

Tamar Campaign

Contextual Bible Studies

2.1 The Rape of Tamar, the Crime of Amnon

2 Samuel 13:1-22

Pamela Cooper-White

Introduction

In Tamar's story we find a *rape* which combines elements of *incest* and *domestic violence*. There is a *conspiracy* of men aiding and abetting the perpetrator of the crime and a male conspiracy of silence after the act. Finally, there is a raw form of *retribution* in the end but this brutal act of revenge is done quite apart from the victim. All power to act or even to speak is taken away from Tamar. In the end, the father to all three of the principle characters in this drama as well as all his servants are seen to mourn by wailing and weeping 'very bitterly' day after day, not for the victim, but for the rapist and the rapist's brother.



Tamar is someone whose story is still very modern:

- Tamar was sexually assaulted, not by a stranger, but by someone she knew;
- The violation took place not in a desolate remote place at the hands of a stranger, but by a member of her own family in his home;
- Tamar was exploited through one of her most vulnerable traits-her kindness, her culturally instilled obedience and her upbringing to take care of the other;
- Tamar said 'No' and her 'No' was not respected;
- When Tamar sought help she was told to hush it up;
- The process for achieving justice and restitution was taken out of her hands entirely and carried forward by her brother. No other women are even recorded in this story as having a voice or a role in coming to Tamar's aid. It became men's business; and
- In the end, it was Tamar's perpetrator for whom her father mourned not for her. In fact, the end of Tamar's story happens without her.

Read 2 Samuel 13:1-22

Discussion:

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. What are the various crimes committed in this story?
4. What are the political implications of Tamar's rape?
5. What does she say and do?

Perhaps the most important theme of the story of the rape of Tamar is that it is not primarily a story about sexual lust or-at least from the point of view of the story's narrator-about the violation of a person. It is first and foremost a tale of the exercise of power and domination. From the narrator's point of view, this is a 'true crime' story-but the crime is actually portrayed in the context of the books of Samuel, not as a crime against a person, but rather a property crime.

6. What are some of the motives that lead a man to rape a woman? What led Amnon to rape Tamar?

Whether the act is rape, sexual harassment, battery or the sexual abuse of a child all our approaches toward prevention as well as intervention and healing will fail until we recognize these not as acts of passion, lust or temper but as acts of power and aggression often using or targeting sexual body parts or sexist language-simply because this is the area of greatest vulnerability and greatest violation.

7. Do you know women like Tamar in your community? How are they viewed?
8. What can the Church do to break the silence against gender-based violence?

2.2 A Selfish Levite

Judges 19

Mark Shaw

Introduction

Is there a moral ecology to life and society? Do small crimes create a ripple effect in society, family and church? Do large consequences flow from small sins? This seems to be a biblical way of thinking and certainly in our passage of Judges 19. One of the primary points of the book of Judges is that without proper structures of justice; moral, sexual, spiritual and political anarchy will abound. This chapter gives an extreme example of that tragic truth. Commentators on Judges 19 note the series of shock waves: from small to great, from personal to public and from selfishness to tragedy that make up this story of the violated concubine. (cf. Adeyemo in *Africa Bible Commentary*).



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Ice Breaker: From Whisper to Shout

Start with an interesting sentence like ‘The yellow crow flies by night’. Do not announce this sentence to the group. Begin the game by whispering the sentence as low as you can into the ear of person number one. That person is told to whisper it louder into the ears of the next person. This is key: each person must be instructed to increase the volume each time the sentence is repeated. The third person does the same and so on until the sentence has made it around the circle. Though the sentence might be different by the time you are finished the real point of the exercise is to show how small actions, like a whisper, can result in larger issues like a shout. Talk about this before introducing Judges 19.

Read Judges 19

This chapter will help us answer the questions about the ‘butterfly effect’ of sexual selfishness and sexual violence.

Discussion

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. What are some of the selfish acts that you see in this story?

