

Actual Message:***Best Laid Plans!***

I want to apologize, friends, because we're not talking about Institutions today.

I had intended to. But something happened to me this week, and I want to talk about that--I think I should talk about that--and how this experience I had relates to the way we make sense of what's going on around us in the world, in the news, in our society. Because we are still in this series on how we make sense of what's going on in the world around us right now. I'll also connect this, I hope in a good way, to Jesus, right? And what it means to be a Christian right now, here.

Heads Up:

And let me say this. We're talking about sensitive things today that will make us uncomfortable, and maybe distressed. We won't talk about them for a few minutes; I first want to share what happened to me this week. But we're talking about trauma, and that itself can be traumatic. I recognize that. So if you have to leave at any point for awhile, do, but come back in if you can. Consider this a trigger warning, a head's up. But, if you can, stick with me for awhile.

Let's pray.

Prayer:

A Thing That Happened:

So. A story.

But background to this story is this: When Bo was 9 months old, she and Carolyn were repeatedly hit by a car in the parking lot of Whole Foods, and basically crushed. Many of you walked with us during that time, it was long and traumatic and a mess, and it had repercussions in every area of our lives. It became a capitalized noun, for us: "The Accident." This was eight years ago, exactly, today; although it happened on a Thursday, then.

Now, this past Thursday I was driving down 315, earlier in the morning than I usually do, during rush hour. I was going down to visit the First Brethren Church building, check mail, make sure no windows had been broken, you know. A check-in. And in my rear-view mirror, I saw an Ambulance coming, well before I heard it.

And my mind immediately went to riding with Bo in the back of the ambulance after she and Carolyn were hit in the parking lot.

And I could barely hold myself together. I did, of course--I was driving, after all, right?

But I was there, in that ambulance, flying down 315. I reached out to Carolyn; she pointed out that it was that day, Thursday eight years ago, that the accident happened. Eventually I got it together, and my day continued in its way.

But before settling into working on the message--this message--I read a silly article about a Beluga Whale, which mentioned Raffi, who apparently sings a song about a Beluga Whale. I've never heard it.

And I was back, again, in the ambulance, singing the ridiculous Raffi songs I sang to Bo at the time, the paramedic noting that he sang the same song to his child. And then I collected myself together again, the parts of me that had spilled out.

A Point:

And here's my point in this: trauma doesn't leave us.

Trauma doesn't leave us.

Most of the time--I mean, if you take the margin of error, all of the time--I never think about the accident Carolyn and Bo were in. It's just not a thing that comes up. I don't think about the grief, I don't find myself crying. I've been through therapy, I've built theology, I take (prescribed) drugs, I keep habits that have allowed me to just live, without regular reflection, on the experience that really has, undoubtedly, shaped our shared life.

I have, oh, integrated the experiences of those days into my life, dwelled on them, made them part of me.

But trauma never leaves us. It may be integrated into our sense of self, it may be muscled down, mostly caged, it may be in control. But it never goes away, because we never go away. Our experiences are part of us, our trauma forms us.

Trauma never leaves us; it never goes away. What's in the past is never undone and can never be made up for or paid back, because the past is unretrievable.

There's a book titled *The Body Keeps The Score*, a book that I've never read, but the title's enough for now, and maybe always. My body remembered Thursday morning: the chill in the air, the day on the calendar, watching and hearing the ambulance on the highway, an echo of my own de-realization as I sat with Bo and sang silly Raffi songs to distract us both.

My body remembered: "This happened to you. This is part of you, always." Because as Nouwen points out, all we are is a collection of memories. We're held together by repetition, by relationship, by these bodies that embody at a cellular level the experiences we've had.

Three Things:

And when it comes to our trauma, we either integrate our critical emotional moments into our view of the world, our understanding of God, and our sense of self; or it controls us directly; or we fight against it, in some sort of civil war that never really stops, and in those times when the trauma wins all our dysfunctional survivalistic coping strategies are on display.

We either integrate, are imprisoned, or battle with our trauma, never making sense of it and never free from

its control.

Re-traumatized:

And I think, honestly, that no matter how healthily, faithfully, bravely we've dealt with the trauma that never leaves us, no matter how well we've integrated our experience of trauma into our view of the world, when we are reminded of it again, we are re-traumatized.

When we are reminded of it again, we are re-traumatized. Because we are our memories held together in this body and the relationships we have and have had.

