



December 2017, Number 9



Church Together

#MeToo and the Bible

A mentor had told him that once an event or movement hits the headlines, you have a window of 3-4 weeks to address it from a pastoral, faith perspective. So when one victim of Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein's sexual assault went public, opening the floodgates for an immediate avalanche of testimony from similarly victimized women, and when he saw friends and parishioners posting #MeToo on Facebook, Pastor Ben Colahan, Faith - Chico, knew he needed to act quickly.

Pr. Ben also knew he is a male who very much needed female partnership in this project. He reached out to several local colleagues, all women: Rabbi Sara Abrams of Congregation Beth Israel, Rev. Loretta Dickerson of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (already a frequent partner with Faith Church), and Dr. Kate McCarthy, professor of religion and gender studies at California State University - Chico. Together they asked, "What does the Bible say about sexual assault - why it happens, how it happens, and how it is dealt with? How were God's people called to respond to sexual assault?" They imagined and planned a public event called "#MeToo and the Bible."

Each of them selected a Bible story and prepared a brief presentation to provoke a conversation about our current cultural situation. The stories chosen were:

- 1) The rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13) When Amnon, aflame with lust, raped his

half sister Tamar, their father, King David, was angry but did not punish Amnon, his first-born son. Two years later Absalom, Tamar's full brother, avenged the injustice and damage done to his sister by killing Amnon.

2) The disobedience of Queen Vashti (Esther 1) On the seventh day of a banquet he gave for his male friends and subjects, Persian King Ahasuerus, by then quite drunk, ordered that Queen Vashti be brought to the banquet wearing nothing but her royal crown, so all the men might see and admire her remarkable beauty. Queen Vashti refused to undergo this humiliation. The king's advisors assured him that if he let Queen Vashti get away with this disobedience, all households would be filled with chaos as wives would be encouraged to similarly disobey their husbands. Queen Vashti was banished forever from the king's presence, and replaced by Esther.

3) King David's "Bathshebagate affair" (2 Samuel 11:1 - 12:25) King David, his lust aroused by the sight of a beautiful woman bathing, learns that she is the wife of one of the king's soldiers, now deployed in battle. Nevertheless, the king sends messengers to bring Bathsheba to his palace, where they have sex. Bathsheba has no safe way to say "no" to the king, so the sex cannot be considered consensual. She becomes pregnant; David attempts a coverup, and, as a last resort, orders Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, to be killed. The prophet Nathan, David's friend, risks his position and even his life to speak God's word and call the king to repent of his flagrant abuse of power.

4) Susanna accused and vindicated (apocryphal book of Susanna) Two evil judges, overwhelmed with lust for Joakim's beautiful wife, Susanna, warn her that if she will not consent to having sex with them both, they will accuse her of having adulterous sex with a young neighbor. Aware that the word of a woman would likely not prevail over the testimony of two male judges, and that she is likely to be executed for the false accusation, Susanna nevertheless refuses. The evil judges make their accusation, and the assembly believes them "because they were elders of the people and judges," condemning Susanna to death. But Daniel, stirred up by God's spirit, comes upon the scene and demands an investigation to determine the truth in this "they said, she said" scenario. The clever and skillful investigation reveals that the judges were lying; they are put to death and Susanna is exonerated.

Despite having less than 2 weeks to publicize the event, #MeToo and the Bible, about 60 people came for the presentations and ensuing lively conversation. Pr. Ben reports, "Responses ranged from, 'Thank you for doing this,' to 'Could we please do more on this topic?'" It has now become clear that the issues of sexual assault and harassment will not evaporate from the public consciousness in two or three weeks, and Pr. Ben is hoping the team can offer a follow-up event, perhaps one that asks, "What do healthy relationship dynamics and sexuality look like in the Bible?"

Do you have a story that you would like to share? Send any Church Together story requests to mic@spselca.org.

Committed to being re-formed...
The Sierra Pacific Synod
9985 Folsom Blvd, Sacramento, CA 95827-6628
916-756-1665 · 800-275-3522 · 888-789-6434 (Fax)
www.spselca.org

STAY CONNECTED:

