

LOVE SHOULD NEVER HURT

Bible Studies for Domestic & Family Violence Prevention Month



Design by Crazy Old Lady of Peace

INTRODUCTION:

The Queensland Government has designated May as Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month. This month is set aside as a time to particularly focus on the causes and prevention of domestic and family violence and abuse.

Domestic and family violence (DFV) occurs when one person in an intimate personal, family or informal carer relationship uses violence or abuse to maintain power and control over the other person.

It is estimated that one in 6 Australian women and 1 in 16 men have been subjected, since the age of 15, to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or previous cohabiting partner (ABS 2017b). Family, domestic and sexual violence happens repeatedly—more than half (54%) of the women who had experienced current partner violence, experienced more than one violent incident (ABS 2017b).

In 2017 the General Synod established a National Family Violence Working Group. The Group's role includes recommending curriculum content and/or guidelines to address unhealthy views about power or the marginalisation of women and other survivors of family violence.

In the Anglican Church Southern Queensland (ACSQ) our own Domestic and Family Violence Working Group supports the role of the National Group, overseeing the development of policy and resources such as these studies.

It is hoped that parishes will use these materials to begin or continue the work of engaging with Domestic and Family Violence and abuse using the resources and traditions of our faith. Our most important task is learning to listen to survivors, including those within our own faith communities.

Each of the 5 sessions in this study relates to the lectionary readings for the corresponding Sunday, and each session is complete. There

are links to online resources and extra material embedded within the studies. They can also be downloaded and printed if that is easier.

It is our hope that this study will assist faith communities within the ACSQ to engage fruitfully with a complex and urgent topic, bringing good news to those who most desperately need to hear it.

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OVERVIEW: Domestic Violence and Scripture

Despite the fact that domestic violence has been condemned by society and by the churches for many decades now, it is a problem that we are seemingly unable to adequately eradicate. In Australia, one woman every week dies at the hands of her partner and 1,600 Australian women experience sexual harassment in the workplace – not every year, but every week!

Violence against women has been very much in the news this year. Brave women like Brittany Higgins and Grace Tame have encouraged other women to speak. The very public murder of Hannah Clark and her three children has once again brought domestic violence front and centre of our attention.

Domestic violence is hidden behind doors (and often behind the semblance of a happy relationship). It can be insidious – violence in the form of coercion and control is sometimes not even identified by the victims.

The reasons why someone might hurt their most intimate partner are many and complex. They may be carrying on behaviour learned in childhood, acting from a sense of their own inadequacy or alternately from a sense of entitlement – none of which is an excuse. The recent revelations from Parliament House suggests that there is an attitude that women are “fair game,” and the murder of Hannah Clark implies a belief that women are property. Until attitudes change, behaviours will not.

Sadly, we cannot claim that belonging to a Christian family provides protection from violence.

Even though there is little in the bible to suggest that domestic violence was characteristic of biblical families the bible has been used as a justification for controlling and dominating women and for “punishing them” if they are perceived stepping out of line. A misunderstanding of forgiveness, and a misplaced conviction regarding the sanctity of marriage has meant that the church has often sent women back to their abusive husbands rather than addressing the husband’s behaviour.

A church that has focussed on appearance and which has emphasised behaviour over spirituality has fostered a culture of silence. We are embarrassed and confused about the bad behaviour of our members, we do not have the language to address abuse of any kind. Despite decades of highlighting domestic violence, it is still not a topic that we are comfortable talking about. Further, we do not have the language to respond. How do we answer a woman (or a man) who argues that the bible says that a woman must submit to her husband or that because Eve was created to be Adam’s helper, that women are somehow lesser than me.

Three passages in particular are used to justify the control of a woman by a man.

[Genesis 2](#) – the creation of Eve

It is important to remember that there are two creation stories and that in the first God creates humankind in God’s image, male and female (Gen 1:26-27). There is no hierarchy here. In the second account, woman is created to be Adam’s partner because none of the animals could fulfill that role. (Eve may have taken the apple, but Adam was weak enough to eat it so both bear the blame. In Jewish tradition, the responsibility lies with Adam – Romans 5:12.)

[Col. 3:18-19](#) (“Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord”) and

[Ephesians 5:22-33](#) (“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour”) have also been used to coerce a woman into compliance and to take responsibility for the violent behaviour of her partner. (She must have behaved in such a way as to provoke him.)

Those who use this verse as a justification for violence against their wives fail to see it in its context – historical and literal. They ignore the next verse in Colossians: “Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.” They also conveniently ignore verse 21 of Ephesians: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

It is helpful to understand that many scholars believe that these letters were not written by Paul but by one of his disciples. Paul has a much more egalitarian view of marriage as is seen in 1 Corinthians 7 in which the instructions for the wives are the same as those for the husband.

Taken out of context, these very few passages have done considerable damage – to the lives of those impacted by domestic violence and to the gospel message. As our studies will demonstrate, at the heart of the gospel is a message of love, respect and empowerment, regardless of gender, class or race.

HOW TO GET HELP

In an emergency call the police on Triple Zero (000).

DVConnect Womensline

1800 811 811

DVConnect Mensline

1800 600 636

1800RESPECT

1800 737 732

QLD Government DFV Pages

<https://www.qld.gov.au/community/getting-support-health-social-issue/support-victims-abuse/domestic-family-violence>

WEEK 1: Afraid to speak, afraid to listen

EASTER 5

Acts 8.26-40; Psalm 22.26-32; 1 John 4.7-21; John 15.1-8



Figure 1: "One million stars to end violence"

PRAYER FOR DFV PREVENTION MONTH

God who brings new shoots from old stumps
flesh and breath from dry bones
and goodness from chaos:
we pray for members of our community
whose lives are limited by the effects of family violence and abuse.
Make us people of deep listening, of courageous conflict
and commitment to the ways of healing and reconciliation,
that our communities might be places
where love and peace prevail
and even the least of us belong.
We pray this through Jesus who journeyed through death to life
that we might do the same. Amen.