Now, for those who have integrated their trauma into their sense of who they are, have made sense of it, it may not be that significant to be re-traumatized by way of reminder. They may be able to do the task of again, saying "This is who I am, this is what's happened to me, this is what I do with it." It may require very little, because new muscle memory, new training, new discipline has not overcome the trauma, but worked with it and through it to embrace it as meaningful without fear.

But for those who are in a civil war, and for those who imprisoned, to be reminded of the trauma that chases them is to be re-traumatized as strongly as their first experience.

Hear me: A reminder of trauma always re-traumatizes someone, because a reminder pricks our memories, and we are made up of memory and bone. That retraumatization may be very easy to move past, or it may derail someone.

Right Now:

And here's how this connects to this whole series about making sense of right now, this moment in our society.

We are, through the very important, critical, conversations that are happening in our public sphere, retraumatizing many, many survivors of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and sexual objectification.

Our days, right now, are days of sexual retraumatization.

Does this make sense? Do you hear me? Our feeds, our stories, our news, the conversation in our public

sphere, they are creating for us retraumatizing days.

Because we have experienced trauma.

28% of marriages contain physical violence. 50% of marriages experience some form of abuse (CCADA). 1 out of 3 women will experience some sort of sexual violence in their lifetime; 1 out of 6 men; 60% go unreported (CDC), but it occurs every 93 seconds. 1 out of 5 women will be raped at some point in their lives (RAINN). And 8 out of 10 victims know their abuser (RAINN). Most of these victims are children; 2/3rds of sexual assault victims are between the ages of 12 and 17 (RAINN). Over 2.1 million American elderly suffer abuse and neglect each year (CCADA, 2009); sexual abuse is wrapped up in that number; 70% of elder abuse victims are women (www.californiaelderabuselawyer-blog.com)

These statistics don't take into account sexual harassment, sexual objectification. But they are true apart from religiosity or religious affiliation. These things are as true in the Church as outside them. I could pile statistic after statistic up, and the pile would reveal this:

We are all being retraumatized right now; surprised by the news that we hear, that is talked about around us. Because if we aren't the one in three, or the one in six, we love them. I wasn't hit by a car; my wife and daughter were. And yet: they are flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone, and I shared in the trauma of that moment.

Beyond this: Sexual Harassment and Sexual Objectification are traumatic, too, and particularly every woman has experienced those, because to be a woman in our society is to experience these things. And if I focus on women for a moment, well: Oh well. Because it is women our society silences most.

Brothers,:

So, men, brothers in Christ, hear me for a second. I want to talk to us. And I do so with fear and trembling.

What has become very, very clear to me recently, in a way that's never been so clear, is that to be a woman in America is to be at the mercy of whatever the men in power above them say and do. Because the men in power above them almost never use their power to diminish their power. The men in power above them almost never, ever treat the women in power below

them as equals. How we use power itself prevents that.

As I was working on the message, or trying to, back in that ambulance with Bo and desperately praying for her and Carol, while fudging Raffi lyrics, I heard a man, just a few tables over from where I was typing, say the phrase “it’s like putting lipstick on a pig.” No big thing; just a saying, in context having nothing to do with men or women at all. But it’s the women, in our society, who wear lipstick. It’s the women, in the metaphor, who are pigs. The men, of course, are the ones who’d put the lipstick on them.

In our fallen society men are actors, agents, those who have will and power, and women are acted upon. And this is the society Bo is growing up in, and I realize, in some real ways, my powerlessness--with all my privilege, all my wealth, all my capacity--I have so little power to change things such that Bo can be Bo without having to assert herself over against the agency of the men around her.

In our society, men act, express their agency, use their will and power, to sexually harass women. It is almost our basic expression of maleness. To be male is to be

one who sexually acts; to be female is to be one who is sexually acted upon. In our fallen society, men learn, very early, that to be male is to be one who sexually acts, and to be female is to be one who is sexually acted upon. To be male is to take, to be female is to be forced to give. And yet: A third of the women around us will experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime. A third of our wives and daughters and sisters and mothers and grandmothers.

And, look, when you add in all the things we do with our eyes, all the ways women are sexually harassed and objectified, it's not a third; it's a whole. It's a 100% of the women around us, and that's because water is wet, and to be female in our society is to have been sexualized and made the object of sexual attention.

What do we do with the world as it is? What ought we do when we realize that conquest, violence, and death are the way of the male, which rules every society? What ought we do when it's clear that our society is run as a male? Driven by men who, in their maleness, will ensure the exercise of their will upon not just individuals, but the entire culture and its laws that bound it, themselves happy to bind and release

themselves upon it?