The Levite in verses 1 to 10 starts a sexual union with another woman who becomes a common law wife (concubine). While this practice was common among the nations of the ancient world and was allowed in Israel, it was rarely found among Levites. Concubinage violated the spirit of Leviticus 21:7 and 13:15 where

it is clear that levitical marriage was to be different from that of either the average Israelite or person of the surrounding cultures. The second selfish act is the unfaithfulness of the concubine in Judges 19:2. A third selfish act is the Levite not following the law of divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1). Note that the actions of the husband in Judges 19:24-28 make it clear his decision to not divorce was not out of love or concern for the second wife or the honour of God.

4. What are the various levels and expressions of sexual violence stated or implied in this story?

(For example, verse 24 offering two innocent women to militant homosexuals to protect themselves; verse 25 unrestrained gang rape; verses 26-27 allowed to die on the doorstep after being violated sexually; and verse 28 the shocking indifference of the husband).

5. Look carefully at Judges 19:29-30. If you were an Israelite leader at that time and received this bloody message what would you conclude about the culture as a whole? What possible courses of action would you consider taking?
6. How does this story of selfishness, violence and tragedy speak to our respective contexts?

(You may want to bring several copies of daily newspapers and ask members of the Bible study group to look through them for examples of the ripple effect of sexual sin and sexual violence).

7. What can a local church do within its own congregation? What can it do in the community at large?
8. What actions will you plan in light of this Bible study? What resources for action can you recommend to the group?

2.3 The Bleeding Woman and a Dying Girl

Mark 5:21-43

Musa Dube

Introduction

Journeying into this story with eyes of a Motswana woman and within the current context of HIV/AIDS, I find that this story of the bleeding woman and the dying girl in Mark bristles with familiar issues. I also find that we cannot journey into this story without recognizing the HIV/AIDS pandemic in our own countries and communities. In this journey, the story opens many useful windows for our context.

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Read Mark 5:21-43

Discussion

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters in this story and what do we know about them?
3. In relating the current backdrop of HIV/AIDS in much of Africa, what similarities do we find in this story? How can we relate the suffering of the bleeding woman and the dying girl to the suffering of those infected?

As we enter through the doors of Mark 5:21-43 we find desperate parents whose children are under the shadow of death. We find desperate patients who have spent all they have in hopes of healing only to grow more frail. We find doctors who give medicine and take money for their services but cannot fully heal patients. We find mothers who have stayed at home to nurse their sick children. We find parents and relatives waiting desperately for healing from healers until it is too late-when their sick ones give in before healers arrive. We find people mourning, crying loudly for their lost children. We find bodies of dead youth.

As a woman, I also note that like in the HIV/AIDS context, illness is embodied by women's bodies and in this case that of the bleeding woman and the dying girl. I find that home based-care is also in the hands of women. Yes, it is the story of Mark 5, but it is also the story of our context, the story of our HIV/AIDS infected bodies and communities.

4. What does this story tell us about healing and hope?
5. What do we learn from the examples of Jairus and Jesus in dealing with the suffering of women? How should men respond to such situations as these?

As we open another window of this story, we find life-affirming models of manhood and fatherhood that affirms a girl-child's life. In relating through our African context, she might be a young girl but she deserves life, not suffering. Jairus and Jesus embody these positive male models. For example, Jairus runs to find Jesus, and once he finds him he falls down and begging Jesus repeatedly he says, 'My daughter is at the point of death. Come lay hands on her so that she may be made whole and live'. Even if she is a girl-child, Jesus agrees to go, and when she has died before they arrive Jesus insists, 'The child is not dead but sleeping'. Jesus walks to her still body, takes her hand and calls, '*talitha cum!*' She is restored to life.

6. What lessons do we draw from the suffering and the healing of the bleeding woman? How can we affirm her bold character in our own lives today?

When we open this final window, the role of a bleeding woman, we are given another ray of healing and hope. Unlike the dying girl, who is supported by two positive male figures, the woman herself exemplified a proactive and bold character in the struggle for acceptance. She is a woman who has suffered from the structural violence of patriarchy which stigmatized and impoverished her due to the status of her health and body. She was very poor, in ill health,

stigmatized by society and with very little chance of economic recovery and social re-establishment. She decided that enough was enough, that her suffering at the hands of others could be justified no more. Therefore, she dares court danger-she touches the cloak of Jesus. The woman believed that if she touched the garment of Jesus she would be healed from her continual bleeding. So she reaches out and touching his garment she is restored to health. Jesus, a man, realizes that power has gone out of him and asks, 'Who touched me?' She then comes forward confessing that she wanted his healing power and in desperation pursued it without asking for permission. And Jesus, being the man that he was, accepts her proactive spirit.

7. How does this story speak to our context(s) today? What lessons have we learned?
8. How can the Church be involved in speaking out against stigmatization of women and those infected with HIV?

2.4 War, Women and Children in the Bible

1 Samuel 4:1-22

Nyambura Njoroge

Introduction

The following are suggested questions on 1 Samuel 4:1-22 for an intergenerational group of women, men and youth for a two-day seminar. All responses should be recorded on newsprint so that the group can come up with a written text. Since the text might provoke deep-seated painful emotions, it is important to have people who can provide pastoral counselling and care. My experience with this text is that it is very useful to read the first six chapters of the book of 1 Samuel several times before the bible study.



Read 1 Samuel 4:1-22

Discussion

1. What is the text about?
2. Who are the main characters in the narrative?
3. What is the role of women and children in the text?
4. Can God be defeated or captured? How does this make you feel?
5. How does this text relate to our reality in Africa today particularly in light of HIV/AIDS and protracted armed conflicts?

The reality in Africa is such that we are dealing with multiple pandemics and crises as HIV and AIDS studies have clearly revealed. In our endeavour to look for solutions, one way of doing so is to study the Bible taking seriously our context. Given the horrible stories we read about the torture and suffering that women, children and the elderly encounter during and after war, I have found this text helpful. It vividly reveals how God uses the most unexpected persons (including children) to pronounce God's message.

(Provide a fact sheet on wars and genocides that have taken place in Africa since 1980. Other cases of extreme violence and criminality in the society could also be highlighted especially gender-based violence. It is helpful to have a big map of Africa in the room as well as copies in the study kit).

6. What resources are there in the church and community for dealing with the aftermath of war and genocide?
7. What will you do now in response to this Bible study?

2.5 The Invisible Crime

Esther Mombo

Genesis 34:1-31

Introduction

At the beginning of Genesis 34 we read about Jacob's family settling in the Promised Land. Jacob had been reunited with his brother Esau and his new name was now Israel. Jacob had actually bought a piece of land in Shechem, and built an altar for the Lord. We read that in the midst of his settling down a plague of violence strikes his family first in the rape of his only daughter, Dinah. Dinah was the daughter of Leah, Jacob's first and less loved wife. Among her brothers were Simeon and Levi.

We learn in this story that Dinah travelled to visit the Canaanite women and while she was there the local prince seized her and raped her. The prince soon fell in love with Dinah and decided to take her hand in marriage. He informed his father Hamor to arrange the marriage and so the King went and approached Dinah's father, Jacob, on the same. Jacob requested that the father of the prince wait until his sons and the brothers of Dinah returned from the fields for he suspected there was more to the King's proposal. Indeed, the act of rape did not please the family of Dinah.



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Read Genesis 34:1-31

Discussion

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters in the story and what do we know about them?
3. How do Dinah's brothers respond to her rape?
4. What points of contrast can you see between Shechem and the sons of Jacob? Is there any sense that either of the two is right in their actions?

When Dinah's brothers heard what had happened 'they were filled with fury', but they pretended that all was well. They accepted that Dinah should marry the prince on one condition: that all the men in the city get circumcised. Abiding by his request, Hamor ordered the men of the city to be circumcised but while they were still in pain, Dinah's brothers attacked the town killing every male and taking their sister from Shechem's house. Learning of their acts, Jacob admonished them but they still felt justified. They responded, 'Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?'

