

Bible study – No means No!

Invocation:

O Divine Wisdom, come upon us, sustain us with your loving arms, move us with your breath of life, pour upon us your light, your warmth and your power. Open our ears and hearts to receive your word. Move us to speak out justice and dignity. Amen

Song

Starting from context:

It is estimated that 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives. However, some national studies show that up to 70 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime

Worldwide, more than 700 million women alive today were married as children (below 18 years of age). Of those women, more than 1 in 3—or some 250 million—were married before 15. Child brides are often unable to effectively negotiate safe sex, leaving them vulnerable to early pregnancy as well as sexually transmitted infections, including HIV

- See more at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures#sthash.5eSUKbta.dpuf>

Seek information from your own context: how is the issue of violence against women and gender based violence treated in the public arena, in your culture? How are the laws? What is the involvement of the church/es? Collect all information before hand, and build with the group a reality check list about the theme.

Be prepared for some testimonies! Some women can feel the freedom and the need to talk about their own situation – be prepared to listen and to help, according to her own decisions. Do not force any decision. Allow space to talk and listen; allow space for crying and healing.

A prayer, a song and joining hands, embracing the pain and struggle of so many women and girls, naming them, remembering that they are persons, human beings can close this moment.

Dramatic Bible Reading (2 Samuel Chapter 13)

(Reader 1 and 3 take their places at 1st podium and 2nd podium respectively. Reader 2 calls out her part from among the congregation.)

Reader 1: (at 1st podium)

¹⁹ But Tamar put ashes on her head, and tore the long robe that she was wearing; she put her hand on her head, and went away, crying aloud as she went.

Reader 2: *(from among the congregation):* Wait? What's happening? Who is this Tamar?

Reader 1: Tamar is David's daughter and Absalom's sister

Reader 2: *(from among the congregation)*

Wait! Go back.

Is this the David who killed the giant Goliath with a stone, the famous King David – poet, lover, statesman, the man “after God's own heart”?

Reader 1

Yes – and also the one who seduced Bathsheba, the wife of his commander Uriah, and arranged for Uriah, to be killed in battle.

Reader 2

But why is Tamar lamenting?

Reader 1

It's a long story of saying “NO”

Reader 2

Saying “NO” to what? What happened?

Reader 1

It is complicated. It's a story of power and abuse.

Reader 2

Tell us more.

Reader 1

It's a tale of scandal and stigma, a major cover-up, of silence and silencing. After all, some things should not be spoken of in public.

Reader 2

What are we talking about? Scandal, stigma and silence?

Reader 3 *(from 2nd podium)*
13: 1 - 22

2 Samuel

Yes. David's son, Absalom had a beautiful sister, whose name was Tamar. Their half-brother, Amnon fell in love with her. Amnon was so tormented that

he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin and it seemed impossible for Amnon to do anything to her. His adviser, Jonadab son of Shimeah, counseled him to do evil things to Tamar, and Amnon, unfortunately, followed his advice.

⁶So Amnon lay down, and pretended to be ill; and when the king came to see him, Amnon said to David the king, "Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple of cakes in my sight, so that I may eat from her hand."

⁷ Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, "Go to your brother Amnon's house, and prepare food for him." ⁸ So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house, where he was lying down. She took dough, kneaded it, made cakes in his sight, and baked the cakes. ⁹ Then she took the pan and set them^[a] out before him, but he refused to eat. Amnon said, "Send out everyone from me." So everyone went out from him. ¹⁰ Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food into the chamber, so that I may eat from your hand." So Tamar took the cakes she had made, and brought them into the chamber to Amnon her brother. ¹¹ But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister."

¹² She answered him, "**No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile!** ... ¹⁴ But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her.

¹⁵ Then Amnon was seized with a very great loathing for her; indeed, his loathing was even greater than the lust he had felt for her. Amnon said to her, "Get out!" ¹⁶ But she said to him, "No, my brother; ^[b] for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you did to me." But he would not listen to her. ¹⁷ He called the young man who served him and said, "Put this woman out of my presence, and bolt the door after her." ¹⁸ (Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves; for this is how the virgin daughters of the king were clothed in earlier times. ^[c]) So his servant put her out, and bolted the door after her.

Reader 3

But Tamar put ashes on her head, and tore the long robe that she was wearing; she put her hand on her head, and went away, crying aloud as she went.

