priests, scribes and other religious officials for the whole nation and as a result could not possess land of their own. It is with intentional irony that the Bible presents this Levite, a religious official, at the center of an ethical and moral breakdown of the Hebrew people.

The woman in this story is called a concubine, which is a confusing term for us. Some of us might think of her as a prostitute or a kept woman, at least a woman with a disreputable character. And yet the Levite is both referred to as her husband and as the son-in-law of the woman’s father. Why? There is a marital relationship of some sort here and we learn that in Hebrew society the term concubine referred to a wife of secondary status. In ancient Israel a husband was given the right to remarry if he and his first wife were unable to conceive a child. For example, Abraham’s relationship with Hagar while still married to Sarah, was that of a husband with a second wife, or a concubine. We understand the dynamics of this text more readily if we refer to her as a second wife. Some scholars have suggested that the second wife was at fault in this relationship and left her husband after being unfaithful to him but the text seems to suggest another interpretation.

She had left him angry, four months earlier, and now he wanted to woo her back with tender talk. But this biblical phrase “to speak tenderly to her” is used elsewhere in the Old Testament between the man Shechem and a young girl named Dinah who Shechem had raped and than later tried to woo with tender talk towards marriage. In Judges the strategy of wooing his wife seems to indicate that the Levite had been at some sort of fault, not she. Experts in the field of domestic violence have identified a cycle of violence between an abusive husband and his wife, there is a violent explosion followed by a courtship phase using gifts, apologies, promises and charming behavior until the wife forgives the husband. Then he soon returns to abusive behavior. It is a very predictable pattern in abusive relationships. But domestic violence is not a matter of anger management. It is first and foremost a matter of power and control where one spouse exercises

coercive control over the life and well being of the other. In well over 95 percent of reported cases of domestic violence the perpetrator is the male.

The Levite sets out in our story after his second wife to woo her back but when he arrives at her father's home he is diverted away from talking with her by the father's lavish expression of hospitality. The concept of biblical hospitality is central to Hebrew thinking. It is essentially based on a biblical and cultural code of ethics between men, designed to build and strengthen relationships. In our story hospitality is shared between the father-in-law and the husband in the form of a three-day indulgence in food and drink that extends into a fourth and even a fifth day at the father-in-law's insistence. But the offering of hospitality is noticeably absent towards the woman in this story. So is the Levite's intended tender talk.

Notice there is no mention of dialogue between the husband and his second wife. She remains without voice throughout this ordeal in a matter that affects her whole future. Very often today in cases of domestic violence the voice of the woman is not allowed to be heard. When couples counseling is relied on to resolve issues between the two parties, the husband's voice is the dominant voice. The wife cannot speak freely or candidly about her situation for fear of reprisal at a later time. Using couples counseling as a therapeutic response to domestic violence only further obscures the truth, leaving the perpetrator satisfied that the problem is not his and the victim more confused and frustrated that her issues and difficulties with the marriage have been silenced.

Too often the institutions designed to help intervene in cases of domestic violence are rendered ineffective by the code of silence including law enforcement, the legal, the therapeutic and the religious communities. As a result even in a communications based society as technologically advanced as ours, we have only begun to effectively address the code of silence impacting victims of domestic violence. Add to this the knowledge that the United States now refuses to sign a United Nations treaty adopted by 170 nations which addresses all forms of discrimination against women. Although the USA helped to draft this document twenty-three years ago we today still refuse to sign it along with three other holdout nations, Iraq, Iran and the Sudan; not good company. On at least one level, this is due to the rise in conservative religious paternalism in each of these four countries including our own.

When the Levite finally gets up to leave his father-in-law's hospitality and return home, the whole matter is settled. He has made up his mind. He gathers his property including his slave and his concubine and heads off late in the day, a time most unwise for a traveler in an unsafe land. He chooses to stop at the well of town of the tribe of Benjamin thinking himself safe there and is welcomed in the home of an old man who came from his homeland of Ephraim. The old man extends to this stranger biblical hospitality. During the evening the men of the town, fellow Jews from the tribe of Benjamin gather outside the home and forcefully demand that the Levite traveler be sent outside so that they might have intercourse with him. But the master of the house went out to speak with the men of the town. "No my brothers, this man is my guest. Do not do this vile thing. Here are my virgin daughter and his concubine; let me bring them out now. Ravish them and do whatever you want with them but against this man, do not do this vile thing." But the men would not listen.

This sense of justice offends our sensibilities and rightly so. But these were distorted times in Israel. Here again as repeatedly throughout the three-chapter story we see the underlying refrain of this book illustrated: "In those days there was no king in Israel, all the people did what they thought was right in their own eyes." Here biblical hospitality becomes completely distorted and

the old man who is most gracious to the stranger thinks it just to offer his own daughter and this woman to the violence of evil men in defense of the stranger.

In an effort to protect himself, the Levite seizes his concubine and throws her out the door. The Hebrew word here for “seize” implies a forceful action and is most often a verb used to describe complete control over an object. Here it is used with a human being, only one of few examples where this verb found in the Bible is used to describe a controlling force against the will of another person. She has become a dispensable sacrifice used as a substitute to protect the Levite. She is raped, violated by a crowd of men all night and towards morning is finally left alone. She staggers back to the door of the home where they are staying and the Bible says, “falls down at the door of the house where her master was, until it was light.” Notice there is no reference to him any more as being a husband; rather he is referred to with the title of a property owner of animals and slaves. He is her master. After handing over his wife, one would hope that the Levite was racked by guilt, shame or remorse, but there is no hint of that in the text. He appears to get a good night’s rest and in the morning he doesn’t even rush out to find her. In fact, only after the Levite has made provisions to leave, only at the last minute does he open the door to go on his way. Only then does he find his concubine, his wife, with her hands on the threshold. It seems ironic that in a culture so focused on biblical hospitality that none would be offered to this woman. Hospitality is as closed to her as is the door to security, the door to compassionate care and solace, the door of hope, the door to a healthy marriage. In a land where there is no king, where every man interprets truth for himself, biblical hospitality is even denied to a wife.

How far we have fallen O Israel, and yet the joyous response of Adam at the first sight of his partner, Eve, still echoes in our ears. This alas is bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh. God had created woman to be man’s partner but the Levite, the religious leader, treated her as disposable property, this God-given gift created in God’s own image. In a land where there is no King, the text suggests that the Levites’ sins were far greater than the men of the town.

