

“When Sin Hits Close to Home”

On Domestic Violence

Pastor Rich Knight
Trinitarian Congregational Church
Sept. 14, 2014
Genesis 12:10-20 Matthew 5:1-10

I was going to read & reflect on, II Samuel 13:1-21 - one of the most disturbing passages in all the Bible - the rape of Tamar. Instead we'll look at Genesis 12:10-20. It's also hard to read, but it helps us think about what we've been forced to think about all week, the issue of domestic violence. We've all seen the assault of Janay Palmer by the NFL running back, Ray Rice. It's been impossible to escape that awful video this week. As dark as the video is, it does help shine the light on the issue of domestic violence. Genesis 12 does not involve a physical assault, but Abraham allows his wife Sarah to be sexually assaulted in order to save his own neck. Keep in mind that the Bible does not always tell us what should have happened. The Bible tells us what actually happened. And sometimes we're told of an awful sin so that we might see the origins and devastating impact of the sin. Let's take a look: **Genesis 12:10-20.**

Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to reside there as an alien, for the famine was severe in the land. When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know well that you are a woman beautiful in appearance; and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife’; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account.”

When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. When the officials of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house. And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female slaves, female donkeys, and camels. But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. So Pharaoh called Abram, and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her, and be gone.” And Pharaoh gave his men orders concerning him; and they set him on the way, with his wife and all that he had.

Matthew 5:1-10 Whenever we read a troubling part of scripture, we need to hear a beautiful passage to follow it up.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.” “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Let’s start with some statistics.

Every 3 seconds someone in America is a victim of domestic violence.

Every 3 seconds. (Renee will give us a feel for that on the piano. Every note she strikes is an act of violence by an intimate partner.)

85% of the time the victim is the woman.

1 in every 6 women in America has been stalked during their lifetime.

1 in every 5 women has been raped.

1 in every 4 women has been assaulted by an intimate partner.

The number of US troops killed in Iraq & Afghanistan is 6,614. - a terrible number.

During this same time period the number of women in America who were killed as a result of domestic violence: 11,766.

Domestic abuse cuts across ethnicity.

African Americans and Hispanic Americans do not have higher incidents of domestic violence.

The only ethnic groups that do are Native Americans and Alaskan Natives - most likely due to high rates of alcoholism & unemployment.

We might not think of this as an issue in such a nice, small town as ours. Does domestic violence occur in the suburbs? It sure does. In the 3 towns I’ve served as a pastor, I always had the opportunity to ask a police officer this question: “What types of calls do you get the most?” “Domestic disputes. You’d be surprised how many of those we get.” It’s a story as old as time.

In Genesis 12 Abraham & Sarah are in Egypt, because of a famine they forced to flee there. Apparently Sarah was quite a beautiful woman. Abraham feared for his life, afraid that he would be killed so that someone could take Sarah as their wife. Think about what that says about the treatment of women. So Abraham came up with a plan. Sarah is to say, "He's my brother," so they won't kill him. Please forgive me, but it's similar to encountering a wild animal in the wilderness and throwing the animal a piece of meat in hopes of escaping. In this case, Sarah is the piece of meat that Abraham uses to escape with his life. She is taken in to Pharaoh and becomes one of his wives. Then a plague hits the land of Egypt.

Back then they believed that severe weather was a sign that God or the gods were not happy. Pharaoh comes to find out the truth about Sarah and he is furious with Abraham. What's fascinating is that in this passage the "godless" Pharaoh comes off as having better morals than Abraham! Pharaoh feels violated - "What is this you have done to me?" The text doesn't mention how Sarah must have felt. One can only begin to imagine.

In the Ray Rice Video doesn't he treat his then fiancé as a piece of property, or a meat? When they slowed the tape down Rice is seen to spit on her twice, prior to hitting her. After he knocks her out he drags her out of the elevator like it's an inconvenience and drops her on the floor. Her dress has come up over her waist; he doesn't care. Experts point out that it's likely Rice and Janay witnessed domestic violence in their homes growing up. As much as they probably hated to see it, it can become part of the script of one's life.

Adrian Peterson, the Minnesota Vikings running back, was arrested for injuring his 4 yr old son. Peterson is listed at 217 lbs. All muscle. How much does his 4 yr old boy weigh? Not much. Peterson disciplined his son with the same form of discipline he received as a child - a stick, a branch with the leaves removed, called a switch when used for a whoppin, as Peterson called it. He struck his son over and over and over again, causing injuries all up & down the back of the boy's body, just like the whoppin's Peterson had endured as a boy. From generation to generation.

Abraham's Son Isaac learned well from his father. Later on in the book of Genesis, Isaac pulls the same "She's my sister" trick with his wife, Rebecca. From generation to generation. Hopefully, this past week can change things.

One thing that's become painfully clear this week is that many in authority simply "don't get it." They don't understand how big of a problem this is and they don't understand the dynamics of domestic abuse.

1. NFL Commissioner, Roger Goodell, knew the truth about what Ray Rice had done. Rice told the Commissioner when they met last Spring. That's what led to the big 2 game suspension. But the Commissioner didn't understand the unwellness of not only Ray Rice but of Janay as well - how victims often blame themselves, often defend the abuser and live in fear of leaving and being abused again. He allowed the fuzziness of that to blur the lines concerning the violence that had been committed.

2. Rice's team the Ravens knew the truth.

General Manager Ozzie Newsome: "There was nothing on the video that surprised us. Ray told us what he did." The Ravens did not discipline Rice at all. All summer long they told us what a "Great guy" Rice is. It took the video for them to truly understand. That's the good that can come of this - those in positions of power can come to understand domestic violence.

3. Several incidents on college campuses recently highlight this same truth, that we have a long way to go.

A. Students at the University of Kansas protested this past week about the fact that college administrators use the term "non-consensual sex" instead of calling it what it is: rape.

B. A Columbia University Student has been carrying around her bed wherever she goes in protest of the college not punishing the young man who raped her. Her point is her bed is to be a private and safe place, and it wasn't.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the Peacemakers."

Blessed are they whose actions lead to peace. Blessed are they who seek peace, who pursue peace. Peace in the Bible means wholeness, wellness, Shalom. We need to treat one another in such a way that there is more peace in the world, more Shalom (peace/harmony with justice).

Jesus also said, "Blessed are the meek."

"Meek" is an interesting word in Greek. It means, "strength under control." It's strength harnessed for its intended purpose. It doesn't mean weakness. It's strength under control. For example, a horse that's been broken or trained and responds to the reins is called meek - strength under control, strength harnessed for good. We men need to learn meekness - strength under control.

A couple of thoughts in closing:

1. Our faith has a long tradition of Non-Violence, using non-violent means to achieve our goals. Jesus told Peter to “Put away the sword.” He said the Peacemakers were the ones doing God’s work. We must be non-violent with our words and our actions. We must model this - in our homes, our workplaces, our church.

2. The church must be a safe place.

Safe from abuse. Safe from violence. Safe from bullying. Safe from the abuse of power. Especially safe for women & children. The church must be a safe place where we can all find healing.

I’d like to close by praying for victims of domestic violence.

This prayer was written by Mark Herringshaw:

“God of peace, there are many places and many people who do not experience your peace. Right now there are many, many women and children who live under the dark weight of the fear of violence right in their own homes. We pray for your protection, and for wisdom for friends and officials to help bring that right protection to them. We pray for the many men who themselves feel powerless and confused about their relationships. We ask that you would help them find healthy ways to work out their frustrations and to find hope without resorting to destructive impulses. God, work in our country to stem this epidemic. We ask for your perfect peace...”