²⁰ Her brother Absalom said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother; do not take this to heart." So Tamar remained, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom's house.

²¹ When King David heard of all these things, he became very angry, but he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn.

²² But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad; for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had raped his sister Tamar.

Reflection: No Means No

The story of Tamar is a clash of "**Nos**". On the one hand we have the **No** of Tamar. Speaking truth to power, Tamar's no, is a No to violence and abuse.

Tamar is a royal daughter, but this does not protect her be a victim of sexual violence in the royal house, in King David's palace. The perpetrator of the violence is a relative – a half brother; other men are co-conspirators of the violence and they conceal the violence.

Tamar is not passive to the violence she suffers: she denounces it, protests, and screams and makes public the rape.

She names the wrong. “Do not **force** me” “Do not do anything **so vile!**” she says. Her verbal “No” is translated into symbolic public protest through lamentation, but goes unheard and even silenced. She knows the law, she ties to use it, but her arguments are dominated and rape happens. Rape is not a sexual intercourse. Rape is violence and abuse of power.

On the other hand we have the “No” of Absalom and David – men of power. Absalom's “No” is a silencing no. He asks his sister not to break her silence. It is probably the product of a culture where women's bodies are linked to honor and shame.

King David's “No” is the no of complicity. He refuses to act in the face of injustice. It is interesting to note that David though angry, would not punish his son Amnon because he loved him. This should probably prompt a question to us all. What are the loves we have which prevent us from acting justly? Are we not sometimes like David, angered by injustice, but yet reluctant to act because we cannot let go of some of our ‘loves’?

In the midst of this clash of “Nos” the challenge for us today is to align with the right No, which is the No of the targets of violence. When Tamar says no – she is not just protecting herself. Rather, she holds Amnon morally accountable, and refuses to dehumanise him. She keeps addressing him as ‘brother’ and emphasises that what he has done is not just destroy the body but the relationship. Very often the No of the victims has this capacity for alternative moral imagination. It is not like the violent alternative of Absalom or strategic silence of David. It appeals to the humanity of the oppressor.

Even as we continue to observe the 16 days of activism campaign against gender based violence it is important to take seriously the no of the victimised and vulnerable. No means No! In this No lies the moral foundations for building just and inclusive communities free from violence and violation. Let us align ourselves, with this No of the Tamar's of today – like those tricked into trafficking by their own ones, coerced into child marriage, forcibly denied education, abused and silenced - and say No to all forms of gender-based violence.

Call for action

Discuss with your group what can be done to raise awareness in your community or church about gender based violence. Agree on some concrete actions. Discuss and agree on some strategies and tasks.

Prayers and healing moment

Stand in a circle, give hands, and move slowly, move the circle in a dance. Chant very slowly and soft common hymn, a short hymn, repeating the verses, while moving in a circle.

Stopw the circle and ask each person to say a healing word, a word of encouragement, a word of support and love to the other person at her or his right side. In the end each person will repeat the work that she or he has received, one slowly, then loud and sound. The mix of words will create an atmosphere of noise and presence. Let the collective presence of healing words move among the circle. Ask people to breath slowly for three times and remember his or her word. Silence. And prayers

Blessing

Blessing in a Time of Violence

Which is to say
this blessing
is always.

Which is to say
there is no place
this blessing
does not long
to cry out
in lament,
to weep its words
in sorrow,
to scream its lines
in sacred rage.

Which is to say
there is no day
this blessing ceases
to whisper
into the ear
of the dying,
the despairing,
the terrified.

Which is to say
there is no moment
this blessing refuses
to sing itself
into the heart
of the hated
and the hateful,
the victim
and the victimizer,
with every last
ounce of hope
it has.

Which is to say
there is none
that can stop it,
none that can
halt its course,
none that will

still its cadence,
none that will
delay its rising,
none that can keep it
from springing forth
from the mouths of us
who hope,
from the hands of us
who act,
from the hearts of us
who love,
from the feet of us
who will not cease
our stubborn, aching
marching, marching
until this blessing
has spoken
its final word,
until this blessing
has breathed
its benediction
in every place,
in every tongue:
Peace.
Peace.
Peace.

— Jan Richardson

In: <http://paintedprayerbook.com/2015/11/16/blessing-in-a-time-of-violence/>