TAMAR CAMPAIGN
Contextual Bible Study Manual
and Sermon Outlines on Gender Based Violence and Peace
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Acknowledgement

This manual contains Contextual Bible Studies (CBSs) reflections and Sermon Outlines addressing various emerging themes on the drivers of violence in general and in particular Gender Based Violence (GBV) in the family and community. It is intended for use by not only ordained ministers of the Gospel and the theologians, but also Lay Ministers, Community leaders and peace actors and champions against GBV as well as Sunday School Teachers, Youth Leaders, Women and Men Church group leaders and other Church workers. This tool is easily accessible and theologically sound for purposes of mobilizing church and community against all forms of Gender Based Violence (GBV) against women, men, youth, children, and persons living with disabilities.

I wish to acknowledge and appreciate the technical team that has played a key role in processing, structuring, and editing the CBS reflections and Sermon Outlines. In particular I wish to thank Prof. Esther Mombo, Rev. Dr. Julius Kithinji, Rev. Phylis Byrd Ochilo, Rev. Fred Nyabera, Rev. Fr. Evangelos Thiani, and Ms. Monica Njoroge. This team has played a critical role in ensuring that the reflections are theologically sound.

The preparation process of this manual has been participatory. The CBS reflections and Sermon Outlines have been written by various clergy and theologians both women and men from across FECCLAHA region and beyond. In keeping with the spirit of ecumenism the contributors are men and women from different Christian traditions. As a result, the material reflects a significant diversity. I wish to thank each of the contributors for their invaluable contribution to this manual.

Furthermore, the preparation of the manual has also entailed conducting consultations and workshops with clergy, theologians, and church workers across the region. I am grateful to all members and clergy that participated in these consultations, as their participation was helpful in facilitating the process of ‘looking back’ and ‘looking forward’ as regards how the church has and must engage with Gender Based Violence (GBV) and peace while taking into account the prevailing context of the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa. The consultations enabled us to identify key gaps especially the need for gender inclusion so as to increase participation of men in engaging with prevention of GBV, a focus on peace and conflict and its link with gender justice, as well as the need for extra tools such as sermon outlines.

This publication has been made possible by funding from Bread for the World and Church of Sweden. We are grateful for their partnership and support for the Gender and Peace initiatives within FECCLAHA. I also thank NCA-Regional Advocacy programme for their support in undertaking a consultation in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) which immensely contributed to the documentation of this manual.

Guided by FECCLAHA vision of ‘Together for a Just and Peaceful Society’, the organizing mantra for this manual is ‘Leaving No One Behind’. It is our deepest prayer, therefore, that you shall find it a handy and easy-to-use reference in raising awareness and promoting behavior and attitude change on Gender Based Violence (GBV) in the Church and community.

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Foreword

“So God created human beings in His own image. In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them”

(Genesis 1: 27)

Gender Justice has to do with valuing the other person regardless of whether they are male or female. It has to do with honouring and treating each other with dignity, fairness, compassion, and understanding. These are key values and principles that ought to guide us on how we live out our Christian faith.

This manual follows FECLAHA's first publication – the 'Tamar Campaign, Contextual Bible Study Manual' (FECLAHA, 2007) – which has been an invaluable resource for churches and church leaders in addressing Gender Based Violence in different parts of the world. The first publication contains 12 Bible reflections that are drawn from different Bible passages addressing different themes on Violence Against Women (VAW). These themes include incest, rape and the silence, stigma, shame, and secrecy on the same and, sexual violence including gang rape, structural violence among others. Also included are themes on how power can be used positively for service and advocacy; suffering of women living with HIV/AIDS; the plight of women, children, and the elderly during conflict situations, as well as life affirming models of manhood and fatherhood as demonstrated by Jesus in the New Testament.

The publication of this second manual on 'Gender Based Violence and Peace' should not in any way dispel the relevance of the first publication. The first publication is still useful as a reference and guide in addressing the various themes on Violence Against Women (VAW).

Consideration for the factors that restricted the use of the first publication by church leaders in the region informed the structure and content of this manual. The key factors and gaps addressed in this manual include:

1. **Gender inclusivity** – This manual brings to the fore and acknowledges that Gender Justice is not only about women, but also about men, children and young people, the elderly, and persons living with disabilities.

2. **Inclusion of themes on Peace and Conflict** – This manual contains themes on peace and violence at the family and community. It also addresses some concerns on governance and leadership and their importance to peaceful coexistence. Conflicts at the family and community level are key drivers of Gender Based Violence and Gender Injustices in the community.

3. **Extra tools** – The extra tools will facilitate widespread engagement on the issue of Gender Justice, Peace & Conflict. In addition to the CBS reflections, this manual includes sermon outlines on various themes and topics. These extra tools will then become key reference documents that will empower the church leaders/church workers to adequately prepare for sermons on GBV which was in the past found to be a difficult topic to preach about for many church leaders/church workers.
Central to this manual is the use of Contextual Bible Study (CBS) methodology which are drawn from various Bible passages in the Old Testament and New Testament. Each CBS contains reflections and critically posited questions to facilitate deep reflections on various themes on drivers of Gender Based Violence (GBV). A key feature of the CBS session is the Call to Action at the end of each session. The Sermon Outlines, on the other hand, cover various themes on gender justice, Gender Based Violence (GBV) and violence and peace, affecting men, women, children, and persons living with disability. These sermons provide talking points and general guideline on various themes on violence and gender justice drawn from different Bible passages. The user of this manual can refer to the Sermon Outlines when preparing to preach or make presentations on the themes listed above to various groups.

I commend to you this manual as an important reference material in addressing the drivers of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and gender injustice. The language and general design of the manual is such that it can be used in different contexts and you do not have to be an ordained Minister or a theologian to use it.

It is my prayer that the use of this tool will make a contribution to break the silence on gender injustice and violence in our families, churches, and society.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Rev. Sylvestre Bizimana
FECCLAHA, Chairperson
Preface

Contextual Understanding of Gender Based Violence in The Region

Background

Gender Based Violence (GBV), that is violence directed against or experienced by men or women mostly or partly because of their gender, is perhaps the most tolerated and least recognized violation of the person. It has devastating impact that cuts across borders, races, class, ethnicity, and religion. These impacts tear away at the institutions of family, the economy, culture and political life through which society is built.

While, Gender Based Violence (GBV) is prevalent in societies considered to be peaceful and secure, its impact is made worse by the presence of violent conflict. Sadly, many societies in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa region continue to experience armed conflict or are in post conflict situations. In many of these societies, the possibility that the conflict will recur is real with anecdotal evidence indicating that one third of all ended civil wars in Africa have recurred.

Why focus on GBV

Gender Based Violence (GBV) exacerbates the suffering of women, men, youth, and children during peaceful as well as armed conflict situations. This then weakens communities, destroys the economy, and erodes core values of respect, dignity, and appreciation for all members of society as valuable and equal participants in development. For women Gender Based Violence (GBV) intensifies gender inequalities and their subordinate positioning in society. Gender Based Violence (GBV), especially the violence against women and girls is also closely correlated to such ills as the spread of HIV/AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Infections.

The following statistics serve to demonstrate the grim situation of GBV in the region and around the world:1:

- According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 35 percent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) or non-partner sexual violence (WHO, 2013).
- In some countries, up to 70 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015).
- Studies in 86 countries in Africa, the Americas, Eastern Mediterranean, Europe, South-East Asia and the Western Pacific, show that up to 68 percent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime from an intimate partner.

(WHO, 2013). Countries in Central Sub-Saharan Africa, had the most incidences of violence against women with an estimated up to 66 percent of ever-partnered women having experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner (WHO, 2013).

- Gender Based Violence is a major cause of disability and death for women aged 15–44 years (United Nations Women, 2011).

- 34 percent of women with health problems or disability reported having experienced physical or sexual violence by a partner in their lifetime, compared to 19 percent of women without a health problem or disability (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014)

- Around the world, one out of every five women will become a victim of rape or attempted rape over the course of her lifetime (Heise, Ellsberg, and Gottemoeller, 1999).

- Worldwide, more than 700 million women alive today were married as children (below 18 years of age). Of those, 1 in 3 – or some 250 million – were married before they were 15 years old. Child brides are often unable to effectively negotiate safe sex, leaving them vulnerable to early pregnancy as well as sexually transmitted infection, including HIV. (UNICEF, 2014)

- Around 120 million girls worldwide (slightly more than 1 in 10) have experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forced sexual acts at some point in their lives. By far the most common perpetrators of sexual violence against girls are current or former husbands, partners, or boyfriends (UNICEF, 2014).

- In 2012, women and girls represented 55 percent of the estimated 20.9 million victims of forced labor worldwide, and 98 percent of the estimated 4.5 million forced into sexual exploitation (ILO, 2012).

- During the 1994 Rwandan genocide, an estimated 250,000–500,000 women were raped (UN 1996).

- Situations of conflict, post conflict and displacement may worsen existing violence, such as by intimate partners and present additional forms of Violence against Women/GBV.

- Approximately half of children of primary school age who are not in school live in conflict-affected areas. (UN Security Council Report, 2014).

- 250 million children live in conflict countries where they are even directly targeted, while tens of thousands of them have been recruited and used as child soldiers by state armed forces as well as non-state armed groups (Children and Armed Conflict, UN 2017).

This manual seeks to address the drivers of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in the family and community. It contains Contextual Bible Studies (CBS) that address:

1. Direct Violence – The use of force or verbal attack within the family and community;
2. **Cultural Violence** – Attitudes, practices and norms that people carry and that justify violence on women, men, and children. These include deeply ingrained beliefs preserved or spread in the Church as well as in institutions such as marriage, parenting, adolescence, youth and adulthood;

3. **Structural Violence** – The presence or exercise of power to achieve or maintain dominance in gender relations and determine the allocation of opportunity and privilege in social, political, and economic arrangements.

This grim situation in the region and world makes the call to end Gender Based Violence (GBV) urgent. Since the drivers of Gender Based Violence (GBV) are many and entrenched, ending it requires multi-pronged approaches working at various levels including the family, community and the state.

