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January 7, 2017

Respecting One Another
John 13: 34-35, Matt 7:12, Romans 12:9-18

John 13: *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

Matthew 7:12: *In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.*

Do you know who the TIME magazine ***Person of the Year*** for 2017 was?

It ***wasn't one person.***

Many expected it to be someone like President Trump, or another celebrity.

Instead it was a group of women who had joined the #MeToo movement.

The Silence Breakers.

Isabel Pascual, Adama Iwu, Ashley Judd, Susan Fowler, Taylor Swift, and an anonymous woman who only felt comfortable sharing a picture of her shoulder on the cover.

These are all women who spoke out about sexual harassment and assault.

Inside the magazine are dozens of ***pictures and interviews*** with brave souls who have spoken out.

The cover of *The Christian Century* on December 20th was a picture of a church with the words ***#MeToo*** on it, and the cover story was a woman who was sexually harassed as an Associate Pastor.

The movement has taken over not only American culture, it has also spread throughout the ***world***, giving women in all kinds of places and situations the courage to speak up against sexual harassment.

As a woman who is ***also a #MeToo woman***, I say it's ***about time.***

I almost left ministry forever after my first ordained call as an associate pastor involved me being sexually harassed by the senior pastor.

It was more than just harassment of me—it involved other church members current and former.

It involved porn being found on his computer,

Dozens of inappropriate remarks being made to me and about me, while alone with me, or even with other men in the office.

It involved sexually explicit remarks or advances, while alone in the office, or as the two of us were getting ready to go into a worship service.

It was a ***nightmare***.

I thought that even though there was an off feeling about him when I interviewed, I told myself I was a strong woman who could fend off any unwanted advances.

I also knew I was the ***sole breadwinner*** for our family as my husband at the time finished his doctorate, and we had a toddler at home.

It became so brazen and scary that I debated criminal charges, and instead filed sexual harassment charges against him in the Presbyterian courts, in hopes that he would be taken out of ministry, and away from causing further harm.

Unfortunately, he was sentenced to just counseling.

I was left as the solo pastor of a church where some ***blamed me*** for him leaving his post (to pursue ‘counseling’ that was supposed to cure him),

and eventually I lost my ***job***,

which meant we lost our ***house***,

all while I learned I was ***pregnant*** with our second child.

We had to move, I took piecemeal jobs subbing in pulpits here and there until I found another call, and Jim finally found a full time job.

It was a ***horrible time***,

and I was emotionally and physically sick beyond imagination.

To make matters worse, the Presbytery ***wasn't experienced*** in such cases, so some of my male colleagues blamed me,

the Presbytery did ‘release him’ to go serve in another state,

and some pastors even contacted old college professors of mine to ask whether I was ‘that kind of woman’, someone who brought this on myself!

It was crazy to say the least. And hurtful.
 I considered leaving ministry forever.
 It was a strong, wise female pastor who encouraged me to hang in there!

As a Christian and Pastor,
 I believe ***it's time for healing and justice***,
 for **women** who have been abused and harassed,
 and it's also time for us to speak ***honestly*** about this issue.
 We need to discuss what we ***can and should do for victims***,
and for those who have perpetrated this kind of abuse or harassment.
 It's such a prevalent issue in our world,
Shouldn't we talk about in church as well?

I have no doubt that ***the majority of women in this church*** have their own
 #MeToo stories of harassment, assault, or abuse.
 Some of you may have never shared your stories,
 some have considered this just an expected part of life,
 others have carried shame over what was not your fault.
Shouldn't we start sharing these stories—to find healing?

I have no doubt that ***men in this church have struggled*** with this issue as
 well, probably in a different way.
 You may have harassed or abused,
 or maybe you participated in some inappropriate conversations or situations,
 or you witnessed something bad and said nothing.
 Sometimes, rarely, men are the victims of such abuse.
What if guys were honest and willing to hold one another accountable?
Shouldn't we start doing that?

Doesn't God want all of us to find ***justice and healing?***
 I think so.

I think what's hard is that our culture is ***so hyper-focused*** on all things sexual,
 that we can lose sight of what is appropriate behavior.
 I know wonderful people who have done some dumb things.
 Probably all of us have struggled in some way or another with this issue.

What's good is that the ***Bible is NOT silent***
 about sexual harassment and assault.

Some stories are PG-13, or even R.

It has plenty of stories of women who were assaulted in horrific ways, women who were harassed, used, and abused in ways that are not even PG-13.

Today we tend to **ignore such stories** in the Bible.

These readings are not included in the weekly lectionary readings for worship, and most preachers never preach about passages like the rape of **Tamar** in 2 Sam 13, or **Dinah** in Genesis 34, or the horrific story of the **Levite's wife** given to a gang of men and then murdered in Judges 19.

Most of us have heard of King David's adultery in 2 Samuel 11, but we focus more on him, than the fact that he took Uriah's wife **Bathsheba** for himself (and had Uriah killed in battle!), just because he saw her from his palace!

We know that women were **treated like property** in Biblical times, but we don't always talk about the consequences of that attitude. It means that women are often not even named in the Scriptures, and they are usually considered to be second class people without inherent value or deserving of respect.

Remember the woman caught in adultery in John 8?

Why was it her, not him who was brought out for stoning?

Do we take for granted

that **Jesus went completely against the tradition** of his day?

He specifically **invited women** like Mary and Martha to follow him, and several women to support his ministry.