This poor woman, who had suffered the worst brutal savagery of her life; this woman had no one to come to her aid. She had been betrayed by her husband, who days before had the intention of wooing her back to him, now she had no where to turn to and literally clung to the only hope for life that she had left, the threshold of a stranger where her master was staying. One might think that now would be a prime opportunity to go out to her to speak tenderly to her but no compassion is expressed. “Get up!” he commands callously, “we are going.” But there is no answer, so he put her on a donkey and proceeded to return to his home where her body is grossly violated by dismemberment to build his case of wrongdoing done to him before the entire nation of Israel. In this last violent act, the Levite uses her body to communicate to the eleven other tribes how he had been violated by the tribe of Benjamin. From beginning to end this nameless woman is a victim with no voice, a victim with no choices; except between her husband and her father, the two primary men in her life. The unnamed concubine in this story is a metaphor for all the nameless women who silently suffer and endure public and private abuse in every society including our own. Her story is important for all women whose fate is determined by wrongdoing men.

So where is the hope? It is not found in the book of Judges but it is found with the turn of the page, when in the book of Ruth we see faith in God and love of family redefined. Hope is found in the fact that the church and to some degree our society is waking up to the call to serve as Christ’s body to women who have been abused, both within the community of faith and beyond the doors of the church.

The covenant of marriage is a biblical promise of great significance to God and God's people. But the church must recognize that domestic violence violates not only the victim, but damages and destroys the covenant of marriage itself and impacts the whole community in negative terms. A choice to preserve the covenant of marriage at the expense of the well being of the victim discounts the sanctity of human life. Abuse in any form is a violation of God's will for humanity, especially for the abused individual who was created in God's image but also for the humanity of the perpetrator. When abuse is physical, it damages the body of another in some cases crippling the victim for life and possibly resulting in death. When abuse is sexual, it distorts the victim's sense of self and their perception of the purpose of sexuality as a sacred gift of God. When abuse is expressed through economic coercion, it creates a distorted dependency of the victim on the perpetrator as the sole source of well-being. Abuse in all its forms is emotionally damaging, destroying an individual's self esteem, potentially scarring their psyche for life. Domestic violence in all its forms instills fear as the predominant emotional state of slavery in the life of the victim. That is far from the will of God.

The church has participated, consciously or not, in a code of silence regarding domestic violence. It is time to break that pattern and to respond with a clear direction and hope not just to the victim but also to the perpetrator who seeks to be accountable for his actions. Your Session is currently involved in reviewing a document for adoption, that includes a policy statement, an action plan of response and an educational strategy designed for our staff and membership comprehensively responding to cases of domestic violence as they occur. There is also a more proactive strategy to educate the congregation helping all its families become healthier, more loving and joy filled. We will keep you posted as to the progress of this policy statement and the implementation of a training program designed to instill positive family dynamics in every church member home. (This positive dimension of family life will be the focus of next Sunday's sermon.)

May God open our hearts and lives as together we seek to be a light of hope to all families especially those impacted by violence.

**Sermon by Beth Truett (PCUSA)**

**Preached on October 12, 2001 @ The Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago, IL**

**Vesper Service to Remember Victims of Domestic Violence**

**Service Texts: Psalm 55:4-8, 12-18, 22**

**Luke 22:19**

This sermon is one of the finalists in the first Bi-National Sermon Contest sponsored by the FaithTrust Institute (formerly the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence).

*Reprint permission granted by The Haworth Press, Inc.*

# REMEMBRANCE: Where Healing Begins

**Luke 22:19: Then Jesus took the loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, our Lord broke it and gave it to them saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."**

These are familiar words...we hear them each time we participate in the Eucharist. They are especially poignant during the Lenten season. But, is it possible that they are so familiar that we don't hear them in their original context? According to Luke 22:19, Jesus knows that violence looms in the very near future. Christ is about to face the trauma of an unwarranted and brutal death by crucifixion! And while anticipating that horror, Jesus also knows that healing will be required for his closest friends...the Apostles. So a prescription to begin the healing process is provided in advance..."*break bread in remembrance of me.*

To remember...that is why we are here this evening. To remember victims and to honor survivors of domestic violence. We are not seeking to glamorize the deaths and lives of people... mostly women...who have suffered violence in intimate relationships. We are not here to raise them up as "suffering servants." Rather, we are here to mourn...to express our indignation over senseless crimes... to give thanks for survivors and to pray for healing. And in the midst of our complaints, our praise and our prayers, we are strengthened in our belief that God suffers with each woman and family, just as God suffered with Jesus amidst undeserved persecution and innocent death.

According to theologian, Flora Keshgegian, "knowing of God's presence may help one live with pain and suffering, but it is not enough to change the situation of suffering. For that we need to be able to express agency and to change the conditions of oppression."<sup>xiv</sup> In her remarkable new book, *Redeeming Memories*, Keshgegian focuses on a theology of the cross that leads to an understanding of how the cross of Jesus is the ultimate sign for victims of domestic violence. By viewing Jesus' death on the cross as suffering rooted in trauma, victims of domestic violence can become one with Jesus. By refusing to glamorize the crucifixion, we stand with victims against the belief that their suffering is necessary, valuable, beneficial and redemptive. Instead we weep together with the victims and God weeps with us.

Keshgegian's stories reference victims of the Jewish Holocaust, African slavery and the Armenian genocide, a systematic violence that still haunts her own family. But we have stories too; they may or may not seem as dramatic as others. But each story is important because each individual is important. Thirty-two million women are wounded by domestic violence every year. Most of these relationships started as love stories...but ended in a woman feeling sad, ashamed, betrayed, angry...and sometimes dead. Perhaps you are not certain that you personally know anyone affected by domestic violence. But here are the tragic facts...between one-fourth and one-half of all intimate relationships include at least one episode of violent abuse<sup>2</sup>... including about 20% of teen dating relationships.<sup>3</sup> This suggests that through your

participation in this evening's service you are probably "standing with" someone you know...even if you don't know for sure. Another way of looking at this is that one person in every pew on Sunday may be a victim of domestic violence.

And sadly, domestic violence is not new...it is not a 21<sup>st</sup> or even a 20<sup>th</sup> century crime. In fact, it is evident in several poignant Old Testament stories...stories that help us to realize that domestic violence has always been a crime of power, not of passion. In Genesis 34, the Yahwist writer reveals a crime of violence against Dinah, the only daughter among Jacob's tribe of twelve sons. In today's vernacular, we might call it "date rape." Jacob's reaction to the abuse of his only daughter is disturbing, to say the least; instead of comforting Dinah he waits to talk with his sons! They appear to be outraged, but we soon learn that their concern is over how the purported violence might affect their political stature not the well being of their sister.

You may know of Dinah through Anita Diamant's captivating bestseller, *The Red Tent*. In this historical novel Diamant gives Dinah a voice...a delightful one as a midwife. But in so doing, she also makes the Old Testament story potentially more disturbing.<sup>4</sup> If, as she suggests, sex between Schechem and Dinah was consensual, not violent, then there is little doubt that the slaughter of the Hivites at the hands of Dinah's brothers was about defilement of their property, Dinah – not their sister, Dinah.

In 2 Samuel 13, we find another story that corroborates domestic violence as a crime of the *power-full* over the *power-less*. Tamar, daughter of King David, is abused by her half-brother Amnon. When she asks him to honor her with marriage and relieve her shame, he throws her out of his house. She is distraught, tears her robes and seeks help from her brother Absalom. After all, Tamar is now "damaged goods," and in the society of ancient Israel, no longer marriageable, consigned to her father's house...alive, but silenced. Absalom, David's favorite son, though pictured as angry, legitimizes the crime by advising her in verse 20, "Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother; do not take this to heart." These women of the Old Testament must have wondered...where is God that protected the patriarchs? The God who had a change of mind when Abraham, Isaac and Moses argued passionately with the Almighty?

We hope that God's ear was tuned to these women's pain even if Tamar and Dinah were not able to express their grief like the writer of Psalm 55...one of the Lament Psalms that we read earlier this evening. "It is not enemies who taunt me...But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend, with whom I kept pleasant company" (v 12-14). Domestic violence is an ancient and a modern crime. And like the crimes against Dinah and Tamar, it happens in rural areas and in the houses of kings...or in modern times, houses of the affluent. Houses like yours...and like mine...homes like Michelle Weldon's. Perhaps you've heard of Michelle; maybe you've read her book, *I Closed My Eyes*. I was overwhelmed when I read her testimony. An adjunct professor at Northwestern University, she lived just six blocks from me, but I didn't know her. She was raised in a loving family in a nice small town; she had three beautiful sons and was routinely abused by her lawyer husband. Like many victims and survivors, it took her nine years to leave, encouraged by "honeymoon" periods...respite from violence that did not last, but rather, escalated. She wrote:

"Surviving domestic violence is like walking away from a raging fire that has consumed your home, your life, and your self-definition. You are plagued with details of how this atrocious fire began, how it spread, and how it took so long for you to jump to safety. Sometimes it just starts with a forgotten match. And before you acknowledge the danger, your life is engulfed in flames."<sup>5</sup>

Amidst the violence of the ancient world and our contemporary neighborhoods, we also pause to ask: If God is all-powerful, why doesn't God stop these crimes against women and their children? And, we may also wonder...where do I stand in this continuum of domestic violence?

What can I do in the face of abuse by the *power-full* over the power-less, especially when Scripture appears to side with perpetrators and against victims of domestic violence.

Mary Ann Tolbert, professor at Vanderbilt University, points out that proof-texting -- referencing the Bible out of context -- has been employed by churches without regard to social location when it serves their purposes.<sup>6</sup> Classics include images of Christ-ordained subservience like Ephesians 5:22, "Wives be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord" or Luke 6:27-29, which seems to suggest "turning the other cheek" in response to abuse. Or what about Matthew 18:22, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times." This has been interpreted as a call for unlimited forgiveness in personal situations even though its context was that of settling arguments within the early church. It is helpful for us to stand in the shoes of early Christians who understood the Bible as inspirational, rather than authoritative. It enables us to take full responsibility for our theological and ethical decisions, including taking a stance against domestic violence.

So then, how might theology and ethics inform our actions going forward from this evening? In *The Cry of Tamar, Violence Against Women and the Church's Response*, Pamela Cooper-White lays out a number of myths about domestic violence together with some possible conversations with the survivors. It is one of several books that are on display this evening and that will be available in the church library in the near future. As Christian women standing against domestic violence it is important, first and foremost, to believe accusations of abuse and to put the victim's safety first. It is equally important to understand the professional resources that are available and to resist giving well-meaning advice that unwittingly faults the woman and protects the perpetrator...advice like, "just give him another chance; I'm sure he didn't mean it!"<sup>7</sup>

Some survivors are angry, wondering like Jesus, "Why has God forsaken me?" but others are filled with shame, thinking "How could I have made such a poor choice in a partner?" "What did I do to provoke his anger?" "Am I being punished by God for my sins?" Remember that a woman victimized by domestic violence has shown great courage in speaking up. Reflect on Michelle Weldon's nine years of silence. We can support our sisters by assuring them of God's love and helping to build a community of spiritual support. By spearheading the initiative mentioned earlier, *Turn Mourning into Dancing*, the Presbyterian Church USA is taking a stand against domestic violence, and we invite your participation.

However, you are taking an important step just by witnessing here this evening...by coming together to lift up this topic out of the shadows and into the light of these candles. By your presence you are standing up against domestic violence.

Personally, I am here on behalf of all of the women I don't know, but particularly on behalf of those that I do...especially my mother. Twenty-three years ago this summer I found letters of contrition tucked away in her antique secretary. They were from my father, written on scraps of paper. Some were over 40 years old at the time, but all were asking for God's forgiveness...and hers...for some insult or another. I was amazed that she had kept these letters. But now I wonder...maybe she needed them for all of the times that he didn't apologize for his demeaning comments and controlling behavior.

I didn't know the term "domestic violence" when I was growing up in the 50s and 60s...or even in 1978 when I read the letters. But I knew that it was wrong for him to deny my mother the use of the car because he'd paid for it. And I remember being terrified when he screamed in anger, and equally frightened when he refused to talk to us for two or three days. Physical violence or the threat of it may or may not have been part of their relationship...I'm really not sure. But so many other abuses were: intimidation, economic abuse, using me as a communication conduit, making threats and using male privilege to control.

These abuses collided with a whole host of positive experiences to create a very confusing model for my own covenant relationships as a young woman. It took me a long time to understand that I lived with domestic violence for over twenty years...but sometimes I am overwhelmed with sadness when I remember that my mother remained *mostly* silent for almost fifty years!

Tonight we are here to break silence...to give voice to the *power-less* who have been abused by the *power-full*...to honor...and to remember the cross of Jesus as a sign of hope for those suffering from all forms of violence throughout the world. As I remember my mother, and other friends who have survived domestic abuse, I stand with you...remembering your friends and loved ones. We stand together mourning loss, rejoicing with each survivor, and trusting that our God rejects abuse and mourns each woman's suffering. We stand with Dinah, and Tamar, and Michelle and all those we remember silently at this moment.

Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me." We remember not only to honor the past, but also to claim the present for the living and to create a future vision of how things might be. Amen.

---

<sup>xiv</sup> Keshgegian, Flora. *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 172.

<sup>2</sup> Cooper-White. *THE CRY OF TAMAR: Violence Against Women and the Church's Response*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 110.

<sup>3</sup> "Dating violence common among US teens: report," *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 2001; 286:572-579 [Reuters news online]; available from <http://oxygen.thriveonline.com/news/wires/2001>; Internet; accessed 1 August 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Diamant, Anita. *The Red Tent*. (New York: Piscador, 1997), 190.

<sup>5</sup> Weldon, Michelle, *I Closed My Eyes*. (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1997), xi.

<sup>6</sup> Tolbert, Mary Ann. "A New Teaching With Authority" in *Teaching the Bible: the discourses and politics of biblical pedagogy*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 174.

<sup>7</sup> Cooper-White, 110-117.

# Women, Violence, and the Church

## A Service of Confession and Healing

Prior to service, recruit four (4) worship leaders who will alternate sections to read. In the section containing stories of women, recruit four (4) voices, preferably survivors who are willing to be part of the service. Candle lighters can be selected from these participants or additional participants can be recruited. Have at least twenty votive candles for lighting. Collect stones to be placed in a basket and used during the service. These will be taken by members of the congregation upon leaving. We have included all that will be said during this service. The bulletins can be more of an outline, with congregational participation pieces included.

### SILENT PRAYER AND MEDITATION

*Every 15 seconds a woman in the US is subjected to violent abuse at the hands of her spouse or intimate partner, for a total of 4-6 million reported incidents per year. O Creator God, help us to change hearts and open minds. Amen. (Statistics from Striking Terror No More, pg. 91)*

### PRELUDE

*(A solo instrument, such as a recorder or flute, playing "When a Poor One" PH #407.)*

### CALL TO WORSHIP

**ALL: We gather today to worship a living God, a God who hears our cries, shares our tears, knows our anger, and is steadfast now and always. We gather today to be in each other's presence as we remember, confess, name and respond to the violence in our lives, in our families, our churches and our communities. Let us walk this way together.** (From *Striking Terror No More*, pg. 89.)

HYMN      "O God, You Are My God"      Presbyterian Hymnal (PH) #198

### INTRODUCTION (Two leaders share)

ONE: Today, we gather for a service of naming. We will name the dimensions and dynamics of the serious problem of violence against women. It is all around us. Violence is the root of many other problems in our society, yet many times the church remains silent. Today, the silence will be broken. We will name the victims of abuse and mourn their lost lives. We will share their stories of loss, pain and alienation through poems and reflections. We will share words of hope from survivors and learn about the process of recovering from the effects of violence. *[Optional, see Appendix: We will name those who are justice-makers in this community.]* We will name the God who is present in and through all our efforts to create lives free from violence.

ONE: With the difficult reality of violence in mind, let us open our hearts to God's call in our midst. We cannot hide from the truth; in fact, knowing the truth, however painful, can set us free to respond with vigor and work for justice in the world that God so loves.

## CALL TO CONFESSION

ONE: Dear Friends, God knows and understands the heart of each one of us. When we confess our sins as a community, we do not usually separate anyone from the whole body, but make our confession as one unit. Today, however, we want to be especially sensitive to the fact that the body of Christ is divided, for some are abused, some are abusers, and some condone the abuse by looking away. As the community of faith, let us join with God and with one another in making our confession before God. (From *Striking Terror No More*, pg. 90)

## PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**ALL: O God, You know our hearts, our minds, our feelings and thoughts. You know the heavy stones that weigh down our spirits. We cry for all that cannot be saved. Comfort us as we mourn the loss of women's lives to violence. Strengthen us as we break the silence, confront evil and cry out for justice. Help us see the chains that bind us and the chains that we place around others. Set us free to walk in the fullness of life that is promised to all people. Let us live into that promise with every moment of our lives. Amen.** (From *Striking Terror No More*, pg. 92)

## ASSURANCE OF PARDON

ONE: Sisters and brothers, hear the good news! There is no sin so large, no shortcoming so great that it can separate us from the love of God. For all who truly desire new life, God offers forgiveness and new opportunities for healing and wholeness in our lives. Accept God's grace and live! (From "Family Ministries and Seniors," Saskatchewan Conference Human Development and Support Committee, Vo. 8, Spring, 1993.)

MEDITATION HYMN "Open My Eyes" (vs. 1) Presbyterian Hymnal #324

## INVITATION TO NAMING THE VIOLENCE AMONG US AND WITHIN US

ONE: Many go unnamed, unknown as victims of abuse. Yet we can name some. May God bless the naming of these women.

*Worship Notes: Names of people in the community are collected before the service with at least four (4) readers, alternating. After each reading, a Candlelighter will light a candle in memory of the person/s named. Read the names dramatically to give a sense of the urgency and breadth of this growing problem.*

## MEDITATION HYMN "Open My Eyes" (vs. 2)

### STORIES AND POETRY OF WOMEN

ONE: Let us listen now to words of women and enter into their experience even as we also bring our own painful memories. By touching our pain, by breaking the silence with our stories, we can discover the truth. Remember that Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (*John* 8:32) Let us be in solidarity with our sisters so that together we can build a community of resistance and hope. Knowing the truth will set us free for constructive action.