What we ought to do, fellas, is reject it. Reject, in every way, maleness and femaleness as our society expresses it. Reject the loose definition that masculine is to be a sexual actor, and feminine is to be acted upon.

We can't say "boys will be boys," we can't teach our sons or grandsons conquest, violence, and dominance. We can't teach our daughters or granddaughters passivity and meek acceptance. If we have power at all it's meant for other uses.

Because what we all know is that people were first made to be in relationship with God who "is love," that we were made in the image of God, and that even though we broke that relationship, God pursued us with love, longing to bless us and draw us back to him. We know that God showed his love for us by sending us Jesus, "who chose to die for us because of his love for us" even when we stood against him. We were made in God's image, out of God's love, and chased after for generations until we could be remade in the image of Jesus, who used up his breath loving us, so that we might know his love and bring others to it.

But, brothers in Christ, we need to remember that into this world that we live in, James calls us to care for the orphan and the widow; the weakest members of society. Into this world Peter calls God's People to remember that they were aliens and foreigners in Egypt, and that His People are meant to be advocates for the ones who less no legal standing in our society. Into this world the author of Hebrews reminds us that it is our responsibility to go outside the gates to the ones who are outside, the "them," who we'd rather disregard. Into this world, Paul calls us to bear witness to the truth that in Jesus there is no "male and female." And he's not using the term to say, you know, that our sex disappears. "Male and female" is a marriage term. Paul's reminding us that those cultural standards, defined by society, are meant to be sublimated, set beneath, our allegiance to Jesus and our safe and secure identity in Christ.

Just as John the Baptist said "I must decrease so that he [that is, Jesus] might increase [in stature and esteem and influence]," we who in our society have the power to reject our power, have to be willing to reject the abusive way of maleness in a society lurking in wait for someone to overtake, and take up the

redeeming way of Christ in a world that's waiting with groaning for resurrection. (A Christ whose first public correction was from a woman, whose ministry was paid for by women, whose dead body was brought home by women.)

We have to be ourselves, that's all. Just ourselves. And come to realize the ways men force themselves on others--sexually or otherwise--because our society has considered it our divine right. If our identity is wrapped up in our expression of entitlement, of conquest, of violence and taking what we want, then we are nothing like the self-emptying Jesus who we owe our life to, Jesus, "who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant

And look, if this is a threat, it's not a threat to being awesome, to being great, to being clever and smart and creative and handy or even a great sexual partner to your spouse. It's a threat only to the insecurity and entitlement that comes when our identity is not secure in God's love for us, but is instead wrapped up in an image of masculinity that takes its cues more from the devil than the Lord. In Christ there is no "male and

female,” there are only those who are defined by love, by strength, by self-sacrifice, and by compassion. That is who we all are.

Brothers, we are not called to conform to the pattern of this world, and we aren't called to thrive in the world or our society. We are called, like all Christians are called, to love those who will not survive it unless we love them.

And right now, if it's the deeds that make up a person or anything, then our society is a sexual abuser, taking what it wants from those females who it has made to exist only for its sexual release. We can't echo a pattern of practice like that.

And should a woman in our lives act with the bravery and courage that our society has somehow, shamefully, allocated to men, and name her experience of trauma as a first step in integrating it into her sense of self, then...we should celebrate that, because we simply have to recognize: It takes more for a woman to do this than it does a man.

So, fellas, brothers in Christ, think about these things.

Right Now's Triple Terror:

All of us, though, need to realize the triple-terror of this moment in our society.

The first is the sexual trauma that is as common as garbage, which is what it so often makes those who suffer it believe they are.

The second is this season of retraumatization, in which a third, and a sixth, and all of us are being forced to deal again with the traumas that never leave us.

The third is that our world consistently asks the most from the least, and we often demand from those who have been most imprisoned by trauma to take the most responsibility for their freedom. The third terror is that it is only the one who experiences trauma who can claim it as part of their experience. It is only the one who experiences trauma who can claim it's experience as part of their identity.

Just as none of us can force a person to forgive us, none of us can force another person to make peace with the trauma they have experienced. These are things that cannot be taken from us: our forgiveness, and claiming our experience of trauma.

An Unjust Plea:

But let me say this, to those of us who are right now being retraumatized by the loud conversation our society is having.

In the end, somehow when it comes to trauma you must name it, and claim it, and let it be part of the story. You're living as someone who is brave, and loved, and special, and destined for glory.