We read about his revolutionary attitude throughout the gospels, and specifically in **Luke 8** when he names several women supporting him. And of course at **Easter**, we are reminded that it was women were the first ones to see and announce the good news of the resurrection of Jesus!

I realize that the apostle Paul didn't always see the value of women in leadership in the early church,

but considering how Jesus was so accepting of women—

I have a hard time understanding the **ban on women** in ministry in so many denominations.

I am **proud** of our denomination, and our local church,

and the fact that so many leaders here are strong women of faith.

I am a member of a ***Presbyterian pastor's Bible study*** that meets on Thursdays, and it's a wonderful opportunity for me to share study and encouragement with some of my colleagues in ministry.

There are 3 men and 2 women, although my friend Sandy has not been able to attend recently.

When the #MeToo movement was hitting the news everywhere, they ***asked me about my experience*** with harassment, and we talked about my situation many years ago, and then ***they talked openly*** about how much our culture encourages a bad attitude toward women.

The men in that Bible study are in their 40s, 50s, and 60s, so it's a wide array of ages, but they all agreed that they have friends and acquaintances who have been inappropriate with or about women, and how easy it can be for men to have ***disparaging attitudes*** about women in general.

Some guys just don't think it's a big deal to share racy remarks or crass jokes about women.

Some think it's ***acceptable*** to speak in explicit ways.

One of them was talking about some of ***movies*** that came out in the past several months, and how one of them in particular involved a man telling his son to just ***go get the girl***—it doesn't matter if she says no—you just take her. It's ***attitudes*** like that which cause so much suffering today.

There is an underlying attitude that women are worth less than men, that they don't mean what they say when they say 'no', that they are things to be taken instead of people to be respected.

What's interesting is that while ***some Biblical characters*** like Amnon were clearly abusers, other Biblical men were disgusted by the abuse of women, Some wanted to ***avenge*** the rape or abuse of their sister or daughter.

And many early Bible commentators (all of which were men!) were completely disgusted by the abuse of women in the Bible.

Sometimes we excuse today the same things that men a century ago were clearly denouncing!

When it comes to leaders,
for years we have **excused inappropriate behavior** by saying
that **boys will be boys**,
or that it **doesn't matter** what they do or say,
as long as they have good leadership skills overall.

The church is really no different.
All of the women I know in pastoral positions have some kind of #MeToo
story. Overall the **church has been far too quiet** about it.

The **Catholic church** has seen the consequences of silence when it comes to
sexual assault or abuse—it's deadly—to victim's souls,
and to the church as a whole.

No denomination is immune to this kind of sin.
People are people, so **you can always find** sexual harassment, assault, abuse,
domestic violence, and every other kind of sin—within the church.
This is why we have a child and youth protection **policy** in this church.
It's why we **background check** everyone who works with our kids,
and we have **boundaries** for who is alone with whom.

But it's also why we remind ourselves on days like today,
that the **Word of God has something important to say** about these situations.

Our John 13 passage reminds us that we are
to love one another as Jesus loved us—that is the mark of a true Christian.
Doesn't that kind of love involve **truth-telling** as well?
Jesus was one of those guys who loved to tell the truth, even when it was
painful, right?
We need to show love through truth telling.
Truth **sets people free**—for those who have been victims,
and those who have caused pain.
Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would be the **Spirit of Truth**, (John 16:13)
so we have that Spirit within us,
guiding us to honesty about these painful situations.

Our **Matthew 7:12 verse is the Golden Rule**,
which is also a part of our church's mission statement,
the Greatest Commandment in Matthew 22:

to love God, and your neighbor as yourself.

Do any of us want to be treated with disrespect?

Do any of us want to be belittled? Harassed? Or abused?

No. Of course not.

If we don't want it done to us—we shouldn't do it to someone else, right?

So when we think of what is appropriate—we **Christians have parameters** for what that means, right?

It's appropriate **if Jesus would do it!**

And of course it's not appropriate if it's not the way Jesus or we want to be treated!

The Romans 12 passage is pretty powerful as well:

Listen again:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good....

outdo one another in showing honor...¹⁷

Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

I love that.

Outdo one another in showing honor.

What if we were to do that?

For everyone---women and men?

What if we showed so much respect for one another, that **people took notice?**

What if we took thought for what is **noble in the sight of all?**

This is certainly **not popular** in our world today, right?

It seems like **all we see publicly** are examples of people putting each other down, belittling one another, and disrespecting each other!

That is not who we are as brothers and sisters in Christ.

We are people who show the love of Christ,

which means we **hold one another** in the highest regard, with the **utmost respect.**

It also means we are **people who care about justice.**

We want to **affirm what is right—**

hold fast to what is good, and hate what is evil.
So we ***cannot be silent*** when we see evil in our midst.

What Would Jesus Do? He would say something.

This is why we have mandatory reporting of child abuse,
because we hate evil, and hold fast to the good.
We care about wrong and right as people of faith!

Most of us want to ***live peaceably*** with all,
just as Paul describes in Romans,
but that kind of true peace can only come ***alongside
truth, love and justice.***

It all goes together.

***What if we started sharing, honestly and openly, and encouraged one
another? And held each other accountable?***

That would be Good News!

Friends, hear the ***Good News.***

We who have been hurt by harassment and abuse,
God wants to bring us ***healing and justice.***

We who have been, and will be in questionable situations,
And Jesus wants to show us the way forward.

May we seek to be ***true Christians***, through our love, our respect,
and the ***way we outdo one another in showing honor!***

Amen.