5. What do we know about Dinah? How does she live out the rest of her days?

The story stands on its own in Genesis with no apparent connection to what precedes it or what follows it. Dinah is not mentioned again in the Bible except as a name in the genealogy of Jacob (Genesis 46:15) which includes grandchildren as well as children. But we know that Dinah never has children perhaps because she was never married after her rape. In Old Testament society, a woman who was known not to be a virgin at marriage could not expect to find a husband (Deuteronomy 22:30) and if a woman was raped, the rapist

was forced to marry her (Deuteronomy 22:28). Dinah's rapist was willing to marry her and to pay the required price but her family refused to accept his offer in the end.

6. What do we learn from reading this story?
7. What motives guide the sons of Jacob to attack the town? How are they motivated by the desire to take revenge for Dinah's rape?

The anger of her brothers was not about the hurt done to Dinah as much as the disgrace brought to the family. This family honour was invested in the chastity of Dinah and this far outweighs the behaviour of the men in the family. The males were justified in defending their honour even by deceit and murder while Dinah's welfare was only incidental: she was a piece of family property which had been violated.

8. How can we relate Dinah's story to that of survivors of rape today particularly women who are raped as a weapon of war? What is similar and what is different?

We realise that after the rape Dinah becomes the object of actions rather than the subject. She does not do much but things are done to her. We do not know her emotions because her story is not told. Dinah has no power to make anything of herself any longer; her sexual identity has been defined by the choices of men. This is very similar to the experiences of many rape victims today. They face a dilemma on how to handle the situation because reporting the case to the police has its own set of consequences. It may result in further emotional distress or assault from the perpetrator.

9. Reading Dinah's story in this way, how can the Church today speak out against gender-based violence particularly rape?

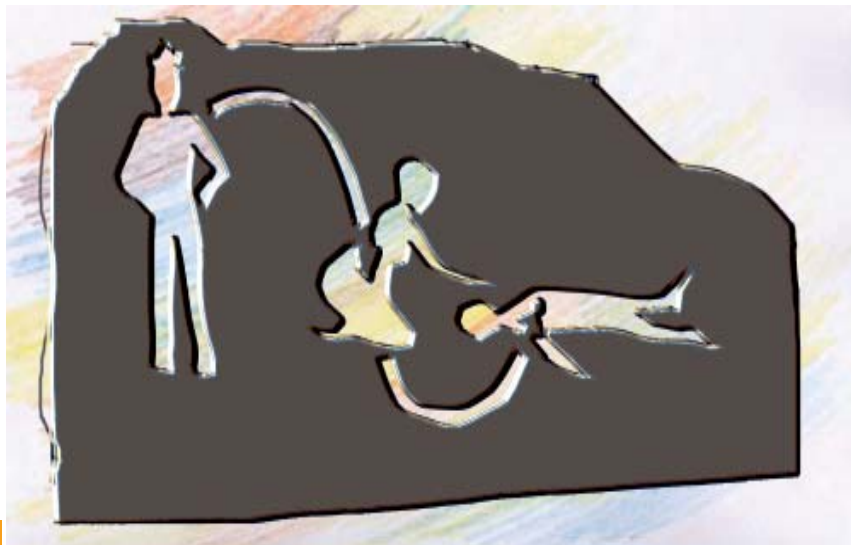
2.6 The Rape of Bathsheba?

2 Samuel 11:1-27

John Gicheru

Introduction

This text is part of the story of David after he became king over Israel. 2 Samuel 2:1-5:10 details the final events of David's rise to kingship while 2 Samuel 5:11-8:18 narrates the story of David as King. In these chapters, David becomes King over south and north, consolidates and expands the kingdom and establishes a true royal state for the first time in Israel. The following two chapters, 9 and 10, form the immediate context of our story.



Read 2 Samuel 11:1-27

Discussion

2 Samuel Chapters 9 and 10 portray David as a King acting with kindness and faithfulness to his subjects. But the text before us begins with the resumption of the war with the Ammonites at the beginning of the New Year.

1. What is the text about?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. Is there anything Bathsheba could have done to avoid David's advances?