To do so is to take your trauma back from the devil, who claims it, and it is to make your wound your strength, your place of compassion, your heartbreak, and your engine for justice.

It is redemption, a miracle of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, when those who grieve anything, find in their grief the means by which they fellowship with all the grieving. It is a miracle of God when they discover, in their sense of abandonment, that Jesus' cry of abandonment to God was a cry of solidarity with them. And it is unjust and unfair that one should not only be given trauma, but then be responsible for facing and claiming that trauma as their own. But it's the only way that a grief can turn into strength, and the deep

pit of suffering can be made into a strong fortress for not only our confident, free movement in the world, but a place of safety for others, too.

To Be Brave:

But let me say this: To be brave, and to do this--to name our traumas, and claim them, and connect our collated memories to the redemption of God, to do this as a woman whose traumas include sexual violence is to stand against every inclination of our society.

Because it's to act with resistance against the pervasive, persistent forces of our society that define femaleness, femininity, as passivity, and acceptance.

To name and own and integrate our traumas of sexual violence as women is to act, as far as our society is concerned, male. And that transgression, that turf-stealing isn't something that our society, or it's most self-deluding masculine actors, manages well.

But it's also to act faithfully, with trust that God means what he says about us, that Paul wasn't lying when he says in Christ there is no longer "male and female," that what defines us isn't our society's expectations of what we ought to do and when we ought to do it, but

what defines us is that we are God's children, we are Christ's siblings, we are chosen, dearly loved, and we reject the idea that anything can define us outside our self-definition in Jesus.

But be aware that the act of bravery that comes in giving voice to your experience of sexual assault is one that will put you in confrontation to the way our society has set you up to act. As you become a friend to yourself, to your own history, to others who have claimed what has traumatized them, you'll be becoming an enemy to those who would have you stay in your place, silent and be acted upon by them.

Let me bring this together for us.

Right Now:

So do you see that this moment in our society is a moment of retraumatization for thousands and thousands and thousands of women, and men too. For some of us and for those we love.

And yet, it's happening because women are refusing our society's long-running evil operating principle that to be male is to be one who acts, and to be female is to be one who is acted upon. It's happening because

those who have been victims of sexual violence are refusing to be victimized by the trauma that never leaves them, and instead, are claiming their grief and owning it as part of the story of their lives, integrated into the memories that make them who they are. There is no more a Christian thing to do than this, even though I am very sure not many of those who are acting with such bravery, such self-definition, realize it.

Conclusion: Trauma

I want us to realize that trauma never leaves us. The implications for that are enormous, because if statistics have any relationship to reality, we are traumatized, we in this room. Trauma never leaves us, and our only choice is to find out how to embrace it by embracing all of ourselves in the center of Christ's safe acceptance.

Conclusion: Male Obligation

I want those of us who are men to realize that as far as the fallen pattern of our world goes, to be male is to be one who sexually acts, and to be female is to be the object of someone else's sexual actions. This lie undermines and destroys our basic Christian truth that in Christ there is no "male and female." We spit on the image of God in women, spit on the image of Christ in

our sisters, when we allow this devilish pattern to become our own.

Conclusion: Retraumatization

Most importantly, maybe, I just want us to see that right now, and for awhile, we are experiencing, as a society, a season of re-traumatization.

We're in a time of making survivors of sexual assaults re-experience those assaults. And that has an effect on our society, it has an effect on the people around us. It has an effect on us.

We who walk by the Spirit of God must be the most sensitive to the ways our conversations will force others to experience trauma again.

What we do with this, I don't know. It wouldn't be bad to be gentler and more patient with others and ourselves for awhile, recognizing the time we're in, knowing that 1 in three, 1 in six is being forced to deal with their trauma again.

It would be good to be sensitive about when and where and why we discuss these things, knowing that to keep this conversation alive is both good, in that it

erodes an oppressive masculinity's power in our society, and nudges us a little closer to the virtues of Christ, but it is also one that will cost those we love and ourselves energy, attention, emotional strength, and just general capacity for life. We don't want to be the ambulance on 315, I think, forcing the person in front of us to be dislocated from their present, so they have to deal with the old trauma we've triggered.

At the very least, join with me in praying for those who live with trauma that never leaves them. We're praying for ourselves, after all, and those we love, when we do it, right? If you need resources, they're in your bulletin; if you want to reach out to me or someone wiser than me about any of this, please do it.

May God make good of all of this, for all of us, however we relate to it.