STORY TELLING - ANGELA'S STORY

She told other people first.

The abuse had happened a long time ago, but recent events had brought it to light again, and this time she felt ready to begin reaching out for help. But who was she going to tell? Who would believe her? Who would help?

She told a professional person. That was ok; they believed her. But it didn't change things, because they were too far away. They weren't related. They didn't come to family gatherings. They couldn't help.

So she told her friend, Jan. That's where things started to get murky and painful. Jan knew him, too. Jan had kids. She thought Jan might say something that would change things, but Jan said nothing. Jan still went to the family gatherings. Jan said it was too hard, and she didn't know what to do. Maybe there was not a lot Jan *could* do.

What had Angela hoped for? That Jan would tell her partner? Immediately cease all contact with the perpetrator? It felt too hard to cut them off without an explanation. Jan said she believed Angela, but let the situation unfold naturally. It didn't go anywhere. Just a niggling in the back of the head. The elephant in the room.

Some time passed. Life went on. Some people breathed a little easier.

A few years later, Angela reached out again, this time with more information. This time she had even been brave enough to confront the perpetrator.

A revelation like that sends shockwaves through a family. It changes the way everyone looks at each other. There is denial ("it didn't happen like that;" "I didn't see it, so it can't be true"). There is

defensiveness (“your accusation really hurt this person). There is blame.

[The Reverend Ann Tiemeyer said](#), “The amount of pain you hear always trumps for me whether someone would be making this up.” That’s what it was like for Jan. On top of the heartbreak she felt hearing Angela’s story, what hurt the most was hearing other people say of her, “Yes, but with her history of mental health issues, we can’t really trust that what she says is true.” Another one said, “Well, I believe her, but I’m not going to let that stand in the way of my relationship with the perpetrator.” In other words, nobody really believed her.

Not enough, anyway.

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

What stands out to you from these stories? Did any new idea or images emerge? What responses do you notice in yourself as you read or hear the story and reflection?

READING THE SCRIPTURES

1 JOHN 4.7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

REFLECTION

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.”

The stars in the image at the beginning of this study are from a project called “[One Billion Stars](#)” (formerly “One Million Stars to End Violence”), an international weaving project created by Maryann Talia Pau. The stars are symbols of peace and hope. As Pau describes it: “The One Billion Stars project is an opportunity for us to bring light and hope in the world and to make something beautiful and powerful together. We know that domestic violence, violence on our streets, racism and harassment is happening RIGHT NOW and often it is difficult to know what to do to help those who are suffering and to help prevent it...The One Billion Stars project is an opportunity to remind each other that we CAN do something about it and not feel paralysed by all that is broken with humanity.”

Jesus said, “the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.” (John 3.19-21).

Domestic and family violence is incredibly uncomfortable to talk about. We like to tell ourselves it’s a private matter, or we are afraid of doing the wrong thing, or of getting caught in the middle. As humans, we are often reluctant to change. However, it is darkness that allows evil acts to grow. [Sarah Wendt](#) writes, “It is through fear that men are able to control women’s behaviour, movements and freedom. And it is through fear that we look past suspected domestic violence. It is more comfortable to think ‘he can’t be that bad’, ‘she must have done something to provoke him’, or ‘they will sort it out’. The alternative is too frightening for us because intimate relationships are the most significant social context in a person’s life.” Denial and lack of engagement only add to the darkness and fear. The more we try to distance ourselves from a situation, the more complicit we actually become.

I believe you, but...

- ...you have a history of mental health issues that make me question your credibility
- ...the person you have accused is so nice/respectable/powerful
- ...it’s not my place to interfere
- ...I don’t know what to do
- ...I don’t want to make it worse
- ...I’m not afraid of him, why should you be?

I believe you, but I don’t want to change my behaviour. My comfort is more important than your safety.

“As concerned friends, it is extremely hard to break this wall of silence that has been built from coercive control. The first thing we can do is to believe any disclosure of abuse, not judge and explore it sensitively so we do not reinforce messages of silence and privacy.” (Wendt) Believe them, and take their fears seriously, no matter what you think of the person/people who hurt them. “It’s not enough to say, “I hear you, that’s really too bad.” It’s important to say, “I believe you and it should have never happened to you. It was wrong what the person did to you.” That is the beginning of healing.” —[The Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune.](#)

Dr Martin Luther King, Jr once said: *“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”* With each star, a little more light shines in the world. In the same way, every time we open our ears to hear someone’s story, we let a little light into the world. Every time we open our mouths to condemn the abuse and support the abused, we let a little more light into the world

“When someone comes forth with their story, they are giving you a precious, fragile gift. And you need to affirm that you believe—that you hear their pain. The amount of pain you hear always trumps for me whether someone would be making this up.” —[The Rev. Ann Tiemeyer](#)

When we feel that getting involved -- engaging with the conversation about domestic violence or standing with someone who has entrusted us with their pain -- is too hard or too messy, we need to remind ourselves that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him (1 Jn 4.9) In other words, “God has entered the messiness and violence of human life and transformed it, through the Cross and Resurrection. Our God *did* get involved, Jesus *did* ‘make a fool of himself’ and miraculously the world is transformed and redeemed.” ([Lucy D’Aeth](#)) In this is love.

Discussion questions

1. Have you ever been trusted with someone's story about abuse? Without betraying any confidences, can you share something about that?
2. If you know both parties involved, and one is claiming abuse, where does your loyalty lie?
3. What fears hold us back from talking about domestic violence in our churches? What actions can we take to move from fear to love?

FURTHER RESOURCES

Susan Glaspell, *A Jury of Her Peers*, 1916.