### About Contextual Bible Study (CBS) Methodology

This manual is informed by and makes firm reference to the Bible and sound theology. The Bible is the major text in the Church and in contemporary African society. The Bible is resourceful and handy in its ability to address many social issues in the society including, Gender Based Violence (GBV). The Bible’s vast influence can be inferred by how often it is quoted in various occasions in politics, social, cultural, and religious life. Communities read, interpret, and apply the bible to many issues in their society. Whereas, the interpretation of the Bible may vary, Christians generally regard the Bible as the central authority of their faith. Various assumptions may inform the use of the Bible including:

- The Bible was written over a period of 1000 years and collected over an even longer duration;
- The stories in the Bible originated from diverse human societies and Biblical materials reflect diverse circumstances as to human values, theology, and religious practice;
- The contexts that informed or influenced the various writers were diverse and thus the Bible contains a wide range of literary forms such as stories, narratives, laws, poetry, songs, proverbs, and letters, among others.

This manual has two main sections: the Contextual Bible Study (CBS) and the Sermon Outlines. This is in acknowledgment that preaching on its own and bible study on its own, although most popular in many churches, may not adequately cover all issues, especially sensitive contextual matters such as Gender Based Violence (GBV).

Contextual Bible Study involves an interactive reading of Bible texts, where the community interacts creatively with the social/cultural context of the users. As a tool, Contextual Bible Study (CBS) creates a safe space and helps to open up the process of discussing issues that are important in Church and society. Contextual Bible Study (CBS) methodology compares well with other forms of Bible study that draw an interface between socially, engaged Biblical scholars and ordinary Christian readers of the Bible.

Contextual Bible Study employs three steps, known as **SEE-JUDGE-ACT**, where the Bible Study process begins with the analysis of the local context (**SEE**), moves to the Bible to allow it
to speak to the context (*JUDGE*), and then culminates with the participants planning a course of action arising from the Bible Study (*ACT*).

The Tamar Campaign originated 15 years ago at the Ujamaa Centre in South Africa where they have perfected practicing Contextual Bible Study (CBS) as a tool for discussing Gender Based Violence. This manual borrows and is informed by the work of the Ujamaa Centre.

**Understanding Contextual Bible Study:**

Contextual Bible Study is designed for the ordained Ministers and Bible scholars, as well as, the lay ministers and church workers. The reflections can be summarized into Five Steps (5 C’s of CBS):

1. **CONTEXT OF THE READER (Social Location)** – CBS begins with the reality or the context of the people who want to study the Bible. The theme/topic under discussion must speak to the reality of the participants. The facilitator should therefore ensure that his or her choice of theme is relevant to the context of the participants.

2. **COMMUNITY (Interactive)** – CBS is interactive. It invites the voices and opinions of all that are participating in the study. Responses to pressing questions are not given by the facilitator, rather by the participants. Community emphasizes discussions, debates, and analysis among participants.

3. **CONTEXT OF THE BIBLE (Criticality)** – CBS respects the text in its own context. CBS tools are therefore used to probe and appreciate the text in its own context. CBS questions regarding character and story plots facilitate the process of understanding the literal meaning of the Bible passage. The facilitator may, however, need to undertake some research on the socio-historical background the text to facilitate adequate participation of the participants.

4. **CONSCIENTISATION (Raising Awareness)** – CBS aims at highlighting how the Bible and other sources of knowledge can be used as both a tool for liberation and oppression. It seeks to challenge the faith community’s practice of approaching Biblical texts and other sources of knowledge with a hermeneutic of trust. CBS brings to consciousness the things that people often take for granted as natural or given. It points out the liberating elements of the Gospel and brings a sharp focus to the way abuse of faith, culture, and the sacred texts promotes injustice.

5. **CHANGE (Transformation)** – The ultimate goal of CBS is to transform. CBS does not end at awareness; rather it goes a step further to ensure that transformation takes place at individual and community levels. As a result of the transformation, the way in which one reads the Bible is changed – the participants learn to read the Bible in ways that are liberating and inclusive. Ultimately, through sustained effort, it is hoped that the transformation will spur people to action for change. CBS has to challenge people enough to want to make a difference in their Churches and communities. Some of the questions that facilitate the process of reflection on the ‘change’ are: ‘What difference does it make that we have now done this Bible Study?’ ‘What will we do differently?’ ‘What resources do we have for change?’
When transformation has been achieved, then there can be a celebration, in appreciation of the progress made.

**Check Points for a Successful Contextual Bible Study (CBS)**

1. **Creative:** Facilitators should incorporate interesting activities, including story-telling, drama, poetry, singing, case studies among others.

2. **Challenging:** Facilitators should probe and challenge participants to think about their faith and society in new and different ways. In the norm, participants have learned to avoid some biblical texts while interpreting those commonly read the same way. This manual focuses on Biblical texts that are often not read but also challenges the reader to re-read the common texts in new ways.

3. **Sensitive:** Facilitators must be sensitive to the culture and church theology. This should however, not be used to patronize others.

4. **Neutrality of the facilitator:** The identity of the facilitator is key. The facilitator must be seen to be sensitive to the diversities of the group by demonstrating critical solidarity with the different participants.

5. **Empowering:** The facilitator should write up all participants’ responses on the board. Efforts should be made to give space to those voices that are often not heard.

6. **Measured Transformation** – When an action plan is implemented it is a sign that the CBS has been successful. For example, a community in response to the Bible study may decide to adopt a policy or engage a wider community.

**Tips for the Facilitator**

The facilitator is a key player in ensuring that the CBS achieves the desired transformation.

1. **Contextual Bible Study is facilitated and not taught.** The facilitator’s key role is to enable and stir debate and discussions amongst the participants. To ensure that discussions are not forgotten and lost in the debate, the facilitator should record all the participants’ responses in a flip chart or board for everybody to read.

2. It helps to introduce some socio-historical information regarding the text and the theme under discussion. This helps in setting the scene and directing the discussion of the Contextual Bible Study session. It also helps the participants understand the topic under discussion.

3. There should be clear co-relation between the Biblical text and the current context of the participants. The Biblical text should be helping the participants to think about and address current social concerns within their context.

4. **Create an atmosphere that encourages participants to feel free to interrogate the Biblical texts** – Many Christians are only taught to have hermeneutical trust for Biblical text. However, CBS sessions should create safe spaces where participants are allowed to interrogate the Biblical texts without being judged.
5. Encourage discussions/debates and analysis of the texts and issues by the participants. **The participants should be encouraged to engage with the text.** The facilitator is free to ask probing questions that will trigger deeper engagement. It is through these engagements that the transformation takes place.

6. **A typical Contextual Bible Study session should take place between 45 minutes to 2 hours.** It should not be too long so as to tire participants; however, it should not be too short so as to facilitate adequate time for discussion.

7. **Sustained Contextual Bible Study sessions** will cause greater transformation than having a one-off session only. This essentially, means that the facilitator should seek to have multiple engagements with the same group of participants.

For resources or help with Contextual Bible Study, consider:


2. Fred Nyabera and Taryn Montgomery. Tamar Campaign, Contextual Bible Study manual on Gender Based Violence. FECCLAHA, St. Paul’s University and WCC. 2007;

OLD TESTAMENT CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDIES
Perfect Creation | Genesis 2: 15-24

—Emily Onyango

Gender based violence and conflict in the family and society are common in East and Central Africa despite a large number of people proclaiming the Christian faith. This has been promoted partly by the assumption that the Bible teaches inferiority of women. Most people also interpret the Bible using their cultural world view which often degrades the woman. A majority of people also do not read the Bible but read into it.

Gender based violence is largely driven by gender inequality and some of the gender roles imposed by the society. Gender roles and gender inequality are social arrangements derived from different cultures and world-views. Religion plays a major role in constructing a world-view. Misinterpretation of scripture and looking at scripture through patriarchal and African cultural lenses reinforces gender inequality.

Firstly, there is an assumption that the first female, Eve, was created as an inferior creature, deficient in physical strength, less astute in her mental capacities and because of her weaknesses, she is supposed to live in a state of subordination to Adam. Secondly, the serpent deceived Eve, and thus Eve must be forever punished for her disobedience. She has to live in a state of subjugation to her superior male counterpart.

In the creation story (Genesis 2:15-23), the man is created first, however this does not establish a hierarchy or man’s priority. That this is so can be inferred from other instances where God created plants and animals and yet gave man dominion over them. Further, in the Old Testament leadership is in several instances given to those born later, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, and David over the brothers.

The Hebrew words ‘Ezer’ and ‘Neged’, translated helpmeet/helpmate, have no meaning of assistant or someone with lower status. To the contrary, helper from the word ‘Ezer’ is translated as strength, help, rescuer or saviour. The word is used several times in the Old Testament but not once to refer to a helper as a subordinate. Helper is always a superior or an equal. God is referred to as helper (Ps. 121:1-2). The Hebrew term ‘Neged’ or meet refers to suitability. Eve is thus a suitable, appropriate or fitting partner, a real help and equal in a relationship of mutuality.

Read Genesis 2: 15-24

1. What is the text about?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. Which words and phrases in this text have perpetrators of gender violence favored?
4. How useful is this passage for educating those who use it to support the inferiority and oppression of women?
5. If you were to rewrite this text what parts would you change and why?
6. In your opinion, is this text favorable or unfavorable to humanity?
7. What will you do in response to this Bible study?
A Child with a Slave Woman?

*Genesis 16: 1-16*

—Pauline Wanjiru Njiru

This text brings out several complex issues that contribute to an environment of conflict and violence. Sarai’s barrenness and Hagar’s slavery expose the vulnerability of women in cultural contexts. The barrenness of Sarai weighs down on her more than Abram. In many African communities, a man is never considered impotent. If a couple cannot conceive because the woman is barren then the man takes on another wife and begets children. In many instances if the man is impotent then a male next of kin would legitimately have sexual relations with the impotent man’s wife and produce children for him. In the society where this text comes from, things were not very different. If the first wife were barren she would get children by having her husband take on a second wife, whose children would be considered as belonging to the first wife. Sarai’s desperation for a child drives her to the edge and she plans to cover her cultural shame and disgrace by use of her slave girl, Hagar, who was a foreigner. In this instance, Hagar is not taken as a second wife, but as a forced surrogate mother. But, things do not turn out as planned as this decision causes conflict because Hagar considers herself a wife to Abram and treats Sarai with scorn. Is it possible to use another mother’s womb without conflict? This study opens up such a discussion within a Christian context.

This story has been written from the viewpoint of Sarai and Abram. We may, therefore, never know the details from Hagar’s side. We can however assume that this was not a simple decision for Hagar to make and that in fact the decision was made for her as she was also a slave.