*[Voice 1 walks slowly to the center of the circle, or to the front of the chancel, carrying a basket of stones. She sits on a chair and begins reading.]*

**Voice 1:** Three days ago he beat me. Now with roses at my bedside he whispers to me gently, running his fingers through my hair. With the same hands that had been clenched around my throat. The same hands that held the bottle for our baby. The same hands that held a pillow over my face when I screamed for help. The same hands that once held mine in marriage vow. The same hands clenched had broken my nose. The hands that reached out to catch me when I was pregnant and tripped. The hands that hung up the phone when friends and family called for me. Hands that held me up when my sister died. Hands that grabbed me jealously. The hands dripping with blood and kindness. Hands that want to claim my body! Cringing, I pray to God "Oh no!"

*A Poem, "The Apology" by Eileen Hudon. Reprinted from Sojourner Shelter Newsletter. Used with permission of the author.*

*[Voice 1 sets the basket of stones on the floor and remains seated in her chair. Voices 2 and 3 come and stand behind her, back-to-back, facing outward in two directions. They should stand behind Voice 1, not touching her and seeming to be speaking as the two sides of her brain; Voices 2 and 3 represent the inward struggle of Voice 1. Voice 2 looks at a wedding or photo album when she speaks; Voice 3 carries a Bible and seems to be reading from it.]*

**Voice 2:** I am in my 30's and so is my husband. I have a high school diploma and am presently attending a local college trying to obtain the additional education I need. My husband is a college graduate and a professional in his field. We are both attractive and, for the most part, respected and well liked. We have four children and live in a middle-class home with all the comfort we could possibly ever want. I have everything except a life without fear.

**Voice 3:** My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

**Voice 2:** For most of my married life, I have been periodically beaten by my husband. What do I mean by beaten? I mean painful bruises, swelling, bleeding wounds, unconsciousness and combinations of these things. I've been kicked in the abdomen when I was visibly pregnant. I have been punched and kicked in the head, chest, face and abdomen more times than I can count. I have been slapped for saying something about politics, for having a different view about religion, for crying. I have been threatened when he has had a bad day and when he has had a good day. After each beating my husband has left the house and remained away for hours.

**Voice 3:** But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads.

**Voice 2:** Few people have ever seen my black and blue face or swollen lips, because I stayed indoors afterward, feeling ashamed. Usually the first response to this story is "Why didn't you seek help?"

**Voice 3:** "Commit your cause to God; let God deliver, let God rescue the one in whom God delights!"

**Voice 2:** Early in our marriage I went to a clergyman who, after a few visits, told me that my husband meant no real harm, he was just confused and insecure. So I was encouraged to be more tolerant and understanding. Most important, I was told to forgive him the beatings just as Christ had forgiven from the cross. I did that, too.

**Voice 3:** Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mothers' breast. On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

**Voice 2:** Things continued. Next time I turned to a doctor. I was given pills to relax me and told to take things a little easier. I was just too nervous.

I turned to a friend, and when her husband found out, he accused me of either making things up or exaggerating the situation. She was told to stay away from me. She didn't but she could no longer really help me. Just by believing me she was made to feel disloyal.

I turned to a professional family-guidance agency. I was told that my husband needed help and that I should find a way to control the incidents. I couldn't control the beatings, that was the whole point of my seeking help. At the agency I found I had to defend myself against the suspicion that I wanted to be hit!

**Voice 3:** Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.

**Voice 2:** I called the police one time. They not only did not respond to the call, they called several hours later to ask if things had settled down. I could have been dead by then!

**Voice 3:** I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.

**Voice 2:** I have nowhere to go if it happens again. No one wants to take in a woman with four children. Even if there were someone kind enough to care, no one wants to become involved in what is commonly referred to as a "domestic situation."

**Voice 3:** O God, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid!

*Litany by Carol J. Adams drawing on a letter from a battered wife found in Battered Wives by Del Marlin and Psalm 22:1-2,6-15,19 NRSV adapted; reprinted from Working Together, Vol. 1, No.6. Adapted and used with permission.*

SCRIPTURE [This may be danced or interpreted liturgically as it is read.]

ONE: Hear these words of the Psalmist and imagine that she is a woman caught in a violent marriage: *Psalm 55: 4-8, 12-14, 20-21 NRSV*

**Voice 4:**

God! I keep saying  
God I can't do it not this time  
the pain the pain  
sure you can honey she says  
you can I know you can  
but God i don't know this time  
the pain the pain  
can't be hidden honey  
I won't leave God says  
and wipes my brow and kisses me even though she didn't have to  
God i keep saying  
God i hurt and she says oh honey I know you do.

*A Poem entitled "Survivor. by Martha Popson. Reprinted from **Daughters of Sarah**, Vol. 13, No.4, July-August, 1987. Used with permission.*

RESPONSE TO THE PAIN

**All: We have heard the anguish of a battered wife. We have also heard the cry of lamentation from our biblical faith. We have cried to the God of our fathers and mothers, but we fear that we have not been heard. The patriarchal mask that God has been given has caused humiliation, guilt, and despair among women. Too often the victim herself has been made to feel that she is the cause of the problem. We must break the silence! We must strip off the mask of patriarchy given to our God so that the God of justice, healing and hope will be revealed.**

[Optional] LITURGICAL DANCE "The Prayer of A Woman" By Kate French

MEDITATION HYMN "Open My Eyes" (vs. 3)

PH #324

REMEMBERING THOSE AFFECTED

ONE: O God of compassion, you feel our pain and cry with us in our passion.

**ALL: God of justice, you rage with us against the injustice of our experiences of violence and abuse. Be with us today.**

ONE: As sisters of faith and hope, gathered here today, we remember:

**Left Side: Our mothers, who had few choices; who did what they had to; who resisted sometimes quietly, sometimes loudly; who carried the secrets of their abuse silently in their hearts.**

**Right Side: Our sisters, who were made the scapegoat; who said, "No!" but to no avail; who thought they were protecting us; who were given tranquilizers to quiet their rage; who carried the secrets of their abuse silently in their hearts.**

**Left Side: Our neighbors, whose cries we heard in the night, whose bruises we saw in the day, who fought back and paid the price, who carried the secret of their abuse silently in their hearts.**

**Right Side: Our girlfriends, who spent so much time at our house, not wanting to go home; whom everyone thought were just shy and quiet; who carried the secrets of their abuse silently in their hearts.**

**Left Side: Ourselves, who may have tried to tell but were ignored; who were not protected by anyone; who were not believed; who carry the secrets of our abuse silently in our hearts.**

**Right Side: We remember and mourn the loss of childhood; the loss of creativity; the loss of vocation; the loss of relationships; the loss of time; the cost of resources required for healing; the enormous waste of humanity caused by sexual and domestic violence.**

**All: We remember and mourn those who have not survived; whose lives were taken by someone's violence; who died in despair never knowing justice.**

*(From *Striking Terror No More*, pg. 96)*

*[Voice 1 picks up the basket of stones, stands up, puts the basket of stones on the chair and exits. Voices 2 and 3 follow.]*

ONE: Eleanor Roosevelt said, "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness!" I invite you to come forward and light a candle or bring a flower out of love for a woman you would remember. Call out her name as you light her candle. Let us hold these named sisters silently in our hearts.