<https://www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/a-jury-of-her-peers>

"A Jury of Her Peers" is a short story about women living in a rural, highly patriarchal society and the difficulties they faced; loneliness, repression, and domestic abuse. Two women – Mrs Hale and Mrs Peters – are able to discern through subtle domestic signs that their neighbour, Minnie, was being abused by her husband

- "you mustn't reproach yourself," counselled Mrs. Peters. "Somehow, we just don't see how it is with other folks till – something comes up."
- "Oh, I wish I'd come over here once in a while!" she cried. "That was a crime! Who's going to punish that?"

Sarah Wendt, "Why don't we speak up when we see signs of domestic violence?" [The Conversation](#), October 1, 2014

[One Billion Stars Project](#): Weaving Stars for Violence Free Communities

[How to support someone experiencing domestic and family violence.](#)
1800respect.org.au

CLOSING PRAYER

We come to you, God,
Father, Brother,
Mother, Sister,
Friend:

We are weary, weary of heart.
The task is huge.

You taught us -

When one suffers, we all suffer.
How can we turn our faces?
How can we now turn our backs?

We look for a way forward.
Our eyes have been opened to see.
Our ears have heard.
We have become aware.
We have woken from ignorance.

Open a path for justice,
for healing,
for sharing,
for peace.

May we walk the path. Amen.

Sharon Towne

Fenelon Falls, Ontario, Canada

Week 2: The Bystander Effect

Easter 6

Acts 10.44-48; Ps 98; 1 John 5.1-12; John 15.9-17



Figure 1: <http://junelee.kr/portfolio/bystander/>

PRAYER FOR DFV PREVENTION MONTH

God who brings new shoots from old stumps
flesh and breath from dry bones
and goodness from chaos:
we pray for members of our community
whose lives are limited by the effects of family violence and abuse.
Make us people of deep listening, of courageous conflict
and commitment to the ways of healing and reconciliation,
that our communities might be places
where love and peace prevail
and even the least of us belong.
We pray this through Jesus who journeyed through death to life
that we might do the same. Amen.

STORY TELLING:

The [bystander effect](#) is a term coined after the murder of Kitty Genovese in 1964. She was raped and murdered by stabbing in two attacks by the same man on the property of units where she lived. The following day the New York Times reported that there were 38 people who knew the attack was taking place and did nothing to stop it. Decades later this number was revised to two or three people: one who called out during the first attack resulting in the attacker running away only to come back again and another man who was known to the victim and was reported to say to police, “I didn’t want to get involved.”

It is especially difficult with domestic and family violence, in which people are often suffering in private, to recognise when we are bystanders. But sometimes we know more than we think we do. Below is an excerpt of a personal story from an anonymous contributor to the [Allison Baden-Clay Foundation](#). After about 15 years of abusive marriage, it took the unexpected death of her brother and the way her husband handled it to realise she needed to leave – it still took another four years to do so... Listen as she speaks of a particular altercation:

“My youngest brother passed away. Very suddenly, very unexpectedly. I will never forget that early morning phone call from my father... the confusion, the pain, the shock. I was pregnant at the time. I raced around to my parents’ house. I needed to be with them. My family flew, drove and raced from all corners to come together. A lot is a blur. I couldn’t talk without breaking down. We huddled together for a few days and did all the things that needed to be done. Everyone stayed at Mum and Dads. Sleeping over in their old rooms, all together. Except me. I wasn’t allowed to stay. The closeness of my family always upset [my husband]. So, late one

afternoon when we arrived back to our own home, he let me have it. I was being selfish. I wasn't thinking about him and how all of this made him feel. I was making it all about me and leaving him out. I sat at the kitchen bench with tears rolling down my face as he screamed and yelled and threw things at me. I'm sure the neighbours heard. It wouldn't have been the first time, but no one ever came to see if I was okay. No one ever called the police. No one asked when they saw me in the front yard if I needed help. Instead, I felt embarrassed, ashamed and worthless."

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

What stands out to you from these stories? Did any new idea or images emerge? What responses do you notice in yourself as you read or hear the story and reflection?

READING THE SCRIPTURES

John 15.9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

REFLECTION

“I didn’t want to get involved.” How deeply can you feel that? For me it is visceral. It feels like stepping over a boundary into unknown territory, and that is frightening. There are many reasons we may not want to directly involve ourselves in a conflict, personal safety is high on that list. In our gospel today, Jesus gives us a new commandment, “to love one another as I have loved you” (v. 12). It leads me to wonder in what way it is loving not to get involved.

There is a growing body of people saying that there is no such thing as an innocent bystander. To stand by and do nothing, say nothing, is to align ourselves with the perpetrator of violence. It is easy to be overwhelmed by all the ways we haven’t acted before today, and it’s easy to be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of need. However, there are many [resources](#) now available to help empower us.

When love is spoken of in the gospels, it is most often expressed as action, rather than emotion. Jesus says there is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (v. 13). Jesus’ embodiment was the embodiment of love, Jesus’ actions on Earth are the embodiment of love.

We have the perfect example regarding love and bystanders in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10). We know it well: when the Jewish man is attacked, two prominent Jews, a priest and a Levite, walk past him and leave him to die; just as his attackers did. We understand that there are reasons of ritual purity that would mean all Jews would expect they acted in the way they did. We have many reasons for our own inaction.

It is the action of the Samaritan which shows love, despite being the one whose experience of generations of hatred and violence would

provide more reason to leave a Jew lying on the side of the road than that of a priest or a Levite. He could have chosen to continue the violence in his inaction, in choosing to pass the Jew by. In remaining an “innocent” bystander. Instead, he chooses love. He chooses to act, even though he knew it put him in a vulnerable position.

Love makes us vulnerable. That is the truth. Both emotions of love and actions of love, create vulnerability in us. This means we can be hurt more easily, and we experience the most rewarding relationships because it allows for deep connection.

Kitty’s story, whilst exaggerated at the time, sparked research into what effect being attacked in the presence of others has, if any. Researchers have found over the decades since, two sides to the bystander effect. Firstly, the notion of dispersed responsibility. If we see an attack taking place and there are others around, we hesitate to act, instead checking how others are responding to know whether it is right to intervene. The flip side is that it takes only one person to speak up and the response cascades; others are empowered to join in and work to help the victim.