**Read [Genesis 16: 1-16]**

1. What is this text about?
2. Name the characters in this story
3. ‘Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife’ What do we know about the characters and their action from this verse in the context of the whole story?
4. What was the issue for Sarah and For Abraham?
5. Why do you think Hagar looked at Sara with contempt (when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress’ v.4)?
6. The story seems to portray Abraham as listening and acting according to Sarah’s advice - why is this the case and what does this reveal about perceived and lived masculinities
7. Are there women like Sarah and Hagar and men like Abraham in our communities? What issues do they bring to light for marriage and family life?
8. Discuss ways in which your church can provide and protect and support women and men in such situations.
Can men be raped?  

—Hendrew G. Lusey & Mote Magomba

Widespread denial and stigma attached to homosexuality has caused men who suffer rape to be ridiculed, overlooked, or ignored. The text of Scripture for this study is used in different ways but largely to address the silence over the issues of men who suffer rape. The situations of men who are raped and the social ostracism and threat to violence of gay men bring to light issues of conflict, violence and injustice. This is brought to the fore in this text. Genesis 19 is a part of the life story of Abraham and his nephew Lot, which begins in Genesis, 11:31-12:9 when both leave Ur for Canaan. Due to the pressure on the grazing grounds, Lot and Abraham part ways. Abraham settles in Canaan and Lot settles in Sodom (Genesis 13:12.). The people of Sodom are described as wicked and great sinners against God (Genesis 13:13). In Genesis 18, two angels visit and inform Abraham and Sarah that Sodom and Gomorrah were going to be destroyed. Abraham is recorded as having pleaded for Sodom and convinces God that the city should be spared if there are ten righteous people (Genesis 18:32).

Reading  

Genesis 19: 1-38

Read the whole story with various or alternating readers.

1. Genesis 19: 1-11
2. Genesis 19: 12-16
3. Genesis 19: 17-26
4. Genesis 19: 27-33
5. Genesis 19: 34-38

1. What is this text about?
2. Who are the characters in this story and what do we know about them?
3. What are the reasons given by the men of Sodom for wanting to rape the strangers?
4. How does Lot intervene to restrain these men from raping the strangers?
5. What are the underlying reasons that urge the men of Sodom to threaten to rape Lot, who rescued these strangers?
6. What circumstances in our societies can cause or have caused men to rape other men/or men to be raped?
7. Is this a serious concern in your society?
8. In what ways can the church step in the reality of such circumstances?
Lethal Widows  |  Genesis 38: 1-30

—Tseganesh Ayele, Alice Shirengo, & Jeanne Mujijima

From the earliest Bible times, widows were looked upon with compassion. Widows were protected by special laws along with the ‘fatherless’ and the ‘stranger’ (Deut.16:11, 26:12, 27:19, Zechariah 7:10), to the extent that the widows were permitted to gather in the fields and orchards (Deut 24:19). A widow was permitted to engage in Levirate marriage under specific circumstances to raise up the seed of her childless husband’s line by his brother or near kinsman. She could participate in the community sacrifice and feasts (Deuteronomy 14:29). The tithe of the third year was divided between the Levite, orphan and strangers.

Genesis 38 is a narrative that involves Judah, the fourth son of patriarch Jacob and matriarch Leah (Genesis 29:35), his Canaanite wife Shua and their sons Er, Onan and Shelah. Er married Tamar but soon died without leaving an offspring. Judah gave Tamar to Onan but Onan did not honour the levirate marriage arrangement so he wasted (spilled) his semen and he too died because this displeased the Lord. Twice widowed Tamar was asked to be patient until the youngest son Shelah was old enough to sire a child. Eventually Judah became a widower but he had not fulfilled his promise to Tamar that a grown-up Shelah would marry her and give her children. Finally Tamar took a very risky action with far reaching consequences for her deceptive father-in-law and a widower.

Read  ❍  Genesis 38: 1-30 guided by the following sections

1.  Genesis 38: 1-11: Tamar married but is childless
2.  Genesis 38: 12-19: Tamar claims her rights
3.  Genesis 38: 20-26: Tamar is accused of promiscuity

1.  What is this story about?
2.  Who are the characters and what do we know about them?
3.  What are the injustices committed to Tamar?
4.  What makes Tamar so desperate that she decides to expose the injustices done to widows in her day?
5.  How did her action demystify the belief of ‘lethal widows’?
6.  What prejudices exist about widows in your community and how are they expressed?
7.  As part of the church, in what ways will you advocate and provide support and encouragement to widows?
Very Unwise Response

—I Kings 12: 1-24

—Esther Mombo

When the tribes of Israel settled in the Land of Canaan they were ruled by judges. They, however, desired to have a king so that they could be like their neighbours. The book of I Samuel narrates how Prophet Samuel heeded to their desire and Saul was made the first king of Israel. Under King Saul, King David and King Solomon, the tribes were unified. When Solomon died his son Rehoboam succeeded him.

When Rehoboam went to Shechem to be made King, the tribes came to him and expressed their dissatisfaction with Solomon’s policies. They asked him to “lighten the hard service of his father and if he did they would serve him” (I kings 12:4). Their request seemed reasonable and Rehoboam asked for three days to consider it. He sought guidance from both the young and the old. The response of Rehoboam to the people from the North led to a public rebellion in which Adoniram, the minister of labour, was killed. The people redefined their identity saying ‘What share do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house oh David’ (I kings 12:16).

Rehoboam could not stop the revolt and ran away from Shechem to Judah. The tribes that revolted invited Jeroboam, a former head of Solomon’s forced labour groups, to come back and become their King. The Kingdom split into two, Israel on the North with ten tribes and Judah on the South with two tribes.

The purpose of this study is to help participants to recognize and prevent ethnic rivalries that lead to violence. This is one of the drivers of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in the society.

Read the text of I kings 12: 1-24 loudly

1. What is the text about?
2. Who are the characters and what do we know about them?
3. Why were the northern tribes unhappy with the unified Kingdom?
4. What advice did the two groups give to Rehoboam?
5. Why do you think the older men and the young men gave different advice?
6. Are there situations like these in our society today?
7. List some of the challenges that can be encountered in such situations?
8. What activities will you organize to help Christians recognize and avert such situations?
Don’t Give Birth to Boys  |  Exodus 1: 1-22

—Olivia Nassaka Banja & Jeremie Kankisingi Kitangilwa

The news of the birth of a boy child is welcomed in many African societies with joy and excitement. Failure to beget a male child is viewed negatively because it is an indication of the end of a family’s lineage. Some families will, therefore, go to any lengths to get a baby boy. The boy child today is much desired in part because it is perceived that there are more girls than boys. To remedy this, a lot of effort has been made to empower the girl child. In the biblical narrative for this study, however, the birth of a boy child is received with anxiety due to the king’s edict.

Exodus 1:1-22 follows on the story of the death of Joseph (Gen 50: 22-26) son of Jacob who became a great leader in Egypt. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers (Gen 37:12-28) and taken to Egypt. He was later delivered by God’s grace and he becomes the powerful leader who saved the Egyptians and his own family from the great famine (Gen 41- 46). The text introduces the story of the Israelites’ exodus (the coming out) from Egypt, where they had settled for 400 years since the time of Joseph (Gen 15: 13). The text further introduces part of why the Israelites were envied and the steps that were taken to curtail their freedoms, leading up to the great exodus.

In Exodus 1 the story is told of the seventy years from Joseph to the reign of a new Pharaoh who did not know him. The Hebrew had grown in numbers in their slavery. This had become a threat to the new Egyptian King. So he ordered the killing of the male children. The midwives were commanded to throw all the male children born to the Israelites into the Nile River. Verse 17 states that the midwives feared God and did not do as the king had commanded.

Read  † Exodus 1: 1-22

1. What is the story about?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. Why in your view was there such great effort to keep the Israelites under control by all means?
4. How does the midwives’ attitude toward Israelites’ newborn compare with that of the King?
5. What challenges are faced by the boy child in your church and community and why?
6. In what ways can the church and community respond to the challenges of the boy child?
A Community Free of Violent Conflict  
*Isaiah 65: 17-25*

—Esther Mombo

The news in our society bring to light a lot of pain from conflict, violence, corruption and scandals where the rich flourish as the cries of the poor go unheard. The poor experience oppression at many levels and have been victims of social, economic, cultural, political and religious afflictions for centuries. Calls for social justice continue to be heard at various levels of society. There is need to envision a new community of justice!

The book of Isaiah is a collection of oracles from the school of Isaiah to his disciples. Chapter 56-66 is known as the third Isaiah. It reveals the situation after the Exile, probably from 538 BCE. Its style and thoughts are continued from the tradition of the first Isaiah (Chapter 1-39). When these chapters of Isaiah were written, the Temple had been reconstructed, the sacrificial system was renewed, and the priestly cult was firmly established. However, these chapters also reflect disappointment and disillusionment, because the glorious restoration and the unswerving faithfulness of the people foretold by the second Isaiah and other prophets had not materialized.

The passage speaks about the life of the new community that God will usher in. The Israelites strongly believed that they would realize the promise of God in their lifetime here on earth. Envisioning a new community should strengthen us in our daily struggles; what we aspire for today is a transformation of the creation, a free atmosphere to operate in, an ecologically sound environment and security for all.

*Read*  
*Isaiah 65: 17-25*

1. What is this text about?
2. What are the features of the new community envisioned in this text?
3. By what means will a new community be created?
4. In what ways has our society hindered people to experience fullness of life individually or collectively?
5. Is a new community possible, how does one create a new community?
6. What resources do we have for creating a new community?
7. Share one thing you plan to do in response to this study.
“Old is Gold”  |  Joshua 14: 6-15

—Esther Mombo

“An old man took his phone to the repair shop. Technician: Nothing is wrong with this phone. Old man with tears in his eyes said: Then why DON’T my children ever call me?”

Old people are increasingly becoming invisible in society. Some old people are left lonely in villages, their contributions to family and community forgotten and what they have accumulated impatiently awaited. Few old people enjoy old age in the company of family. Just as the society places special emphasis on the care for children, the same should be for the old. Peace and justice for the old is peace and justice for all in the community and society.

When one follows the story of the children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan we read about many episodes. In Joshua 14, Israel has been engaged in claiming the Promised Land for a long time. They have been engaging the enemy in battle, and they have obtained some very decisive victories. Now, the time has come for them to divide the land and to give each tribe its inheritance. When the tribe of Judah comes forward, there is a gray-haired, 85-year-old man in the midst of them. This old man named Caleb steps forward to claim his inheritance.

Read  Joshua 14: 6-15

1. What is the text about?
2. Who are the characters and what do we know about them?
3. Why does Caleb ask for the hill?
4. Was his request justified at this age? Did he need the Land?
5. What are some of the ways old people are treated in your society and why?
6. Who should care for old people and why (The State, first Born, last born, daughters)?
7. Why do old people become a source of unrest in some families?
8. State some activities that you will create as part of your response to the aged people in your church and community?
Hope for Persons with Disabilities

*Micah 4: 6-7*

—Esther Mombo

Disabilities are numerous and could include one or more of the following: immobility, mental, vision, social/communication, hearing, cognitive or learning impairment. Women with disabilities are confronted with multiple layers of oppression including sexism and violation of their self. Women, as well as men, living with disabilities experience more violence than those without. Across the cultures, disabilities have been perceived negatively. In the Bible people with different forms of disability were mainly discriminated against.

Governments have made great efforts to reduce the stigma attached to disability as well as include persons with disabilities in different governance levels. Bodies such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) have specific programs targeting the church on disability. These programs aim to end exclusion and violence against persons with disabilities.

How can we increase the voice of the Bible in favour of persons with disability?

*Read*  
*Micah 4: 6-7*

1. What is this text about?
2. Why are the lame and the vulnerable included in this text?
3. Does this text represent the complete view of the Old Testament on disability and vulnerabilities?
4. In what ways does this text speak to disabilities and vulnerabilities in humans?
5. What are the challenges of persons with disabilities in your society?
6. What are forms of disabilities existing in your community?
7. List down some of the activities that you will carry out in response to this study?
Let the Little Children Come to Me

*Matthew 18: 1-6*

—Fred Nyabera

The Kyoto Declaration that arose from a gathering of one thousand religious leaders in 2006 made claim to: “*A strong consensus across our religious traditions about the inherent dignity of every person, including children. This (consensus) requires that we reject all forms of violence against children and protect and promote the sanctity of life in every stage of a child’s development. Our religions share principles of compassion, justice and love.*”

The Christian faith upholds the dignity of every human being, including children. Christianity teaches that all of us are created in the image of God. Christianity, therefore, cultivates a spirituality that views any violence towards children as a violation of God’s will.

Jesus’ own relationship with children was characterized by love, tenderness and respect. His teachings pointed to the fact that children deserved as much respect as any adult, not only because of their future potential, but also because there were qualities in children which were closer to the kingdom of God than all the alleged wisdom and maturity of adults. It follows that the Christian tradition should value, respect, affirm and protect children from any form of violence.

*Read*  
*Matthew 18: 1-6*

1. What are the main themes in this text?
2. Who are the main characters and what do we know about them?
3. What do we learn from the examples of the disciples and Jesus regarding their attitudes towards children?
4. Why is causing a child harm such a serious offense?
5. How does this text relate to our context?
6. How can your faith community influence the society in advocating for children?
7. List ways in which the church can create safe spaces for children?
Agents of Wrath | Romans 13: 1-15

—Julius Kithinji

Romans chapter 13 has been at the center of many controversial interpretations with many interpreters having noticed its apparent connection to Revelation 13. Both texts discuss Christian attitude towards civil authorities. Throughout its life, the church has found itself in one of two extremes; either in good terms or not in good terms with the state. However, sometimes it is lukewarm. Many governments have appealed to sections of this Chapter of Romans to wreak havoc and reign terror. Paul did not intend in these verses to empower any state to mistreat its subjects by use of a divine voice. On the contrary, Paul was advocating for simple submission to states that were mindful of God and His people, while maintaining civil order.

Paradoxically, Paul experienced many difficult moments at the hands of the Roman government (Acts 22, 23 & 24) including imprisonment, beatings and finally death. The Romans, about whom he was writing, continuously experienced persecution under the hand of Nero (54-68CE). It was during his and this community’s difficult moments with the Roman government, that Paul wrote of government as being established to do good, and to bring justice and “punishment on the wrongdoers” (Rom 13:3-4). So our study explores Romans 13 for any looseness that would render this passage liable to misinterpretation that would sanctify and justify agencies of wrath.

A sovereign God working out His purpose of salvation will use the state for His own purpose. Good governance is nourishing and enables the conditions for an abundant and fulfilling life in orderly contexts, but this is not made explicit in these verses.

Governments are not just welfare based. In Paul’s mind the primary role of the government is to maintain civil order, hence minimize conflict. This seems to be the emphasis in verse 2 wherein Paul says that the state will punish those who do evil. Read Acts 23:1-3 and Acts 4:18-20 against Roman 13:2. Ultimately, in Paul’s mind, we may want to consider that good governance is second to godliness. According to Paul, the state or conditions of good government are sanctioned and sustained by God and there can be no good governance without involvement of God. Such government and authority invites submission and peaceful obedience.

Read Romans 13: 1-5

1. What is the text about?
2. Who are the actors in this text and what can we know about them?
3. Read verse one again. What do you understand by Paul’s statement in this verse?
4. Consider as many regimes as you can, do you think Paul meant that all governments could fit in this statement?
5. Are there any Christian exemptions in your context for disobeying the state?
6. In what ways can Christians disobey the state without resulting to violent conflict?
7. Discuss forms in which civil disobedience becomes submission to God’s authority.
8. List various ways in which the church can disseminate such teachings in your context?
Directives and Conflict  

—Lydia Mwaniki & Lydia Chemei

African communities will often have established rules and conventions to shape various aspects of life. Some community members and society may object to some of these rules or conventions. This is especially true when the rules are designed to operate differently and promote different outcomes depending on whether one is a man or woman, boy or girl (gendered directives). Even when unstated, this use of community or societal norms and rules to promote outcomes favourable to one sex is often a source of much strife and conflict. In the church, for instance, if rules or norms prevent one gender from preaching, teaching, and offering leadership, but permits the other then conflict is inevitable.

Successive generations of readers have interpreted 1 Timothy 2:8-15 differently. For the most part, this interpretation has privileged a male-centred tradition that has encouraged the exclusion, and oppression of women. Owing to the high esteem attached to the Bible, especially in the African context, this bias in interpretation got firmly rooted and has become part of a foundation to sustain the status quo. There is also, however, evidence of a body of interpretation that has sought to challenge this male privileging by adopting an emancipatory reading that enables more favourable, enabling and liberating outcomes for women.

This study looks at this text primarily as a conflict text due to the potentially controversial directives given. More importantly, the study attempts to make sense of the directives in this text by approaching it via negotiated dialogue. Such a study allows for open dialogue among participants who will in the process enrich the study with their diverse backgrounds and insights. Similarly, dialogue will be initiated between the biblical context and the current context of reception.

Read 1 Timothy 2: 8-15.

1. What is this text about?
2. Who are the characters in the text and what do we know about them?
3. What directives are given to women and men in this text?
4. How do you think the original recipients received these directives?
5. Who formulated those directives?
6. List gendered directives that you know in your context?
7. In what ways do formulated directives become a source of conflict?
8. List practical steps that need to be taken to minimize intra-gender and inter-gender conflict in the society.
Resisting Provocation to Violent Conflict  |  *Matthew 5: 38-48*

—Taryn Montgomery

This scripture is part of Jesus’ much larger message to his early followers, also called the “Sermon on the Mount”. This is the only documented sermon we have of Jesus, written in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. In Luke 6, the sermon is preached to the multitude “on the plain”, while in Matthew 5-7, it is preached “on the mount.” The sermon on the mount is preached from a high place, intending that the hearers go from that place and into the valleys of life where God will use them and their gifts to share God’s word and “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

In this sermon, Jesus provides a powerful illustration of the kind of life and faith he calls his followers to. This kind of faith demands that we resist all skillful persuasions of the enemy to involve us in violent conflict. Thankfully, we have the example of Jesus himself, who demonstrates persistence in loving enemies and living a non-violent life.

Throughout the gospels, we encounter a God who portrays the importance of speaking to people in a language that they can understand. This is also true in African culture and language. Jesus speaks in common terms because he sees value in helping his followers understand the nature of violence and how to evade it.

**Read  
*Matthew 5: 38-48***

1. What is this passage about?
2. What categories of people are mentioned and what do we know about them?
3. Consider the figures of speech that Jesus uses in this passage. How do they help in passing his message to the listeners?
4. Jesus closes by calling on his disciples to “be perfect” as God is perfect. Is perfection even possible for us?
5. Look at vs 43 keenly. Where is Jesus quoting from?
6. How practical is it to exercise the instruction in verse 39- 42 during our days?
7. Have you ever been in a situation of provocation to violence? How did you act?
8. How does God invite us to behave in times of provocation to violence?
9. List down ways in which the church like Jesus can help people to be persistent in times of provocation to conflict and violence.
Preserving Masculinities

Matthew 20: 20-34

—Hendrew Lusey

What does it mean to be a man? Beliefs about maleness and masculinity can both be an asset or a liability to men. Such beliefs may, for instance, help place their health and that of their partners at risk. From very early in many African communities, men are taught to demonstrate a denial of weakness, to wear the appearance of being strong and invulnerable, and the suppression of emotional feelings. “Real men” (it is said) are not expected to cry or fall ill.

Men will often harm themselves in pursuit of privilege or power that seems to belong to them by right as males. It is evident, however, that males are not alone in constructing their dominance. To be successful at domination, male power often invites and co-opts females in its construction and sustenance. Women are thus significant partners and purveyors of masculinity and male power. In Matthew 20: 20-34, the Bible describes a mother of two sons who would like to safeguard her sons' positions of power and privilege among the disciples of Jesus Christ.

Read Matthew 20: 20-34

1. What is this text about?
2. What people are mentioned and what do we know about each of them?
3. What is the relationship between the wants of the sons of Zebedee and the needs of the blind men?
4. How does Jesus respond to each of them?
5. How is masculinity reflected in this text?
6. How is masculinity reflected in your family, church and community?
7. In what ways do women or mothers in your Christian community contribute to shaping masculinity or what it means to be a man?
8. What can you do to change any negative characteristics of masculinities in your family, church or community?
Sibling Rivalry  
—Julius Kithinji

Petty rivalry and domestic conflict involving siblings is something we may not easily want to look for in the Bible. But why not, while our societies are not devoid of such with escalating homegrown violence. Tragically, a lot of violence experienced has often been incubated in domestic/house spaces before they are replayed in public spaces.