## NAMING OUR SISTERS

*["There Is A Balm In Gilead" should be played softly in the background during the naming. When publicizing the service, encourage persons to bring a candle or flower with them to remember a woman who was a victim of violence, or provide a vase of individual flowers and dozens of candles for the use of participants at this time.]*

*[After everyone who wants to remember someone has come forward, a worship leader continues]*

ONE: Let us hear the names, ages and home towns of the victims of sexual or domestic violence who have died in our state during the past year.

*[Leader pauses as names are read from a list given to participants. Each person reading a name may light a candle after she reads it, or if there is a long list, the names may be read and a large candle lit for all of them at the completion of the reading of their names, ages, etc. When this is finished, a leader continues.]*

ONE: I light this candle [or bring a flower] for women who are victims of violence but whose names we are unable to speak publicly. Let us hold them in our hearts and prayers.

ONE: God of compassion, you feel our pain and cry with us in our passion.

**ALL: God of justice, you rage with us against the injustice of these experiences. Let our cry of "never again" come unto you.**

*[The music "There Is A Balm In Gilead" should stop here.]*

## CONFESSION OF COMPLICITY

**ALL: O merciful one, we confess that by our silence and inaction we have passed by on the other side, leaving a sister suffering by the side of the road. We confess that in our fear, we have hesitated and turned away from life adding to the pain and suffering. Bring us to repentance.**

**O Holy One, open our eyes to see the violence in our lives, within us and among us. Open our mouths to name what we see and to acknowledge our own pain. Open our hearts to let in the pain and suffering of family members, friends, child victims, adult survivors, our neighbors. Open our mouths to call to account those who have harmed others. Be merciful and bring us back to life in Christ. Amen.** (From *Striking Terror No More*, pg. 92)

## LITANY OF HEALING

ONE: God of grace, you nurture us with a love deeper than any we know, and your will for us is always healing and salvation.

**ALL: We praise you and thank you, O God.**

ONE: God of love, you enter our lives, our pain and our brokenness, and you stretch out your healing hands to us wherever we are.

**ALL: We praise you and thank you, O God.**

ONE: God of strength, you will us with your presence and send us forth with love and healing to all whom we meet.

**ALL: We praise you and thank you, O God.**

ONE: God of love, we ask you to hear the prayers of your people.

**ALL: Hear us, O God of life.**

ONE: Touch with your healing power the minds and hearts of all who suffer from sickness, injury, or disability, and make them whole again.

**ALL: Hear us, O God of life.**

ONE: Touch with your healing power the minds and hearts of all who live in confusion or doubt, and fill them with your light.

**ALL: Hear us, O God of life.**

ONE: Touch with your healing power the minds and hearts of all who are burdened by anguish, despair, or isolation and set them free in love.

**ALL: Hear us, O God of life.**

ONE: Break the bonds of those who are imprisoned by fear, compulsion, secrecy, and silence.

**ALL: Come with your healing power, O God.**

ONE: Fill with peace those who grieve over separation and loss.

**ALL: Come with you healing power, O God.**

ONE: Restore to wholeness all those who have been broken in life or in spirit by violence within their families; restore to wholeness all those who have been broken in life or in spirit by violence within our Family of Nations; restore to them the power of your love; and give to them the strength of your presence.

**ALL: Come, O God, and restore us to wholeness and love.**

ONE: Let us now name before God those, including ourselves, for whom we seek healing:

We lift up before you this day all those who have died of violence that they may have rest

**ALL: In that place where there is no pain or grief, but life eternal.**

ONE: O God, in you all is turned to light, and brokenness is healed. Look with compassion on us and on those for whom we pray, that we may be re-created in wholeness, in love and in compassion for one another.

**ALL: Amen.**

## OFFERING

ONE: Prayerfully consider how you have been blessed economically and give in thankful response and hope. May God's blessings in your life be multiplied through the gift you give today.

## OFFERTORY

### PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**ALL: We offer ourselves to you, O God our Creator. We offer our hands. Use healing touch to comfort our sisters, brothers, and children who are afraid. We offer our eyes and ears. May we see and hear the signs and stories of violence so that all may have someone with them in their pain and confusion. We offer our hearts and our tears as their hurt and sorrow echo within us. We offer our own stories of violence. We offer all our skills. Use our gifts to end violence. We offer our faith, our hope and our love. May our encounters with violence bring us closer to you and to each other. May these monetary offerings be pleasing in your sight. All this we ask through Jesus Christ who knows the pain of violence. Amen.** (From *Striking Terror No More*, pg. 93)

### THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE

ONE: We are women of faith. Many of us are active church members. We have heard the cries of our sisters. Many of us know violence in our midst. What shall be the church's response?

ONE: Encourage your pastor to get training to help address the issues of sexual and domestic violence. Ask clergy to speak out against sexual and domestic violence from the pulpit.

ONE: Invite staff from local programs to make presentations to every group in the church.

ONE: Provide a place in your church building for a support group for survivors.

ONE: Volunteer at a battered women's shelter.

ONE: Teach children they have a right to their bodies. Don't force them to hug or kiss adults.

ONE: Encourage clergy to offer pre-marriage counseling dealing with equality, conflict, violence and control.

ONE: Contribute to the financial support of local and national sexual and domestic violence programs.

ONE: What ideas do you have? What needs to be done in this community? What is happening that needs more support? What would help you or other survivors of violence? How do you think churches, church people and concerned people might respond? I invite each of us to name in our hearts one thing that we will commit ourselves to do to help break the cycle of sexual and domestic violence. What will be your response?