By simply becoming aware to the signs of DFV beyond the outwardly visible (bruises and broken bones), we can begin to see opportunities to show people (both victims and perpetrators) love. By creating safe spaces and listening non-judgementally when we check in with our friends and neighbours about how they are coping, or lovingly enquire about warning signs that they are heading down an abusive path, we can allow them opportunity to express themselves and what their needs are. We can encourage them to seek the help needed. And then, we can stay involved. Continue to check in. Remain an ally to the victims. Remain present to perpetrators, continuing to encourage them to access programs designed to help.

We do none of this on our own. Apart from the many resources that are out there to help us now, let us not forget the most powerful supplier of love, the Holy Spirit. In the reading from Acts today, the Holy Spirit has fallen on all who were present; they were all empowered!

We, gathered today, are (likely) Christians. As such, we are not only commanded to love one another, but empowered by the Holy Spirit to do just that. We can draw strength from the Spirit and from each other and stand by one another in courageous love.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When have I not wanted to get involved? What did this feel like?
2. How does love play an **active** role in my life? What abundance grows in these spaces?
3. What might a safe space look like where I can have conversations with people I am concerned about?

A Helping Hand

Sometimes, we close our eyes,
Pretending to be a normal bystander.
But someday, and somewhere,
Let us reach our hands out to others.
No matter what comes along.

FURTHER RESOURCES:

Signs and tips for helping people experiencing DFV:

- [Talking to someone about their DV situation](#)
- [Questions to ask](#)
- [Bystander Effect and Domestic Violence](#)

[Mensline](#) (Talking to people about their violence)

Public harassment bystander intervention tips:

- [National Sexual Violence Resource Centre](#)
- [Queensland Human Rights Commission](#)

CLOSING PRAYERS (*From the Anglican Church of Australia's [White Ribbon Day resources](#)*)

God bless us with insight
to recognise violence in all its forms,
and courage to name it,
speaking out for justice. **Amen.**

The Lord Jesus bless us
with compassion for the vulnerable,
and grace to stand with them,
sharing his strength. **Amen.**

The Holy Spirit bless us
with a prayerful heart,
and power to breathe peace,
transforming the world. **Amen.**

The blessing of the holy and glorious Trinity,
eternal Wisdom, living Word, abiding Spirit,
be amongst us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

Week 3: Susanna and the Elders

The Sunday after Ascension (Easter 7B)

Acts 1.15-17, 21-26; Ps 1; 1 John 5.9-13, John 17.6-19



PRAYER FOR DFV PREVENTION MONTH

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and goodness from chaos:
we pray for members of our community
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and commitment to the ways of healing and reconciliation,
that our communities might be places
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We pray this through Jesus who journeyed through death to life
that we might do the same. Amen.

STORY TELLING:

In 2018, Julia Baird and Hayley Gleeson conducted a lengthy investigation into how religion and faith intersect with domestic violence; how it might impact the behaviour of perpetrators or shape the actions of victims, and how women in faith communities might have particular vulnerabilities, or, especially, concerns about how their leaders respond to them....

“The stories of the Christian women we interviewed were brutal: repeated rape, verbal assault, physical beatings, complete financial control, needing to ask permission for simple things such as drinking lemonade, or going to the shops.

“Their treatment had resulted in destroyed lives, shattered self-esteem, and suicide attempts. Husbands tried to use scripture to control their wives, demanding female obedience to male abuse.

“And in very many cases the local pastors did not believe the women when they told them of their stories. Or they told them to submit to their husbands, endure, and stay....

“The insistence by many public Christian voices that churches are safer places because a religion of love and selfless kindness should be anathema to abuse has blinded, and still blinds many, to what was, and is, occurring in their midst.

“Overall, we heard repeatedly from counsellors and psychologists that Christian women are less likely to leave abusive marriages, more

likely to blame themselves for abuse, more prone to believe the abuse will change, and unlikely to be protected by their pastors.

“We found many women felt forced to leave a church when they left a relationship; that they felt forced to choose between faith and safety, and their faith was severely challenged as result....

“One woman told the Victorian royal commission that she had sought help from five different ministers and that each of them had told her to stay with a violent husband. One counsellor said" "Be gentle with him, he's trying to be a man."

“Another reported telling her pastor that her husband was raping, hitting, and verbally abusing her, while taking drugs. The pastor told her to pray. She then asked him, "What if he kills me first?" And the pastor said: "At least you'll go to heaven."..."

Julia Baird, [Domestic violence in the church: When women are believed, change will happen](#), Posted Wed 23 May 2018.

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

What stands out to you from these stories? Did any new idea or images emerge? What responses do you notice in yourself as you read or hear the story and reflection?

READING THE SCRIPTURES

JOHN 17.6-19

Jesus prayed, “I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you

have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

REFLECTION

This study is titled *Susanna and the Elders*, although that story from the Book of Daniel is not one of the lectionary readings for this week. It is the title of the painting included with the study, as painted by Italian artist Artemisia Gentileschi in 1652. The story tells of a young woman spied on by two elders as she bathed in her own garden. When the voyeurs were caught they deflected the blame onto Susanna, claiming she was engaged in an illicit relationship and they were merely bringing her actions to the attention of the community.

Gentileschi appears to have painted this subject at least 5 times over the course of her life, and this is the last version. I encourage you to find the others, particularly the [first version](#) painted in 1610, when Gentileschi was turning 18.

Back to the gospel: the idea of unity is a powerful touchstone for Christians. Jesus prayed on his last night “that they may be one, as you and I are one” (v11) and we have aspired to unity ever since. But Jesus also prayed to his Father, “They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.” So this passage from John’s gospel draws us into a complex space: we are not of the world and we are one.

Jesus knew that his followers would have to contend with the prevailing culture, both then and now, and that culture would challenge their faithfulness. What then is the culture into which we Christians are sent today and how do we engage faithfully with it?