Addressing sibling, and by extension family/domestic conflict and violence may be an important precursor to resolving or ending other conflicts. Although our text is not a full-blown sibling rivalry, however, illuminated by the beam of many African societies, it comes out as a narrative of conflict. In Luke 10:38-42, the story about Martha, Mary, and Jesus is presented as part of the ‘Lukan travel narrative’. The story reveals dimensions of conflict promoted by the exercise of power and domination by an appeal to culture or prevailing gender constructions in order to curtail freedoms and choices of the other. The narrator also seems to uncritically follow the grid and contours of society. Therefore, it is about a sister who is agitated because her fellow sister does not seem to see the need for assisting her to prepare to host a family guest. In turn the narrative opens up windows, in which we can view our own world.

In many African societies household chores are negotiated and shared among siblings. Each child knows his or her role and is supposed to act accordingly. In some situations, however, it may not be obvious which child should perform what chore. In this case, the narrator does not tell us and we can only speculate that Mary and Martha have not negotiated their roles.

Read 📖 Luke 10: 39-42

1. What is the text about?
2. Who are the main characters in the narrative and from the narration what do we know about each of them?
4. In your opinion, has v40 any relationship with what goes on before in v2-12 and v34-35?
5. What do you think is the meaning of Jesus’ pronouncement in v41-42? Comment on the seeming preference of Mary over Martha by Jesus in an African family setting.
6. The scenario created by Martha and Mary is quite interesting. Can you recall a similar situation in your context? What would you consider ‘sibling factors’ that fuel conflicts and violence in many African homes? What dimensions of this narrative can help to address them?
7. Consider the positioning of each of the sisters in the reality of a family guest. Do you know siblings who behave like Martha in your community? Do you know siblings like Mary in your community? How are they viewed? How do they view themselves?

8. What can the church do to help siblings like Martha and Mary to negotiate healthy and violence free relationships at all times?

9. Are you aware of any families in your context that experience strained sibling relationships? Based on this study, draw a plan of action on how you will offer mediated interventions.
Some churches have made progress in addressing sexual and gender-based violence. However, much more remains to be done as sexual and gender-based violence is still commonplace in our homes, churches and communities. A big challenge remains the tendency by many churches to regard sexual and gender-based violence as being attached to the realm of private life and therefore a personal or family matter. Further, in many African communities, women are often encouraged to suffer in silence, thus worsening the problem and challenge posed by domestic/intimate partner or gender-based violence. Although there are some traditions that are somewhat liberating, such as the Shona people of Zimbabwe (as one example among the different African ethnic communities), often women who are victims of sexual and gender-based violence are often counseled to endure and remain silent about violence. In many communities a mature and self-respecting woman must protect the “dignity” of her marriage as well as save her husband’s face.

Churches often struggle to provide an effective response to sexual and gender-based violence because they do not regard such an undertaking as being an essential or urgent part of their mission. Like the synagogue leader in the text under discussion, church leadership might fail to see the urgency that attaches to such matters, arguing instead that it could always be addressed at a later, more convenient time. The church leaders may feel that the matter of sexual and gender-based violence is “postponable”. Yet, the story of the woman liberated on the Sabbath demonstrates that Jesus considered such a response an urgent task, one to be undertaken even if it meant breaking the rules and conventional way of doing things.

In Luke 13: 10-16, Jesus demonstrates that the task of setting the oppressed free is urgent and cannot be put off to a later date. Similarly, churches must regard their response to sexual and gender-based violence as urgent; it is the business of NOW! Women and men who experience sexual and gender-based violence are unable to experience peace and wholeness, the very essence of the mission of Jesus.

Read Luke 13: 10-16

1. What is this text about?
2. Who are the key characters in this story and what do we know about them?
3. How does the condition of the woman affect her physically, mentally/emotionally, socially and spiritually?
4. Comment on the strategies that the woman might have engaged in order to position herself to ensure Jesus sees her.
5. Compare and contrast the attitude of Jesus and that of the ruler of the synagogue.

6. Discuss the attitude of the ruler of the synagogue in relation to the churches’ present day response to sexual and gender-based violence.

7. What will you do at the individual, family, Church, and community levels to ensure that you respond in time and effectively to sexual and gender-based violence?
SERMON OUTLINES

About this section:

Gender injustice and violence is not an easy subject for discussion, preaching/teaching, or counseling. It is, however, real, widespread, and prevalent in our communities and societies. The objective of this section, Sermon Outlines, is to help Christian leaders and congregants increase their awareness of the issues, and offer them basic tools with which invite discussion with their churches and communities. This section provides an extra tool that will facilitate wider engagement on the topic using the many platforms and structures provided by the Church and Christian faith.

The Sermon Outlines consist of brief notes that help establish interest in the noted topic, identify with the audience, provide a biblical perspective, and apply it to real life situations. At the beginning and end of each sermon outline are some liturgical prayers that can either be used as they are or as a guide to more prayers by the participants. Additionally, appearing at the end of the manual is a general prayer that participants can use as they may find appropriate. You are encouraged to use this resource at your discretion, and feel free to contextualize each message based on your community and preaching style.

—Evangelos Thiani

Prayer before the Sermon

Creator of both male and female, help us to faithfully use their consolidated charismas in our leadership and peace initiatives. Amen.

Scripture Reading Judges 4: 1-24

Introduction

After the apostasy of Israel, Yahweh sold them out to the Canaanite King Jabin and his hostile army commander Sisera (Judges 4:1-3). Deborah, the charismatic Israeli woman Judge christened “mother in Israel” (Judges 5:7), was married, but still did her administrative, military, judicial and prophetic duties with exemplary perfection (Judges 4:4-5). With the blessings of God in the battlefield, Deborah and Barak with their smaller army and God’s floodwater (Judges 4:6-20) defeated the enemy King and his iron chariots. Jael, a Kenite housewife with a different political opinion than her husband and who acted strongly within her rights, later killed Commander Sisera while he was hiding in her home (Judges 4:21). Peace is hence restored in Israel at the initiative of these two women and the one man (Judges 4:23-24).

More about the text

This text tells of two females of different ethnicity and social status, one an Israeli Judge and the other a Kenite housewife, together with a male army commander’s actions to restore peace and eliminate violence and political hostility in Israel. The two women hold their own God centered political positions, irrespective of that held by their powerful husbands. Commander Barak, although a powerful male with an army, works hand-in-hand with Deborah to eliminate the injustice in their land. These three bring a different narrative on how male and female, and persons of different ethnicities and social background, can collaborate to respond to violence, conflict and build peace.

Of note, women have and can be religious, social and political leaders of any society and men can work constructively with such women to great social and community benefit. Cessation of violence, resolution of conflict and peace building needs such collaborative efforts. Many communities’ still chose leaders on account of their perceived qualities as males, often leaving out capable women. Women should also take courage and utilize their God-given charismas to seek leadership in the social, political, religious and other spheres. Society should also seek to empower women leaders, for their gains and contributions will trickle down back to our societies.
It is a common expectation in many communities that married women should follow their husbands’ lead in politics. Married women who desire or participate in political office are viewed to have neglected their families. This text reveals such views to be flawed and biased, considering Deborah and Jael were both married. Jael’s bold political stand, taken independently of her husband, ended up being the best choice not only for her and her ethnic group, but also the entire society. On the other hand, Deborah and her husband Lappidoth lived well, despite her many political, social and religious responsibilities in Israel. Women must be free to take political leadership and positions of their choice, even when it means making decisions that are different from those of their husbands.

**Points to note**

1. Women can be effective and bold social, religious and political leaders of any society;
2. Women can effectively initiate and lead peace building and conflict management in their society;
3. Both women and men can work together in eliminating political and human injustice;
4. Even women of differing backgrounds (tribes, religion, or region among others) can work together to bring peace to a society;
5. Societies can pick-up new gender trends along the way (Israel lost its gender balance after the Babylonian captivity of 6BCE).

**The preacher can lead people to confess the following:**

1. Undermining the God given leadership qualities in women;
2. Not recognizing the role of women in conflict resolution and peace building as important;
3. Conflicts in our society continue because we do not involve ourselves in finding the solutions;
4. Society (men and women) have forced wives to follow their husband’s political choices, and barred them from vying for political offices;
5. Women fail to speak out their agenda and to insist on a place on the leadership and peace processes table.

**Conclusion**

Leadership gifts and qualities are God given, to both men and women. Our social, cultural, religious or political bias as well as negative perceptions and socialization have led us to believe women cannot take senior social and political leadership offices. Deborah and Jael are testimony that women have and can offer valued peace building leadership in situations of conflict and violence. Each one of us has a responsibility to eliminate all negative perceptions and socializations, and through action make women leadership a reality, as God has ordained it to be.
Prayer after the sermon

*Lord, forgive our past prejudice and help us recognize, utilize and empower, the many effective and capable female leaders and peace builders you have given us. Amen.*
“The Journey from Lo debar to Jerusalem”

*1 Samuel 20: 13-17; 30-33, 2, 2 Samuel 4: 4, 9: 6-9*

—Phyllis B. Ochilo

**Prayer before sermon**

Your love, image and likeness do not get diminished or limited in any way even in our differences in ability. Lord, may we always remember that all of us remain valuable before your eyes. *Amen.*

**Scripture readings**

*1 Samuel 20: 13-17, 30-33, 2 Samuel 4: 4, 9: 6-9*

**Introduction**

The Hebrew name my Father Jonathan gave me is “Mephibosheth.” Society does not see me as a person worthy of a name because I am lame. In ancient times there was no word for a person with disabilities. “Monstrum” is how they referred to us; it means a “mythical monster.” Do you know how it feels to live your life as less than human? Everyone around you looks upon you as a non-person. “Monstrum” has become part of my psychological make-up; I have been called this for so long it is difficult to see myself as a man. I have become the personification and reflection of how society sees me.

It has been said “three strikes you’re out,” this seems to be the theme of my life.

**Strike 1**

My parents and my entire lineage were killed in war when I was 5 years old making me an orphan at an early age.

I am the grandson of King Saul, the first king of Israel and Judah. My father’s name is Jonathan the son of Saul. King Saul was a well-qualified leader but his down fall was that he was obsessed with what others thought of him. King Saul lacked confidence as a leader, therefore he saw David as a threat to his rule. David was not only his son–in–law but also a confidant and assistant. My grandfather was paranoid and instead of focusing on the nations that were the known enemies of Israel and Judah, he turned his attention to destroying David. He surrounded himself with sycophants like Doeg, his chief herdsman who did not reflect the values of Israel and Judah. My father Jonathan became an enemy to King Saul his own father. Because of my father’s close friendship with David, King Saul tried to kill him on several occasions. My grandfather used words to bully, insult and humiliate his eldest son Jonathan when he told him that his mother was a “nasty woman.”
**Strike 2**

I can’t walk because I am lame in both feet.