### CLOSING PRAYER

**ALL: Loving and Compassionate God, today we have named the violence! We have broken the silence! We have felt your presence in our midst! We have shared ideas for action! We have lit candles in the darkness! We have named, remembered and celebrated**

**many people that you so love. Bless our time together, our knowing and that which we will do in the future. Give us persistent hearts and strong bodies for the work that will end violence in our midst. Send your Holy Spirit especially to our churches and church leaders. Open their eyes, their mouths, their minds and their hearts to do justice for the women in our community. In the name and the spirit of Jesus, we pray. Amen.**

\*HYMN "Open My Eyes" (Vs. 4)

PH #324

\*SENDING FORTH

ONE: During the closing music, please come forward and take a stone with you from the basket, as a reminder to pray for all those we have named today. Let it also remind you to be solidly persistent in the action that you are committed to do to help end violence against women.

BENEDICTION

ONE: Now, go forth with the courage and persistence of the widow, saying "never again" to the abuse of women and children. Go forth to make justice in your life, in your family, in your church, in your community. Go forth knowing that we follow in Jesus' steps empowered by the Holy Spirit. Go forth rejoicing in this knowledge! Amen.

POSTLUDE [Optional SOLO. See Appendix on next page.]

## APPENDIX:

### **Optional prayer to be added after Confession of Complicity.**

#### NAMING OF JUSTICE-MAKERS

ONE: There are many in our community, including some of you who are here, who serve survivors of sexual and domestic violence: counselors who work to heal the wounds caused by violence, advocates who are committed to public policy changes, and others who work to stop the cycle of violence. We want to recognize those who heed Jesus' words not to give up, who are persistent in demanding justice, over and over and over again. This is a time to remember them, to name those in our midst or those persons you know who have given time, energy, resources, vision, courage, persistence and friendship to victims of violence. You may even name yourself as one who is committed to doing justice in your locale. Speak the names now of justice-makers, either aloud or in your heart. Then we will bring our offerings of thanksgiving for their lives and for the work that God is doing in our midst.

*[Pause for the naming of justice-makers.]*

### **Optional Reading after “The Church’s Response”**

ONE: To be a witness means coming to terms with stones... and with believing. On Easter morning the women encountered a series of strange occurrences. The stone had been rolled from the door of the tomb. They saw things never seen before, But nobody would believe them. The stone was a seal, and the seal was broken, But nobody would believe them. The hearts of the leadership had turned to stone. No wonder they couldn't believe them. The hearts of the women were as heavy as stone because no body would believe them. Stone-cold, stone-deaf, stone-walled... Words all too familiar. Words that break our hearts. Words well known to women, who come up against immovable obstacles at almost every turn. Stones are the tests of believers. Do you believe the Living God can roll any stone aside?

"To Be a Witness" ...from a Liberation ritual entitled "You Shall Be My Witnesses" pg. 99 in the book: *Woman Prayer, Woman Song*, Miriam Therese Winter, Crossroads, NY, 1990.

# For of Such are the Kingdom of Heaven

A Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Patricia Ramsden

Luke 9: 46-48; Mark 10: 13-16

A little girl, four years old, sat huddled in a corner of her bedroom, when her daddy walked in. When he saw her hiding there, he walked over and stooped down, asking her what in the world was wrong. She didn't need to be afraid. Didn't she know that he would always keep her safe? He picked her up in his arms and carried her to her bed, sat her down in his lap and soothed her gently, talking to her about how he would always keep her safe and would never, ever, let anyone hurt her.

Then, just as she started to relax in his arms, his hands started to go where no daddy's hands should ever go and he raped her yet again — violently, forcibly — keeping her quiet with one hard fist hitting into her face. When it was over, he wiped her off gently, cleaning away all the evidence he could, telling her how much he loved her and how she was daddy's good little girl. He told her it was all going to be OK and he would always keep her safe.

But one day, the little girl's mother found out. Something hadn't been cleaned up well enough and she came storming down the stairs to where the little girl was playing, screaming words the child didn't even understand, calling the little girl horrible, evil names I can't repeat here. Then the mother grew deadly calm, as if she had gone away inside. She took the child by the hand and told her she knew what had to be done. She led the little girl into the bathroom, shaking and terrified. Then the mother hurt the little girl — hurt her down there where her father had hurt her too, and the mother told the little girl that she was a wicked, evil, dirty little thing and that she was never to let her father do that to her again.

Now that's not a pretty story. But it is a true one. I know because it's a part of my story. It all happened to me. Time and time again, it happened to me. Child abuse doesn't just happen to those people over there. It doesn't just happen in the poorest parts of town or in broken homes. Sometimes it happens in the house next door — and sometimes, sometimes, it happens in our houses. According to a 1992 study done by the Children's Defense Fund on abuse in the United States, sometime today, sometime tomorrow, sometime during every day of the year, three children will die at the hands of their parents' abuse. That's over a thousand children a year killed by their parents, and over 1.9 million additional children who are abused or neglected in this country alone. And those are the reported cases. There are any number of cases, like my own, that are never reported. But what can we do in the face of such horror?

The first thing we can do is to be aware, to watch and to listen. So often we just don't want to know the reality of what is going on, so we close our eyes to signs of neglect, even the obvious signs of bruises and cuts and burns. We're afraid to know. Afraid to speak out — and because of our fear, children suffer — and some children die. But the awful truth is, sometimes the signs of abuse are not so obvious. Sometimes they are subtle.

No one ever hurt me where the hurt would show; and, in order to survive, I made the memories go away. They call it incidental amnesia. I made it never have happened and I created a daddy who loved me and a mommy who cared.

I showed up for school, though, before the doors were even unlocked. The janitors would find me playing on the playground or huddled in a doorway waiting to get into my safe haven. I was the child who always stayed late to help the teacher straighten up, looking for any way to make the day not end. Sometimes the signs of abuse are subtle and we have to be able to read them and be willing to open the way for a cry of help to come into being. We have to be willing to see what we don't want to know and we have to be willing to listen to the children. Too often we are told that children who are abused did try to tell — to tell a teacher, a friend, a counselor, a minister, a member of their church.

In the face of such messages as “If you tell, I will kill you,” “If you tell, you'll be sent away,” and “If you tell, no one will believe you.” Children have taken the risk to tell, to ask for help and they were sent away — told not to make things up, told that it couldn't possibly be that bad, told to be good and to do whatever their parents tell them because parents always know best and their parents will always love them. We need to listen to the children and we need to be certain that every child knows that they matter, that what they say matters.

There is an essential element there. The most important thing we can do for our children — for all of the children — is to let them know that they matter. That they are important. That they are cherished and loved. At times, the greatest protection we can give is a safe haven of love in a world broken apart by pain. You see, the stark reality is we will not be able to rescue every child. We will not even be able to recognize every child in need of being rescued, no matter how vigilant we may be. Of course, when we are concerned for a child's safety we must talk to their parents and we must file reports when that proves necessary. Above all, we must be certain that we do not abuse. That we do not strike out.

That we do not belittle. That we do not destroy. And we must ensure that every child, every child, has one safe place to be — a place where they know they are loved and cared for and accepted no matter what — a place where they know that they too are a precious child of God's, worthy of being saved, and that place is and should ever be the church. In a world of physical and emotional abuse, it was the church that told me how much I was loved. It was the church who told me about a man named Jesus. A gentle, strong, kind man who I could trust — who promised a new life in a new place and who gave me the strength and courage I needed to claim that life so different from the one I knew at home.

It was at church that I learned of the wonderful power of God, a power stronger than any evil and any hate, a power stronger than death itself. A power and a love that would save me. It was at church that I met the people who made all those words a reality.

People who lived out the life of faith, who struggled with sin, and who worked to overcome it. I met women like Polly who folded us in her arms of love with comforting hugs and fed us marvelous homemade pies still warm from her oven and who never failed to tell us we were miracles in the making. I met Sunday School teachers of incredible patience who taught the basics of the faith and who allowed us to argue and debate, who listened to us even as teens and valued who we were. I remember preachers who played Red Rover with us in the church yard and who told us in the pulpit that God died to save us from sin and evil and that he rose again from the dead just to prove to us that he had done it. All those people --- all those men and

women — some nameless to me now — gave me life, saved my life, with their gift of faith and their acts of love, without even knowing the enormous importance of what they were doing. It's true that none of them whisked me away from the nightmare of my home. None of them could erase the pain of all the years of abuse. But that does not diminish, can never diminish, the magnitude of what they did do.

And I would maintain that what they did is what Christ asks each of us to do: to live the life of faith and to share his love so that love might touch and save those who are dying from the lack of it. As we think of the children — all of the children — and we wonder what we can do to make a difference for them in their world, I think the best we can do is to listen to a man named Jesus who said bring the children to me. Don't hold them back. Let me keep them safe. Let me tell them how much they are loved. And as for you, go and do likewise. Love the children, for of such are the kingdom of heaven.

*Comment*

*Dr. Ramsden's autobiographical sermon serves as an example for preachers willing to speak about their own experiences of violence from the pulpit. The choice of when, where, and how to speak of one's own experience of abuse has to come from within, but can be transforming for speaker and listener alike. Pastors and other religious leaders who have been victims or perpetrators can exert a powerful healing effect on the community if the experiences have been healed sufficiently within.*

# "WHAT IF..."

## WHAT IF YOUR CHURCH HELD A CANDLELIGHT VIGIL TO HONOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

**Vigil:** *A peaceful event to show solidarity and support for a cause or issue.*

***"I go to vigils to draw oil for my lamp."***

Rev. Thelma Burgonio-Watson, FaithTrust Institute

Domestic Violence Awareness Month evolved from the first Day of Unity, observed in October 1981 by the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. The intent was to connect battered women's advocates across the nation who were working to end violence against women and their children. The Day of Unity soon became a special week with a range of activities that were conducted at local, state and national levels. These activities were as varied and diverse as the program sponsoring them but had common themes: mourning those who have died because of domestic violence, celebrating those who have survived, and connecting those who work to end violence.

In October 1987, the first Domestic Violence Awareness Month was observed. That same year the first national toll-free hotline was begun. In 1989, the first Domestic Violence Awareness Month Commemorative Legislation was passed by the U.S. Congress.

**What IF** Presbyterian Churches around the country took the leadership in their communities and organized vigils during Domestic Violence Awareness Month? As people of faith, we know how to do this well. It is through our faith and our commitment to Jesus Christ that we continue to work for justice. It is through our faith communities that we work and struggle together. This is a positive message we have to offer our brothers and sisters working against violence.

So many of us have been impacted by domestic violence and it is a time to come together to raise awareness and show support, not only for victims, but for all who work to end violence against women and children. Vigils can also give us the passion and energy we need to continue this difficult work.

**What IF** we worked together with the local shelters, law enforcement, social services, survivors and families that have lost members due to domestic violence? We could include other faith communities, local musicians, poets, artists, to help with planning, etc.

**What IF** we used some of the following strategies in our planning?

- Plan as far ahead as possible and involve the voices of battered women.
- Work with your local and state domestic violence programs and coalitions. They will be thrilled that you are willing to take this on!

## Worship resources

- Be creative. Include music, poetry, dance, and moments of silence and be sure to have the voice of a battered woman! It is best that most of these be shared by women.
- Purple is the color of Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Wear purple ribbons all of October. Consider wearing purple clothes all month. By wearing the ribbons, you will have an opportunity to educate others about domestic violence.
- Light candles to honor victims. Participants can possibly name out loud those they have known and light a candle in honor of that person. Candles represent HOPE.
- Display the Clothesline Project to honor victims/survivors. See [www.clotheslineproject.org](http://www.clotheslineproject.org).
- Use the Silent Witness Display to remind those attending about those that have died. You can make your own. [www.silentwitness.net](http://www.silentwitness.net).
- Study *Turn Mourning Into Dancing, A Policy Statement on Healing Domestic Violence* approved by the 213<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2001). This policy is an excellent resource with education, scripture, resources and a study and action guide.
- Use *Anguished Hearts* in your church, a seven-session study guide on domestic violence that goes along with *Turn Mourning Into Dancing*. It was developed in partnership with The Presbytery Peacemaking Program, the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy, and the Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA).
- Tell others about PHEWA and the Presbyterians Against Domestic Violence Network (PADVN). Become a member and share in our work – [www.pcusa.org/phewa/padvn](http://www.pcusa.org/phewa/padvn).
- The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence has additional resources for Domestic Violence Awareness Month – [www.ncadv.org](http://www.ncadv.org).
- FaithTrust Institute [www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org) will have faith-based related resources.
- Check the website of PADVN for past years' resources for Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Each year has a different focus.

As we know, it takes us all to spread the word that domestic violence hurts everyone—and that it will not end until we **all** take responsibility for speaking out when we see or hear violence around us.