It has been suggested that in Jesus’ time the greater danger was that Christians would withdraw from the world and pursue a kind of purity within the church community. Today it is arguable that we are more at risk from being *too* embedded with the culture and fail to recognise the ways in which faith challenges those norms.

In the case of domestic and family violence we seem to have adopted the worst of both worlds: we cling to a ‘biblical’ ideal about marriage and families that make it difficult for people experiencing abuse in the home to speak up about it. And at the same time we

have adopted views about masculinity and power from the culture that are antithetical to the gospel of Jesus.

However we got here, the result is that when people experience domestic and family violence and abuse, it is almost impossible for them to speak up about it with their church community. They are all too aware of the expectation that marriage is for life, for example, to suggest in their faith community that *their* marriage is not sacramental. And they are also aware of the ways in which patriarchal norms play themselves out in our communities of faith. The result is unity, but at what cost? Who pays for our assumption that we are focusing on important matters such as upholding the institution of marriage? Who pays for our unwillingness to examine male privilege in the church and our reluctance to interrogate what we just assume to be true?

It is almost always the people with less power who pay for our comfort.

[William Loader writes](#) that “unity was not an ideal in itself, but always and only in the context of unity with the Son and Father. Unity can be a collusion of betrayal.” Christian unity is often regarded as an expression of peace, demanding that everyone is always nice and any conflict is seen as failure. True love and peace, by contrast, is about making and having space where conflicts can be dealt with, worked through and, if need be, lived with, but in a way which does not turn them to destructiveness.

Gentileschi’s paintings of Susanna being spied on by the Elders reflects her own experiences at the hands of authorities. As a survivor of sexual assault at the age of 18, she reported the assault

and her assailant, Agostino Tassi was brought to trial. She was tortured in court, to assure the truth of her claim, while her assailant was found guilty but the sentence was never enforced. He remained a popular painter defended by the Pope who said of him, “Tassi is the only one of these artists who has never disappointed me.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. If the ‘world’ that Jesus is talking about is indeed the culture, how would you describe the culture into which we are sent today? Are there aspects of culture that challenge Christian living? Are there aspects of our culture that allow domestic and family violence to thrive?
2. How does the desire for unity play out in talking about domestic and family violence in a church context? How does it help us speak up? How does it work to silence people?
3. William Loader suggests that “True ... peace ... is about making and having space where conflicts can be dealt with.” Talk about your experiences of conflict within faith communities. What triggers conflict and how is it dealt with? How do you tend to respond to situations of potential or actual conflict?

FURTHER RESOURCES

www.respect.gov.au Federal government website hosts resources and links to other organisations

<https://www.itstimetotalk.net.au/> A website developed to help individuals of all ages understand how to form healthy, long lasting relationships.

<https://www.saferresource.org.au/> Resources for Churches to talk about domestic and family violence (from Common Grace)

CLOSING PRAYERS

A confession regarding church responses to domestic and family violence

Father, please give us grace and insight to face uncomfortable truths about how the gospel has been misused and our church communities have been complicit in the abuse of vulnerable people. Please help us not to downplay or deny our involvement, but help us to see our own individual and collective responsibilities.

For the times where we have sheltered and supported abusers in place of the abused, we are sorry, and we repent.

For the times where we have spoken, counselled or taught thoughtlessly or insensitively, or wrongly, we are sorry.

For the hurt that we have caused or perpetuated or excused, we are sorry.

We thank you that you are merciful and you take our wrongs so seriously that Jesus died for them. We ask that you would enable true and full repentance within us and our churches that healing and transformation would abound. Amen.

(From Common Grace, [16 Days of Prayer against Domestic and Family Violence](#))

Week 4: Sitting with the Bones: Why #NotAllMen is Not Alright

PENTECOST

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:22-27;



Figure 1: eric-prouzet-571YWyZVEok-unsplash

PRAYER FOR DFV PREVENTION MONTH

God who brings new shoots from old stumps
flesh and breath from dry bones
and goodness from chaos:
we pray for members of our community
whose lives are limited by the effects of family violence and abuse.
Make us people of deep listening, of courageous conflict
and commitment to the ways of healing and reconciliation,
that our communities might be places
where love and peace prevail
and even the least of us belong.
We pray this through Jesus who journeyed through death to life
that we might do the same. Amen.

STORY TELLING

Dali sat uneasily, thinking about her nervousness and her resolve. Sitting with her friend Pat was a natural thing to do but the topic of this conversation was very different from their regular conversations over coffee. But she couldn't keep this to herself anymore. She needed support. In the middle of their normal small talk about TV shows and the kids' schools, she began...

"Pat, I'm going to leave Mark... I have to," she said.

Eyebrows raised, Pat exclaimed, "What!? Really? Why?" Mark and Pat had been friends since Uni days, longer than he had known Dali.

"He's different when work gets more difficult. He gets stressed" Dali said. "I say the smallest thing and he blows up."

Pat looked down. "I've never seen him like that. He gets quiet, but..."

"Sometimes he pushes me, Pat. He holds me down. By the neck."

"Mark does? I can't believe it!" Pat was shaken. He tried to say calming things. "Have you reported it? So awful!" He looked up at Dali.

"Mark!? I can't believe it. Well at least we're not all like that. I've never touched Astrid like that. I wouldn't do that. Women are to be

respected. I do whatever Astrid tells me!” Pat kept spluttering out more words, but he left as soon as he could.

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION

What stands out to you from these stories? Did any new idea or images emerge? What responses do you notice in yourself as you read or hear the story and reflection?

READING THE SCRIPTURES

EZEKIEL 37.1-14

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.”

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD.”

REFLECTION

Pat sat in his car, parked by the side of the road. He felt out of breath, confused. Fishing his phone out of his pocket, he began a post. “Not all men beat their wives. It’s not right to say this. Only some do and it’s very wrong. But we shouldn’t all be tarred with the same brush. Some of us are good guys!” Pat pressed ‘send’, dropped his phone on the passenger seat and drove home, still feeling unsettled.

Have you seen the hashtag #NotAllMen around? Especially prominent in some circles on social media, it’s regularly quoted by men during discussions of feminist issues such as family domestic violence. On the surface it might seem a reasonable statement of fact, just setting the record straight. There are bad guys out there, but some of us are okay!

But it’s not helpful. If solutions to family domestic violence are about listening and believing victims, changing systems and educating men about better ways to resolve problems, then the hashtag

#NotAllMen and the idea behind it does nothing to support those processes.

The familiar Ezekiel passage reminds us of this. Most commentators I've read consider this passage to be metaphorical in aim rather than literal or physiological. But consider the movement from the two states of being for the bones in the story. The valley of dry bones is traditionally seen as the negative state for this piece of geography. The act of God with the prophet's help is to restore the bones to life, creating a 'vast multitude' in verse 10: the positive state. But let's stay with the bones for a while. The passage from Ezekiel reminds us that there might be some learning to come in sitting with the bones, the dryness, the bleak situation.

There can be little doubt that the current state of Australian life is not the apex of possibilities. That 'creation groans' in the Romans passage reminds us of the imperfections of our daily lives. Figures for family domestic violence are intolerably high. Some women still fear the upheaval of escaping from their circumstances. And yes, men are still overwhelmingly the perpetrators.

But not all men? What might be unhelpful about saying that? When this point is made it invariably serves to draw the conversation away from a more supportive, listening stance back to a male focus that most public discourse these days already serves. It works to impose a masculine agenda on an issue where it is not required. It is a way of drawing attention back to maleness when others should have the focus here. In doing so, the fragility of the male ego is often on display: Not me! I'm not to blame! The further problem is that men

in question then absolve themselves for any responsibility of a society-wide problem.

But these passages from Scripture have something to teach us here.

The Acts passage of Pentecost, with its oft-heard story of what many consider to be a pivotal moment in the birth of the church speaks to us. The writer of Acts creates a vivid, movie-like narrative of flames and voices and chaos. There is a conventional reading. If the Holy Spirit is credited with enabling people to speak loudly in unusual languages that only some others can understand, it seems correspondingly possible that the Spirit can enable some of us to remain quiet when the situation calls for it. Though 'filled with the Spirit' might be a phrase that suggests ebullience and effervescence, might not it also engender a spirit of silence or restraint when necessary? Men tempted to type #NotAllMen might draw on the Spirit to listen and support instead, realising that attempts to re-direct blame for family domestic violence should not be the focus. They should not be the focus.

As we've read, the passage from Ezekiel points to the opportunity for some learning in 'sitting with the bones'. Addressing the wounds of our cultures involves understanding those wounds and the deep scars they cause. This takes thoughtfulness and listening! Instead of intoning #NotAllMen, men might be better served by asking ourselves some hard questions: Following the metaphor, what is our responsibility for this situation of arid dryness? And once we own that responsibility, how can we support and amplify other voices prophesying to restore life?

Ezekiel's passage makes it clear that some things must die for new things to be born. If that 'new creation' that Paul talks about in Romans is a [utopian cosmopolitan community](#) as Karin Neutel puts it, then it will be one in which the inappropriate blame shifting of #NotAllMen will be unnecessary. We will speak out when injustice is present. We will be quiet to let other voices be heard. We will all work to make things new.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your experience of the #NotAllMen hashtag? Have you seen it around? In what situations have you seen it or heard about it being used? Is it life-giving?
2. We often associate action with speaking out. But action can also be about being silent when the moment calls for it. Can you think of other biblical stories where this rings true? Start with John 8:1-11 or Matthew 27:12-14...
3. 'Sitting with the dry bones' to ask oneself hard questions can be challenging. Can you recall other significant moments in your life when you've done this kind of self-examination? How has that gone?
4. This devotion suggests our reaction to family domestic violence should not be the focus of the conversation, victims and their situations should be. What do you think?

FURTHER RESOURCES

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NotAllMen> - If you've never heard of the hashtag, have a look here to get a briefing.

<https://www.elle.com.au/news/not-all-men-response-24856> == Here's an Australian perspective on the issues raised.

<https://inbreakthrough.org/six-reasons-notallmen-fails/> - Here's a quick summary of reasons to reject the NotAllMen hashtag.

CLOSING PRAYERS

Creator God of bones and life,
We walk with you as you walk with us.
Enable us with the grace to be silent when silence is called for;
To be an insistent voice when injustice is present;
To be thoughtful when all is noise and chaos;
To be silent when other voices should be amplified;
To listen and support when that takes strength
And to love when loving is dangerous.
In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen

Week 5: The Trinity and Headship

TRINITY SUNDAY

Isaiah 6.1-8; Ps 29; Romans 8.12-17; John 3.1-17



PRAYER FOR DFV PREVENTION MONTH

God who brings new shoots from old stumps
flesh and breath from dry bones
and goodness from chaos:
we pray for members of our community
whose lives are limited by the effects of family violence and abuse.
Make us people of deep listening, of courageous conflict
and commitment to the ways of healing and reconciliation,
that our communities might be places
where love and peace prevail
and even the least of us belong.
We pray this through Jesus who journeyed through death to life
that we might do the same. Amen.

STORY TELLING

Scripture was and is so important to me, but it was twisted and used against me.

I internalised all the warped interpretations and meanings given to particular parts of scripture — for example, Ephesians 5:22-33 ("Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour") and Colossians 3:18-19 ("Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord").

The call to "submit to one another" was skimmed over, as was the call for husbands to love their wives.

So I learnt that to be spiritual, to be godly, to be obedient to God, I was to submit to my husband.

He had the final say in decisions; I was to give myself to him and uphold my responsibility to submit regardless of whether or not he upheld his duty to love.

Nobody else knew what was happening — they saw my then-husband as a bright, bubbly, kind and helpful person.

Driving to church he could be yelling at me or the kids, but as soon as he stepped out of the car, he would be charming, pleasant and happy, talking to people he met on the way into church.

...And although I knew my marriage was 'sick', I blamed myself. Divorce, meanwhile, was an absolute 'no-no'; I saw it as my responsibility to make things better.

I found it hard to come to terms with the fact that what was happening to me was in fact domestic violence.

As the workshop hosts listed the various forms of domestic violence — verbal abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse, spiritual abuse etc.

I sat there, stunned. I could tick every box except physical abuse: I was never hit.

That's one of the things about the ongoing discussion of and commentary on domestic violence that frustrates me — the emphasis is usually on the more extreme forms of physical violence.

The deaths and injuries from domestic violence are heartbreaking. However, they often come at the end of years of non-physical abuse.

I could never go to the police because I believed there was nothing illegal to report.

During counselling sessions after I had left, my psychologist commented that my ex-husband was such a "violent man". I stopped her and said: "But he never hit me!"

She went on to point out all the ways I was violated; how I had been destroyed from the inside out.

Today, I can look back and smile. Instead of bagging myself, I can acknowledge the strength and courage it took to be able to make it through.

(excerpt from [*Shattering the Silence: Australians tell their stories of surviving domestic violence in the church*](#))

PAUSE FOR REFLECTION:

What stands out to you from these stories? Did any new idea or images emerge? What responses do you notice in yourself as you read or hear the story and reflection?

READING THE SCRIPTURES

ROMANS 8.12-17

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

After Rublev's Trinity

Each face turned toward
a face at table leaving
always a space for

one more. An open
door to run through when someone
can't quite make it home

on their own. Though the
wings work, humans haven't got
them, and it's hard to

converse from heights so,
in one hand a staff to lean
on. The other hand
ever reaches down.

— Carrie Purcell Kahler

REFLECTION

Love, Paul is saying in his letter to the Romans, has to do with mutuality. It is about opening ourselves to the Spirit and aligning our desires with the loving action and interaction of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit; a God who is ever reaching down to draw us into divine communion.

The ancient creeds of the Church point to this constant life of mutuality, where no person is greater than another, within the very nature of God. The Athanasian Creed, states;

*The deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory, coeternal in majesty....
And in this Trinity, no one is before or after, greater or less than the other; but all three persons are in themselves, coeternal and coequal; and so we must worship the Trinity in unity and the one God in three persons.*

Such theological language of equality in unity may seem too esoteric to have anything to say to the misery of marriages such as Lynette experienced. Rather than an experience of the mutuality of love, this most intimate of human relationships is for some defined instead by power and control. Unequal gendered relationships which enforce the submission of woman to man are justified by texts such as Ephesians 5:22-33 and Colossians 3:18-19 along with a sweeping interpretation of male headship.

For many, the image of God is the absolute essence of power- and is therefore to be feared. It seems natural that our human relationships fall into that same pattern where love and attention must be earned and appropriate submission cultivated to avoid punishment. Perhaps

this is why so often verses in the Bible that actually speak of submission to one another are twisted into the more easily understood shape of power over instead of power mutually surrendered. With this kind of god in charge, there is no 'open door' to run through to escape beyond the harsh confines of control. As in slavery, the freedom of the self is colonised by the dominant party whose ownership extends to the whole person: emotional, physical, sexual, spiritual. For some who are trapped, this god offers no safe way home.

Yet clearly in Romans we are pointed to a view of God that leaves no room for fear because God has shifted the equation of power and come in vulnerability and self-offering. St Paul affirms, "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption." As adopted children, there is none who has power over another. There is no hierarchy in our relationships because there is no hierarchy in the Holy Trinity into which we are invited to participate as the new family of God. (This applies to marriage as it does to all other relationships. In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul expects both parties to respect the needs of the other.)

To align relationships of love with the same patterns of power and fear the world has always known is to miss the revolutionary nature of the good news brought by Jesus and proclaimed here by Paul. We are led by the Spirit towards a renewed humanity, participating together in the new life of Christ where there is interdependence and mutuality based on love and freedom. This is a higher goodness that requires our transformation, not merely an adherence to rules. Only when we accept the unconditional grace of our adoption may we begin to understand the abundant generosity of the God whose very being is relational, making us heirs of a kingdom where all can flourish and where there is no room for fear.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Where do you experience hierarchies in your relationships (social, spiritual, economic)? Who usually gets to be in charge? How is that decided?
2. How do you imagine God? Does this imagining affect how you relate to others? How?
3. How do you think our understanding of God as Trinity might help us to reach for 'a higher goodness' in our human relationships?

FURTHER RESOURCES

[Trinity: Shared Power by Fr Richard Rohr OFM](#)

On the Way podcast: [Jess Hill on Power, Control and Domestic Abuse](#)

In the second of the series of recordings from the Byron Writers Festival, Jess Hill joins Sue and Dom to talk about domestic abuse and the systems that enable perpetrators. The conversation explores the frightening realities behind the statistics and how our communities can confront the fear and violence that is present in so many relationships. Jess Hill is an investigative journalist who has been writing about domestic violence since 2014. Prior to this, she was a producer for ABC Radio, a Middle East correspondent and is listed in *Foreign Policy's* top 100 women to follow. Her reporting on domestic violence has won two Walkley awards, an Amnesty International award and three Our Watch awards.

Content warning: This conversation covers topics of domestic abuse and family violence. If you are affected by domestic abuse help is available. The following site provides further information on where to find support both for victims and those who use family violence and are seeking counselling.

[Help lines White Ribbon](#)

[Doctrine of headship a distortion of the gospel message of mutual love and respect](#) by Julia Baird

CLOSING PRAYER

Enfolding God,
Trinity of love,
You are our source, our goal, our life:
May we be born again in you
No more to live
Alone and unconnected,
but sharing in the Spirit's breath
And carried to your heart;
Through Jesus Christ who lifts us up.
Amen.