Strike two totally changed my life; it was at this point that I became “monstrum.” I was only 5 years old when the Philistines declared war on Israel. King Saul committed suicide after all of his sons were killed in battle. When word came to my nurse that all of my family was killed in battle, she knew that they were going to come and look for me. She wanted to protect me, but in her rush while she was running with me in her arms she accidentally dropped me on my head. This is how I went from “Mephibosheth” to “monstrum.” I was never able to walk again. I was sent to live the rest of my life in Lo-debar.

**Strike 3**

I have been robbed of my dignity because of my circumstances: I am poor and have to live off the good will of others.

I live in a culture that considers anyone with a so-called disability or any form of disease cursed or subhuman. The “disability” is a bad omen that pointed to something evil to come. Lo-debar is a ghetto where the misfits of society are sent. It is here that I was to live the rest of my life. It was a place where we could be hidden from society and silenced. Monstrum I became; never to be considered a man by society even though I am now an adult.

This shaming of those of us that are branded “monstrum” has permeated every aspect of society, be it politics, culture and in some cases even religion. I live in a society that creates divisions and barriers between people, those that are considered “normal” vs. “abnormal,” “blessed” vs. “cursed.” It is these types of divisions that have led to the justification of privilege and exclusion for those who have access to resources and those of us who live in poverty. Over time this dehumanization has become ‘normal’. You come to accept that those who hold social, cultural, economic and political power are more worthy and, I might go as far to say, divinely favored. Over the years I have lost any positive sense of self such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, and self-worth. I am monstrum living in a place called nowhere.

**Journey from Lo-debar:**

I have lived all of my life in Lo-debar. One day there was a lot of excitement around town. Lo-debar does not receive many visitors, but on this day someone was sent by King David to look for me. When word came to me that I was sought after by the king, I knew this was trouble. I was the only one left in the lineage of King Saul, now they have come to kill me. This is the only reason someone would come to Lo-debar looking for me, I said to myself. Alas he found me. “Are you the son of Jonathan? The grandson of Saul?” he asked. “King David wants to see you!” My body began to shake out of control, “Yes”, I said in a feeble voice. King David wants to see me? This was the beginning of my journey out of Lo-debar. I was escorted into the presence of David. Even he saw my fear. The words that came from him were unbelievable. He told me of a vow he once made to my father, that he would look after his family if anything were to ever happen to him. David assured me that my grandfathers’ land would be restored to me and I would eat from his table.
You can imagine how that sounded to my ears, When, you live a life of destitution, banished to the sidelines of society, you come to accept this as your fate, your way of life. My inheritance will be restored? When you live your entire life in Lo-debar, you become deaf to anything other than the sounds of poverty and despair that surrounds you. You are blinded and cannot even experience dreams. My voice spoke the sentiments of my heart that lost all hope a long time ago. “King David, my Lord may your name live forever but, I am not just a dog, I am a dead dog. I could never expect or ask for Justice”. At the same time his words and actions caused an internal combustion to take place in me; I felt my dignity and worth were being restored. I was acknowledged and invited to sit at the table, a place and space that has always excluded me.

Jeru-salam:

I knew that I had journeyed from Lo-debar to Jerusalem: Jeru(City)-Salam(Peace). The God of the prophet Samuel, the God that my grandfather once followed, the God of my grandmother, the God of Jonathan my father, the God of David has seen fit to take me out of Lo-debar and establish me in the city of peace.

The Journey to Peace:

This city of peace that I am referring to is not a location but a Divine mandate all of God’s people must journey. The kindness that King David extended to me enabled me to understand that Justice and right relationships are the sum total of peace. While, peace is the absence of war with the Philistines and other enemies of Israel, peace is also the total way of being. Peace was the journey out of Lo-debar a place of nowhere, a location that many others and I live in because of our circumstances. Peace comes as we address the laws, economic disparity, historical injustices that cause those of us to live in Lo-debar and for Lo-debar to live within us. The city of peace was not a result of the resources I will have at my disposal because of David’s kindness, but it is the results of David redressing the injustices I experienced throughout my life.

I was able to see myself through God’s eyes, not through the eyes of the society that I lived in. I became transformed from monstrum to Mephibosheth. It was because of the covenant relationship my father had with Yahweh, when he instructed David to trust God when David’s life was on the line. When I left Lo-debar I now see that I too am included in this covenant relationship. This unbroken relationship with JEHOVAH, which is extended to Israel includes me, a man who all of his life viewed himself as being broken. It is in Jeru-salam that for the first time I can sit at the table not with my head hung down but as an equal with other people. I can now sit at the table not as a social reject or outcast but as a child of the Most High God. I journeyed from Lo-debar as a social outcast. I had to cross many barriers within and outside of myself to sit at the table in the city of peace where you can find wholeness.

Prayer after the sermon

In the city of Peace you find the fullness of life, in the city of Peace you find well-being, lead us to that eternal peace and love that offers equity of all your creation, oh God. Amen.
Lord! Save our Children  
—Evangelos Thiani

Prayer before Sermon

Lord, quell the violence in our hearts, communities and nations, which have brought pain to our innocent children. May your peace dwell in the hearts of the violated, neglected and displaced children all over the world. Amen.

Scripture Reading  

Matthew 2: 13-18

Introduction

After King Herod heard from the Magi that a King was born in Israel, he asked them to let him know of His whereabouts (Matt 2:1-10). Herod was troubled and thought that, politically, that would mean he would be overthrown by the Jews. Jewish history foretold of a future Jewish born king that would rescue them from all oppressive powers. Through Divine intervention, the Magi left Bethlehem of Judea without informing Herod of the exact location of the child Messiah (Matt 2:11-12). Christ and His parents fled to Egypt for safety, and would only return to Israel after the death of Herod (Matt 2:13-15, 19-23). Herod, on realizing the Magi tricked him, and not knowing that Christ had fled the country, ordered the death of all children two years and under living in Bethlehem. Herod hoped that in the process he would kill the newly born King, whose location was unknown (Matt 2:16-17). A total of 14,000 male children were murdered in carrying out of this political order. The mothers of these children, and their ancestor Rachel in her grave, mourned the death of these children (Matt 2:18).

More about the text

The book of Matthew presents Christ as the Messianic King of Israel. His Kingship, which was not well understood, created conflict in political and religious circles. Both circles plotted and tried to eliminate Christ. To protect their rule over Israel, the Romans were opposed to and suspicious of any local kingship including the one claimed by Christ as seen in this text. On the other hand, Jewish religious leaders rejected the non-political and non-prestigious kingship of Christ as it contravened their expectations of the Messiah. These opposing claims led both parties to kill Christ.

The setting of the text is in 4CE, during the first political attempt of killing the King Jesus (Matt 2:1-6). Most Christians today read this text with a focus on how Christ was saved from the hands of Herod. The massacre of the 14,000 innocent infants by Herod is mainly ignored or brushed over, even though some Christian traditions recognize these children as the first martyrs slain on behalf of Christ. The rest of scripture as well as history stay silent on the massacre of these innocent children.

The text highlights how innocent children with no idea of the political, ethnic and religious state of affairs in their land die and their families left in mourning. The society of the rulers seems not to care much for these children and what they go through in this harsh and unjust incidence. This silence is, however, eerily similar to how we also stay silent about the injustices children suffer
during violence and conflict. Children often end up being the victims of violence and conflict even as they have little knowledge about the political, ethnic or religious factors that caused it. In such situations many children die, are displaced from their homes, become orphans, maimed, raped, exploited, and even used as soldiers. Those children that become child soldiers are tasked to be fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies and even sex slaves. Africa holds over half of the 250,000 child soldiers serving in the 20 violent-conflict countries. This violence and conflict has displaced many people and spawned huge refugee populations. Over 50% of the world’s refugees are children. In many cases children go through even more abuse in refugee camps. Regardless of any role they may have played in the conflict, refugee parents are often helpless and have to watch powerlessly as their children go through injustices and atrocities.

It is vital that adults are made aware of the real cost of violence and conflict to children. To avoid such, it is essential to avoid conflict or violence and to protect children from the injustices and atrocities that arise from it.

**Points to note**

1. Without children, those religious, political and ethnic communities we fight for will be doomed to extinction.
2. For the sake of our children, all must learn to co-exist and live in peace, seeking to resolve our challenges in peaceful ways.
3. Children do not care what they or their neighbor’s political, religious or ethnic communities are.
4. Children have God given and universal rights to live, be loved, and cared for by their parents, guardians and communities within peaceful and just societies.
5. Our society has a responsibility to care for the neglected and suffering children

**The preacher must lead people to confess**

1. Dragging children into religious, political or ethnic violence and conflicts;
2. Not dignifying and respecting God’s image and likeness in children;
3. Continuing conflicts that endanger children in our society;
4. Failing to remember or honour the responsibility to protect and keep children safe.

**Conclusion**

Children are God given and they remain the way God ordained to continue the human race (Genesis 9:7). Children have God given rights to life, love and care in a safe, just and peaceful society. The adults whose responsibility it is to fulfill these rights must seek to do so by ending violence and conflict. Peace is the beginning and means to end the hurt and pain children go through during times of violence, and thus must be sought and maintained.

**Prayer after the Sermon**

Lord, we commit our children to your care and ask that you help us keep our pledge of never again neglecting to care for them holistically. Use us to make justice and peace a reality in our community for our sake and that of our children. Amen.
Violent Men Consult Jesus  

—Julius Kithinji

Prayer before the Sermon

We do not always ask of you Lord what is right and just. Enlighten our prayer as well as our actions. Amen.

Scripture Reading  

Introduction

Many communities in Africa are ravaged by violence with civic especially common. The promoters and perpetrators of this violence are mostly men. The most prominent examples of widespread civic violence include the Rwandan 1994 genocide, the Kenyan Post Election Violence 2007/8, among other examples. In many communities' localized public outbreak and expression violence such as mob beatings, wife beating among others are common place and tolerated. How are we as Christians to deal with such violence and especially when we may be complicit as participants? In as much as our text today does not directly address the issue of civic violence, this sermon tries to answer this question by re-reading the story of the woman caught in adultery in John 7:53-8:11.

This story is about a woman who was allegedly caught in adultery. In John’s gospel, this narrative is part of Jesus’ public ministry (commonly referred to as the book of signs), which in John’s gospel runs from chapter two to chapter twelve. It appears before the second “I AM”, (8:12) where Jesus declares that he is the light of the world. It is a unique narrative that only appears in John’s gospel. As with many of John’s writings, this text includes a quotation from the Old Testament (Deut, 22:22 with possible allusions to Ezek, 16:40) as an attempt to interpret contemporary Christianity from an Old Testament perspective.