Taking the text at face value, the King had not known Bathsheba before—he had to send someone to inquire who she was. When the summons from the King came, Bathsheba, as a subject, had to obey. We do not know whether her sexual surrender to the King took place willingly or under protest. Probably she could have protected herself more from prying eyes when bathing. It is instructive that whereas David 'sent someone (one person) to enquire about the woman's identity' he sent messengers (two or more men to fetch Bathsheba (verse 3-4). Probably this was to ensure that she came and if she resisted they would have compelled or carried her. Probably she could have screamed or resisted, scratched, bitten him or run away. Bathsheba had very little in her power as a woman to fend off the advances of the King.

4. Did Uriah know about David's violation of his wife?

5. The simple message, 'I am pregnant', from Bathsheba threw David into a panic. Did she have to embarrass the King in such a manner?

Bathsheba could be viewed as having had schemed to trap the King and force him to marry her. This view is supported by the argument that she should have kept quiet and faced the consequences alone instead of bringing shame to the 'whole nation'. On the other hand, Bathsheba's bold action in forcing the King to take responsibility for his action is commendable although things developed in a manner she could not have anticipated. Had she kept quiet she would have been 'stoned to death' while David went scot-free. Unfortunately, her disclosure led to the murder of her husband. However, David was forced to take her as his wife and thus live up to his responsibility as a father.

6. 'But the thing David had done was evil in the sight of the Lord'. (verse 27b). What does this mean?

The King may have been powerful and acting with impunity but he was not above the law. God had given David victory and the throne in Israel and he had forgotten where he had come from. The messengers who all along knew what was going on and Joab who may have suspected something, were unable to call the king to see his own folly but that did not mean that he was right. The covenant of the Lord applied to everybody, including the chief executive in the land.

7. What are the main issues raised in the story?
8. What will you do now in response to this Bible Study?

When doing this study with a church group, members were surprised by the many issues raised by the Bible study some of which they had never thought of as related to this particular text. Particularly disturbing were the issues of pornography, HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, safe sex and abortion. David also emerges as a more human figure than the idealized Messianic character Christians are used to.

2.7 The Woman Caught in Adultery

John 8:1-11

Mvume Dandala

Introduction

Gender-based violence is a spiritual problem and human rights violation affecting millions across the world today. It affects women, children and even men, regardless of their age, race, faith, educational background or economic status. Still in Africa today, some countries have laws and policies that actively discriminate against women. In most cases, both conventional and customary laws deny women their full legal capacity to exercise and enjoy their rights. As a result women have fewer advantages culturally, socially, politically, economically and sexually than their male counterparts.

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Read John 8:1-11

Discussion

In this passage the community approaches the woman with harshness and prejudice but Jesus crosses the cultural boundaries and reaches out to the victim in spite of the Jews' expectations and belief to stone her.

1. What are the themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. Why was the woman made to stand before the crowd?

Bringing this woman to Jesus was part of the strategy of the teachers of the law (scribes) and the Pharisees to discredit Jesus. She was the object of their trickery. Note that they did not bring the man who was involved in adultery to stand before Jesus when in Mosaic Law both the man and the woman involved are subject to the death penalty.

4. What did the scribes and Pharisees want to see happen to the woman? Was it just punishment?

The complainants are the teachers of the law; they thought that Jesus' only options were to either say 'leave her alone' or 'stone her'. They base their case on the Law of Moses, either as written or as they interpret it.

5. What does this story tell us about gender and the roles of women during Jesus' time?

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6. Are there women like this woman in your community today?
How are they treated?
7. How can the church better assist women who have been rejected by their communities?

2.8 Lot Offers His Daughters

Genesis 19: 1-11

Oliver Kisaka

Introduction

The story of Lot in Genesis 19 provides a window for discussion and self-examination. In this story, Lot's generosity attracts the inordinate affections of a wayward community. Did Lot think about what he had tried to do? What was uppermost in his mind? What plans did Lot have for the girls? Let's turn to the scriptures for discussions.



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Read Genesis 19: 1-11

Discussion

1. What is this text about?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. Why in your view did Lot act the way he did in verses 6-8 and what did it mean to those concerned?
4. Tell your group about any situations (especially with regards to women) you think are similar to that of the Biblical passage above. What practical steps need to be taken to either end them or avoid their recurrence?
5. In today's society, who do men think women to be? How are women looked upon?