Steven Shakespeare, *Prayers for an Inclusive Church*, Canterbury Press: 2008)

WORSHIP RESOURCES FOR THE END OF THE STUDY

WORSHIP TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE *(From the World Council of Churches)*

This short liturgy can be used as part of a group study, or in any way you find meaningful. You will need: some candles; a basket of stones; and some products of the area where you are, as signs of the generosity of creation in every time and place.

CALL TO WORSHIP

In the beginning the Spirit God danced over the void.

It was a dance of creation, of joy, of freedom of wholeness, of power. . .

And God, knowing that all that is good is shared,

held the Earth tenderly and yearned for relationship.

And humanity was born in the yearning of God.

We are born to share the earth.

adapted from: Blessing the Earth, Carter Heyward, USA

LIGHTING THE CANDLE

God bringing light and banishing fear,
we light this candle as a sign of our willingness
to be your light in the world.

We remember before you our own communities;

the places where we live and work;

the people whose lives are connected to ours.

We bring before you all the people

whose stories we have witnessed in this study

and all those whose stories have shaped our lives.

In Jesus, you show us how to confront violence

and how to transform it into peace and justice.

Fill us with your peace, that we may be peacemakers.

Fill us with your truth, that we may speak truth to power.

Fill us with your courage,

that we may bring hope to those who live in fear.
Fill us with joy, that we may be your beacons in the world.

We ask it in the name of Jesus, our brother and our friend,
Amen

Invite participants to take a stone from the basket to hold as the Gospel is read.

GOSPEL READING

JOHN 8:2-10

Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?' They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.' And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, sir.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.'

PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND LAYING DOWN OF STONES

After each prayer a stone is laid down, at the end of the formal confession everyone is invited to come forward and lay down a stone in a communal act of confession.

God of heaven and earth before you we confess our sin

God of transformation hear our prayer

We confess the terrible physical and sexual violence that so many women and girls across the globe are subjected to.

God of transformation hear our prayer

We confess how even into our own time scripture has been used to justify violence against women and their exclusion from a full role in society.

God of transformation hear our prayer

We confess a violent culture which turns women's bodies into sexualised commodities and sees women as part of the spoils of war and commerce.

God of transformation hear our prayer

We confess the structural violence of our institutions including the church which too often exclude women from decision-making, power or authority.

God of transformation hear our prayer

please move forward to lay down your stones

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS AND TRANSFORMATION

Let us stand to listen to words we can trust,
words which help us and our societies
to stand up straight, be transformed
and walk humbly in God's paths.

(please rise)

“Behold,” says God, “I am making all things new.
I will wipe every tear from their eyes.” (Rev. 21:5, 4)

For the mountains may depart
and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,

says the Lord, who has compassion on you. (Isaiah 54:10)
In the name of Christ we are forgiven,
Alleluia, amen!

PRAYERS

2

Great God we give you thanks that you call us out of silence to name hidden and domestic violence.

Today we pray for women who despite suffering from violence, continue to care for family and children, to grow and prepare food, carry water, earn a living and offer support to others.

We pray for women who are trafficked as domestic or sex workers; for women who are raped and do not know how to find words to name their pain or a way into the future.

We pray for transformation of our societies which often find it easier to judge the victims of violence than to solve the problems of injustice

We pray that women's voices may be heard and taken into account in all peace and reconciliation work.

We pray for a transformation in the violent way many men act towards and think about women.

We pray for right and just relations between women and men that together we may transform and overcome violence in all its forms and learn to celebrate our diversity and interdependence

We look forward to the age of peace, when violence is banished, both women and men are able to love and to be loved, and the work and wealth of our world is justly shared.

Benediction

May the God of Eve teach you to dance.

May the God of Hagar bring you comfort in the desert.

May the God of Miriam bring companions to you
when you struggle.

May the God of Deborah teach you courage for your
battles.

May the Christ who knew Mary and Martha show you the
way of balance.

May the Christ who healed the bent-over woman heal
your pain.

May the Christ of Mary Magdala send you out to proclaim
your story. In the name of Christ who is the memory,
hope and authority of the future.

*Adapted from a worship created by Jane Stranz for the World
Council of Churches*

NAMING THE SILENCE: A LITANY FOR THE CLOSE OF THE STUDIES

(adapted from a litany written by the Rev'd Canon Dr Marian Free)

In the name of Christ I name the silences known to me.

In the quiet that follows, perhaps you would like to name the silences known to you.

I name the silence of all the young children molested or raped by their fathers, or by men whose first duty should have been love and protection.

I name the silence of any who have been sexually or physically assaulted – young or old, male or female.

I name the silence of all those hurt by those in whom they trusted.

I name the silence of all whose dreams of a happy marriage have been shattered by emotional or physical violence.

I name the silence of all whose hopes of having children have gradually disappeared. Those who are seen as selfish by a society which does not name infertility.

I name the silence of all those who have no home – refugees imprisoned when they seek freedom, wrenched from their past and deprived of a future.

I name the silence of those locked behind the doors of mental illness, those who cannot give or receive love or participate in 'normal' human relationships.

I name the silence of being over 30 and single, or married and childless.

I name the silence of all who do not fit within our narrow definition of “normal”, I claim for them the right to be loved and valued for who they are – not for who we want them to be.

I name the silence ...

Allow a time of silence for those present to “name the silence”, and conclude with silent reflection.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Evensong for Domestic Violence Prevention Month

Sunday 30 May, at 6pm

St John's Cathedral

Preacher: The Rev'd Suzanne Grimmett, Priest in charge of St Andrew's Anglican Parish of Indooroopilly

[Joint Churches Domestic Violence Prevention Project](#)

CONTRIBUTORS

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The Rev'd Suzanne Grimmett, Priest-in-Charge, St Andrew's Indooroopilly.



Figure 2: Heart shape made from woven stars. Photo Mark Yettica-Paulson 2012