The story of this woman caught in adultery has attracted many interpretations in sermons over the years. A lot of sermons on this text have not sympathized with the woman, choosing rather to focus on the scribes and Pharisees who brought the woman to Jesus. In equal enthusiasm there have been many unsympathetic readings of this text in violent slander of the woman and the men who wanted to stone her without producing her partner(s) in adultery. To be fair, John omits much detail such that it is easy to characterize the men portrayed as prone to violence.

Other readings have been sermonic and quite spiritually uplifting. One of the more enterprising views castigates contemporary Christianity for treating sin rather casually. The call is for Christians to catch their own sins before catching the sins of others in a style reminiscent of Mathew’s speck in a believer’s eye (Matt 7:3-4).
Violent Men Consulting Jesus

Our reading of this sermon takes a different view of this narrative. First, it considers this as a case of men participating in civic and Gender Based Violence (GBV). Their actions are encouraged by a faulty interpretation of the Torah. Secondly, it takes this as a case of violent men consulting Jesus before they participate in violence. And true to their word they obey Jesus’ rebuke on the matter. To achieve such reading involves overlooking the usual practice that privileges the presumed enmity between Jesus and the Pharisees.

Lessons to Learn

- Even if for wrong reasons as the reading tells us (John 8:6), the Pharisees consult Jesus before involving themselves in life threatening violence.
- The Pharisees are willing to obey the answer that Jesus gives them and they actually do.
- Jesus is consulted because throughout his ministry he presented himself as an exemplary person and an apt teacher.
- Jesus urged the church to be the light of the world (Mathew 5:14). This injunction is extended to individual Christians.
- Jesus said that unless our righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees (Matt 5:20), we might not enter heaven.
- Christians are ambassadors of Christ (2Cor 5:20) and hence should represent Jesus’ opinion in situations of public violence.
- What do you expect when a sinner is thrown at the foot of the cross of Jesus? There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1).

Conclusion

We are often invited to engage in violent acts and this text can help us to deal with it. Unfortunately, this lesson is learnt not from very godly people, but rather from violent men. Whether their original deed was genuine or not, there is one lesson we can learn from them, they consulted Jesus. From where they stood, they could have taken the liberty to stone the woman without enquiring from Christ or anyone else. The woman’s life was saved because the men dared consult and obey Jesus. It is important to consult Jesus and obey him in all situations.

Prayer after the Sermon

Jesus, you promised to be always with us, and thus we know you are always with us in all situations, Remind us to always consult and obey you before we act, Amen.
The Jealous Husband  

_—Diphus Chemorion_

**Prayer before sermon**

*This violence and finger pointing in our homes demands your presence Lord. Rekindle your peace, love and forgiveness in our families. Amen.*

**Scripture Reading**

*Numbers 5: 11-31*

**Introduction**

Jealousy among couples is one of the leading causes of marital instability. If left unchecked, jealousy can cause domestic violence, depression, divorce or even homicide. Numbers 5:11-31 presents a case of a jealous husband and prescribes a ritual that could be used to bring a solution. This text may have had good intentions at the time and culture in which it was written, however, it reveals aspects of tradition that cared more for the welfare of male spouses than the female. These traditions were challenged by the positive attitude that Jesus had for women in the New Testament.

**Jealousy in Numbers 5: 11-31**

The redress for jealousy falls under a category of rules called “casuistic laws” that anticipate calamity that may be visited on the community and prescribe solutions to them. Casuistic laws are prototype rulings that could be made in particular kinds of situations. The main purpose of these laws was to preserve social order. These laws were common in many communities in the Ancient Near East. A greater number of casuistic laws in the Pentateuch are found in Exodus 21-22. Also known as “the book of the covenant”, the main goal was to maintain the standard of holiness that Yahweh expected of his people in accordance with the covenant he made them on Mt. Sinai.

The text envisions a situation where a husband is jealous because he suspects the wife to be unfaithful. Whether it is true or false, the jealousy in the husband would have had dire consequences (Prov 6:34; 27:4; Sirach 26:6; 30:24). In the Ancient Near Eastern culture such a case was decided by a trial by ordeal procedure. To establish guilt or innocence an accused person was required to undergo some set procedure, often potentially hazardous and designed to secure compliance with a moral code. Although this case is prescribed in the Pentateuch there is no evidence of its application in the Old Testament.

**Application of Jealousy law**

The procedure that Yahweh ordered the people of Israel for the jealousy law is shown in the following outline of the passage.
Vv 12-13 Envisaged situations of husband jealousy
If a husband becomes jealous because he suspects his wife to be adulterous but there is no evidence to show that she is innocent or guilty.

Vv 14-15 Action to be taken by jealous husband
The husband is to take the wife to the priest for an adultery test. He is required to provide a grain offering for jealousy.

Vv 16-26 Trial for suspected wife
The priest shall cause the suspected woman to stand before the altar, loosen her hair and place in her hand the jealousy offering. The priest shall then prepare a concoction of cursing water by mixing some holy water in a clay jar with some dust taken from the floor of the tabernacle. The priest is to hold the cursing water in his hand and administer a solemn charge to the suspected woman saying “If you have not committed adultery may this cursing water do no harm to you. But if you have committed adultery may this cursing water enter your body and cause your abdomen to swell and your thighs to rot. ” The woman is to respond to the charge saying “Amen, Amen”. The priest is to write the words of the solemn charge on a scroll and wash them off into the cursing water. The priest will then take some of the grain for jealousy offering and burn it on the altar. After that he is to make the woman drink the cursing water.

Vv 27-28 Expected Consequences
If the suspected woman is guilty of committing adultery, the cursing water which she drunk will bring her bitter suffering. Her belly will swell and her thighs will rot and she will be an outcast in the community. But if the woman is innocent, the cursing water she drunk will not be harmful to her and she will be able to have children.

Vv 29-31 Summary of the law of jealousy
The jealousy law is to apply to situations where a husband is jealous because he suspects his wife to be adulterous. The husband will be innocent of any wrongdoing but the guilty woman will bear the consequences of her actions.

Merits and Demerits of the jealousy ritual
The Jealousy law has both merits and demerits and it serves to emphasize the apodictic law in Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:17, which give strong prohibitions against adultery. On the positive side, the law does not allow a jealous husband to take matters in his own hands, especially when he accuses his wife of infidelity without proof. The law is emphatic that God alone is capable of determining the guilt or innocence of an accused wife. The priest, acting on behalf of God, causes the accused woman to stand before the Lord. The fact that God is the judge in the matter is signified by the grain offering, which is to be offered at the altar as a memorial (Num 5:26). The other positive feature of the jealousy act is that both the ritual requirements and expected outcomes of the adultery trial for wife had great potential of deterring promiscuity as many women would have feared going through the procedure. It has also been pointed out that the public nature of the ritual underlined the sacredness of the marriage bond, which prohibited casual treatment of the marriage bond among the Hebrew people.
However, when examined objectively from a non-patriarchal perspective, the jealousy law leaves a lot to be desired. To start with, the law may be faulted for not providing a similar procedure for situations where a wife suspects her husband to behaving an extra-marital affair. Only married women are subjected to the trial for jealousy. The law also reinforces a view of the wife as a sex object and the property of her husband. It may also be argued that the jealousy law accords to the husband a prerogative to bring charges of infidelity without a similar recourse for the wife. Moreover, there is no obligation placed on the male partner to the adulterous wife. A fair practice would have sought to try not only the woman suspected of adultery but also the man with whom she is suspected to have committed the act. Such practice would give effect to the holiness code which demanded both the woman and man caught in adultery to be killed (Lev. 20:10). It is also unfair that should the woman be found innocent, the husband is not held responsible for falsely accusing her.

A second weakness of this law is that it violates the rule of natural justice where the woman is assumed to be innocent unless proven guilty. The woman here is held to be guilty and no provision is made for her to protest her innocence. To the contrary she is required to swallow a concoction that places her health and life at great risk. Some scholars have noted that the potion of cursing water may have been intended to induce abortion in cases where the woman was pregnant as a result of engaging in adultery. Whether the woman was guilty or not, the law of jealousy violated her privacy and she was publicly humiliated. With such psychological torture it is very unlikely that a woman who went through the ordeal would be comfortable living with a man who had caused her all the trouble.

**Conclusion**

Jealousy and suspecting infidelity among couples are still threats to marriage as it was in the days of Moses. That God hates adultery is true now as was in the Old Testament days. In the contemporary world, jealousy thrives on low self-esteem of the spouse, emotional insecurity, and patriarchal social structures that promote men's total control over women and their sexuality. The law of jealousy as presented in Numbers 5:11-31 made a lot of sense in the social cultural context of the Ancient Near East during the exodus period. The main lesson to be drawn from the passage is that jealousy related to suspicion of adultery is a spiritual matter that needs spiritual intervention. No spouse has a right to take matters on their own hands. However, it is also evident that the trial for adultery ritual described in the Torah reflects unfair patriarchal double standard that undermined the dignity of women. This later is contrary to the empowering outlook that Jesus carries for women in the New Testament.

**Prayer after the Sermon**

*Out of our self-righteousness we judge others and even hurt those we love. Eternal Judge who knows and sees all, extinguish our inclination to harm those near and dear to us. Help us to remember that all judgment is yours and yours alone.* Amen.
Solidarity is Strength  

Numbers 27: 1-11 & Numbers 36: 3-13

—Faith Lugazia

Prayer before Sermon

You have remained a God of justice and equity. May you install these qualities in us your sons and daughters. Amen.

Scripture Readings Numbers 27: 1-11 and Numbers 36: 3-13

Introduction

This text is about the struggle of Zelophehad’s daughters to inherit the land. Zelophehad daughters were Mala, Noa, Hogla, Milka and Tirzah. Their claim arose upon the death of their father and religious leader Eliezer. Moses, the political and religious leader, as well as the Benjaminites clan leaders did not want to give these daughters the land that was supposed to be allocated to their father. They were denied this right because they were women. These girls decided to break the silence and went beyond their cultural beliefs by approaching the leaders claiming for their rights. Their claim is recorded in Numbers 27:4.