The kind of effort that men undertake to win the approval of women and the kind of disrespect and abuse with which men treat women constitute a paradox. On the one hand, men consider women to be indispensable for their livelihood. They are born of women, raised by women and find them suitable marriage partners. On the other hand, they use their muscular, economic, political and religious advantage to demean and deny women their rightful opportunities.

6. How can the church affectively involve, encourage and affirm women?
7. What will you do with what you have learned from this Bible Study?

2.9 Silent Protest: Rizpah's Story

2 Samuel 21:1-14

Gerald West

Introduction

This Bible study introduces us to the reality that there are often contending theologies¹ within the biblical text and/or silenced voices particularly those of women.



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Read 2 Samuel 21:1-14

Discussion

The first question should be discussed by the participants as a whole group. Write the responses offered by participants on a piece of newsprint so that everyone can see these.

1. What is this text about?

Next, divide the participants into small groups. Ideally, there should be about four to six people in each group. Each group should have a piece of paper, a Bible and a pen or pencil. Put up questions 2 to 4 on the newsprint. Each group should be able to see the questions clearly. Each group should discuss amongst themselves while noting the answers down.

2. Who are the characters and what do we know about each of them?
3. What is the 'theology' of each of the main characters? Using the text as a basis, try and reconstruct elements of each characters' way of looking at God and life.
4. What is the theology of the narrator? A careful reading of the text gives us some clues to the narrator's point of view. For example, what does the phrase 'after that' in the last verse refer to?

At the end of discussion time each small group should report back to the whole group having summarised their responses to the questions on a piece of newsprint so that everyone can see. Ensure that participants understand the questions and answers and hold some discussion on them.

After this, the participants should return to their small groups. Put up questions 5, 6 and 7 on the newsprint. Each group should be able to see it clearly. Ask the groups the following questions:

5. Which character and theology do you identify with and why?
6. Who in your context is like David, the Gibeonites and Rizpah?
7. How does this text speak to you and your life and what will you do in response?

The small groups should then discuss each question separately and write down some of their responses in summary form. They should then share a report of their discussions and answers with the whole group. The facilitator should summarise the responses to the questions on a piece of newsprint so that everyone can see. The results of this step are a useful reminder and resource for Christian action. Encourage the groups to each write up their own copy to take away with them. Finally, bring the Bible study to a close. You may wish to do this by leading all in a prayer.

2.10 The Story of the Good Samaritan

Luke 10: 25-37

Mgr. Prof. Diendonne Mbaya
TSHIAKANY

Introduction

Violence has taken various names and faces in our midst: political, military, social, economic, sexual, gender based and racial. It can be loud or quiet and brutal or silent. The focus of the Tamar Campaign is one form of violence that our society is experiencing in deep and various ways. This is sexual violence which includes rape, abuse, trauma, harassment, social complications and psychological implications. Sexual violence happens both in contexts of war and in regular or normal life. In all these circumstances, the main issue is the social attitude in response to the situations once they have happened in the society. In Luke 10, we read about different attitudes.



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Read Luke 10: 25-37

Discussion

1. What is this text telling us?

After the text is read aloud by one of the participants, the facilitator should ask each of the participants to say what they know or think of the text and episode. The facilitator may give them some minutes of silent meditation before the sharing. What is very important at this point is the participation of each and everyone in the group in the sharing.

2. Who are the main characters in this text of the parable?
3. What do we know about the main characters? (From tradition and from the text).
4. What is the role of each character in the incident that unfolds in the text? (Both positive and negative and active and passive).
5. What is the meaning of the situation faced by the half dead man in the context? (Equivalence and relevance-refer to verse 30).

Participants should identify the main and secondary characters and discern the key themes and around or on which characters the drama is focused. The facilitator should focus attention on the link between character and the category of person bearing it because, later on, this will help to disclose the role of each character.

6. Are there men and women in similar situations in your church or community? (Tell their story).

7. What message do we get or hear from the voiceless victims of violence: silenced by their contextual conditions and incapable of crying their pain and sufferings in our midst? (These include girls and women who are victims of rape in families and boys or men abused by various forms of violence).
8. What is the general attitude of the church or community in such situations where people fear to get involved due to the consequences of repressive use of power to violate and silence others? (For example, compare the two attitudes in the text: that of the Priest and the Levite versus that of the Good Samaritan).
9. What resources are there in your Church or community to deal with similar hopeless situations? (Share stories on how the church or community succeeded or failed in such cases).
10. What will you now do in response to this Bible Study? (This includes the choice of attitude you make, the decision on the side to take and decisions on action to take).

2.11 The Rape of Hagar

Genesis 16: 1-16

Taryn Montgomery

Introduction

There are numerous themes abounding in this text: that of a subordinate woman, slavery and non-consensual sex. Along with these, is the relationship between Hagar and Sarah, two women struggling for position in a patriarchal household.



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Read Genesis 16: 1-16

Discussion

1. What is the text about?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. Describe the power struggle between Hagar and Sarah? How do they treat each other?

The relationship between Hagar and Sarah is indeed a tense one. From the text, we learn that it was initially Sarah who suggested to Abraham to 'go in to' Hagar and conceive her a child. However, when Hagar conceived, she 'looked with contempt on her mistress'. This severely angered Sarah who insisted that Abraham deal with her directly. When Abraham refused, we learn that Sarah took it upon herself to deal with Hagar 'harshly'.

4. What do we learn of slavery and the use of concubines from this text? Can we relate this story to that of sex trade and sex slavery today?

Hagar was a slave girl to Sarah and in their cultural context Sarah could legally force her servant to bear a child if she herself could not do so therefore making the child legally Sarah's. With this in mind, we can see that Hagar had no choice in the decision and was merely a vehicle through which to bring an heir to Abraham and Sarah on top of the day-to-day duties she probably performed as their slave.

5. Do you know women like Hagar in your own community?
6. How can the church better reach out to women like Hagar and Sarah and to men like Abraham?

2.12 Crying for Justice

Luke 18:1-8

Fred Nyabera

Introduction

Jesus tells a story which is all too true in Africa and many parts of the world today. A defenceless widow is taken advantage of and refused her rights. Through sheer persistence she wears down an unscrupulous judge until he gives her justice. On the other hand, Jesus illustrates how God as our judge is quicker in bringing us justice, blessings and help when we need it. This parable gives fresh hope and confidence to those who have been denied justice. Though they face adversity and trials, they are not without hope in God's provident care and justice. In the same breath it is also a call to the Church, the followers of Jesus Christ, to emulate God through advocating, exercising and demanding justice for the vulnerable, exploited and oppressed.



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Read Luke 18:1-8

Discussion

1. What is the text about?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. How do the characters in this passage use power for their positions?

First, we are confronted by a model of abuse of power embodied by the judge. In that culture, a judge had absolute power in his jurisdiction. He would determine what would or would not happen and when. He called the shots. This particular judge has the worst possible combination of qualities: he is callous and uncaring about people and he has absolute power. That is the kind of power we often see in many parts of the world. We find governments, institutions, leaders and cultures that are utterly oppressive. They have power over the people under them and they selfishly use it to oppress them.

Second, we encounter a model of using one's power to empower others. This is the use of power for service and advocacy. This model is embodied by God in verse 6, 'And will not God bring about injustice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?' God is not like the unjust judge, he will respond to his children who cry out to him day and night for justice.

The third model offered by the story is that of the oppressed becoming agents of their own empowerment. The widow best captures this approach. The text does not say what constituted her grievance. But it underscores her insistence on justice: she kept coming and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent’. With her stubborn determination, she prevails upon him into doing the right thing. This judge who neither respects people nor fears God finally grants her justice but for the wrong reasons. As he says, ‘This widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming’ (verse 5).

4. What do we learn from reading this story about God, justice, the widow and the judge?
5. How do we relate the widow’s story to that of survivors of gender-based violence today?
6. Who do you identify with in this story and how have you been using your power, position, or situation to empower others?
7. How do you plan to apply the lessons learned from this Bible study in your own church?