“Is it right that you remove our fathers name from the list of inheritors because he had no boy child?” They posed. “Here we are, his children, what is due to him belongs to us, so give us our right” they might have added. On seeking God, Moses was instructed that the daughters had a right to inherit their father’s land (Numbers 27:7-9). When Moses returned, he assembled the elders and all agreed that the daughters of Zelophehad were to inherit their father’s land but to keep the land within their clan by marrying within their clan (Numbers 36:3ff). By taking the bold decision to approach the court of Moses and the entire assembly, these women left in their wake a legacy doctrine touching on inheritance and the transition of property between different tribes of Israel.

Points to note

God is not a respecter of gender (Numbers 27: 1-11)

God’s concern for human creation goes beyond cultural and communal care or protection. God is just (Numbers 3:7) and thus his people should practice justice (Isaiah 34, Hosea 2 and Micah 2). God knew that these girls needed to till the land and earn their daily bread from it. That is why He commanded Moses to give them the right of inheriting the land without giving them any condition.

Patriarchal culture has many sinful dimensions

It is a common view in Africa that Eve betrayed Adam. If that was true, however, then the man should be held responsible because it was he, Adam, that was given instructions (Gen 2:15-17). But again, God did justice by calling both to account. In another incident Abraham sent away Hagar, his maidservant who had borne
him a child (Gen.16). Many might view Sarah as having instigated this problem on account of her barrenness, her giving Hagar to Abraham to sire them children and her later jealousy as Hagar assumed the status of a co-wife. Such a view holds Abraham as a helpless participant in the circumstances. A more liberating reading of this text today, invites us to view Hagar as a victim, that Abraham may have raped Hagar, impregnated her and chased her away. As a slave and a woman, Hagar had little control of her immediate environment and decisions. How many mistakes and wrongs do men in our societies commit and what is our reaction to the same? What if women committed the same mistakes?

God's view on inheritance (Numbers 27: 7-9)

Land inheritance for women in Africa is still a contentious issue. In Tanzania, for instance, constitutionally, women have the right to inheritance, but men still own most of the land. It is still difficult for a Tanzanian woman to take effective control and ownership of land, even by inheritance. The few women that inherited unmovable wealth, like land, from their family are required to return it to their brothers or clan once they get married. Even though some churches fight for the rights of men and women, the question of inheritance is taken as a cultural issue where women hardly have a voice. Our God is just and recognizes the dignity of all human creation regardless of one's gender, but we have chosen to ignore this.

Unity against cultural and structural violence

The daughters of Zelophehad stood together before the congregation of the Israelites and said, “Give us our possession among our Father's relatives” (Numbers 27:4b). Solidarity and boldness helped these women to break their silence, and claim their right. Many women will die from depression and silence for not claiming rights and speaking to those in power or even their husbands. This spirit of oneness for both men and women will help us recognize the humanity of each other, and discard cultures that still hold women to be weaker and dependent on the male gender.

Conclusion

For Christians, not only is Jesus Christ a savior from sin and death, but also from all forms of evil including violence. The bible provides us examples of women who spoke up during the time of Christ; as did the Syrophoenician woman (Mk 7:24-30), and Jesus’ mother at the cross (John 19:25-27). Through this text Christians are reminded to break the silence of oppression and injustice by educating and encouraging men and women to work together to eliminate gender injustices and discrimination. It is not possible to experience the peace that surpasses all understanding while we continue to violate each other on the basis of gender. God is indeed with us, and through Christ and the Holy Spirit, we are able to break the chains of violence and discrimination.

Prayer after the Sermon

This world and all that is in it is yours, but you have given us the responsibility to justly steward and share amongst us. Oh God, give us wisdom to surpass all forms of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and discrimination in our lives, cultures, and societies. Amen
Christian Response to Human Trafficking  

*Genesis 39: 1-23*

—Silvester Arinaitwe and Fred Nyabera

**Prayer before the Sermon**

*Gracious God, remember the pain of those who are victims of human trafficking, their loved ones, families and communities. Almighty God, grant them your unending peace and hope, and liberate them from all hostilities. Amen.*

**Scripture Reading**  

*Genesis 39: 1-23.*

**Introduction**

Human trafficking, or the enslavement of a human being for trade and other gain, can happen to anyone, anywhere and at any time. This type of injustice is not new and is even recorded in the Bible. Chapters 37 to 50 of the book of Genesis are dedicated to the story of Joseph, a survivor of human trafficking. Joseph’s story exemplifies the age-old undiminished trade of human beings into slavery and other kinds of forced destitution that takes place even today. In our communities, it is not uncommon to find children and young people trafficked from rural areas to urban areas to work as domestic servants. The reasons for the increase of such trade are several and include personal vendetta (hatred, malice, jealousy, envy) and economic profiteering. In numerous instances this enslavement will result in impoverished existence characterized by rape, sexual slavery, child abuse, gender violence and many times ritual murder. The story of Joseph brings out many important issues to consider when examining this vice, it’s proliferation and the abuse and harm of the victims.

**Context**

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, well-built and handsome, is sold by his own brothers to the Ishmaelites who then sell him to an Egyptian official, Potiphar. A God-fearing young man, Joseph considers that this is the will of God and commits to what fate has placed before him. In time, he proves himself reliable and hardworking and brings numerous blessings upon his master. This earns him a promotion; Joseph is elevated by his master to be the chief housekeeper. Being handsome, he attracts the attention of the Master’s wife who desires him sexually. However, being a God-fearing person, Joseph refuses to be drawn into the allures of Potiphar’s wife and instead flees. To cover up her own corruption, Potiphar’s wife accuses Joseph of attempting to rape her. Being a slave, Joseph should have been summarily executed but instead, he is thrown into jail. The stories that follow are recorded in the next chapter of Genesis.
**Sold by Relatives**

Like so many victims of trafficking today, Joseph was sold by his own family; people he trusted (Gen. 37:28). The fact that the Midianite caravan was ready to buy a slave to sell in Egypt (Genesis 37:26–28) tells us that the trade in people was already happening in the region at that time. Today, we are told, trafficking happens in every nation on earth, with many men and women involved in buying and selling fellow members of the human family.

It is Judah who proposes to his brothers to sell Joseph, rather than kill him. Judah argues his point by saying, ‘Let’s not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother’ (Genesis 37:27), showing his corrupted belief that the slave trade is more acceptable than murder. In reality, upon being sold to slavery Joseph would experience profound shock, disorientation, torture, abuse and possibly death, and that would have lasting effects even if he survived. Today, people still sell their family members into slavery, just as Joseph’s brothers did. These relatives may also explain their actions in ways similar to Judah.

**Exposed to Abuse**

Once in Egypt, Joseph is sold again to Potiphar (and his wife), the captain of Pharaoh’s guard, to labor as a domestic servant. This puts Joseph in the dangerous situation of being at the mercy of his master and mistress. Young men today often look to the example of Joseph, who resists the sexual advances of Potiphar’s wife. How different might the situation have been, however, if Joseph had been a teenage girl and it had been Potiphar making the advances? That is what actually happens time and again in our society today. We know of far too many cases of young women and men enslaved as unpaid maids and servants, who are sexually and physically abused by their employers.

**Accused and Criminalized**

As a slave, Joseph has no rights and no way to appeal when Potiphar’s wife unjustly accuses him. In fact, he is the one who is accused and is jailed. This is similar to the experience of many trafficking victims, particularly sex trafficking survivors who find that society blames them for abuses done to them. In some countries, female victims of sexual slavery are treated as criminals.

**Sustained and Redeemed by God**

Three times in Joseph’s story the phrase, ‘But God was with him’ (Genesis 39:2, 21, 23), is repeated, reminding us that no matter how terribly we are treated by others – sold, betrayed, falsely accused, unjustly imprisoned, forgotten – God’s presence can carry us through difficult times.

What is particularly redemptive about the story of Joseph is how God uses the difficult experiences of Joseph’s youth to position him in just the right place at the right time to make a difference. We watch, amazed, as Joseph journeys from being a ‘favoured son’ to a ‘betrayed slave’, and on through several promotions to arrive at being ‘Pharaoh’s right-hand man’, occupying one of the most powerful positions in the world. God used Joseph not simply...
despite the tragedy he experienced, but in spite of it, through the course of the tragedy itself. This can provide inspiration for modern trafficking survivors. Though they may not reach positions of such influence as Joseph did, it reminds us that their life stories are not just about the exploitation they have suffered. Rather, they can grow beyond that abuse, to bring blessing to others in many ways.

The victim’s experience of trafficking is not ignored by God or minimized by the Bible, and it is not outside of the scope of healing and hope found in redemption. God’s response to evil and violence is redemption, renewal, and re-creation because of the gospel of Christ. And that should be the church’s response.

**Conclusion**

The answer to all of this can be found in Jesus the Messiah who, as he declares in Luke 4:18–21, fulfills the description in Isaiah 61:1–2, *‘The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor… sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour and the day of vengeance of our God.’* He is God’s Word incarnate, who has experienced all the pain and trauma borne by Joseph and the millions of other trafficking survivors in history.

Like Jesus’s, we can respond to the realities of human trafficking. We act because we share God’s vision for how he can redeem a situation like Joseph’s. We can follow God’s call to rescue and rehabilitate victims of human trafficking, to work to prevent others from being sold and to bring the criminals involved to justice. Then we will surely discover many more ‘Josephs’ through whom God can work, despite their tragedies, to bring ‘the saving of many lives’.

**Prayer after the Sermon**

> Many victims, families, and societies have lost contact due to human trafficking. Lord, wipe their tears and where possible bring them together, like you brought Joseph and his family together. Amen.
Final Prayer

Thanksgiving

Creator God whose love for humanity is unfathomably deep; we praise you, sing to you, bless you, adore you, give thanks to you, and glorify you, our only true God. Sovereign Lord God, Master of heaven and earth, Lord of every time and place, God of the visible and invisible, God of peace and dignity, male and female, young and old, the poor and rich, the sick and healthy, God of the wailing and those rejoicing, persons with disability, and God of all.

We give thanks to you for the many blessings you have bestowed upon us in Africa, our nation and community including the diverse lands, waters, climate, vegetation, faiths, ethnicities, communities and peoples. We thank you for the privileges and responsibilities you have given to each one of us individually and collectively and thus our prayer to you. We repent of our past sins and transgressions as we draw near to your seat of mercy, knowing you always listen to our cries and petitions, and respond according to your will. Amen

Peace and End of Violent Conflict

We pray that you give deep and enduring peace to our continent, nation, community and family. We ask that you sustain them in peace and harmony; and that you nurture the infants and children; comfort the faint hearted; care and shield the orphans, widows and widowers; give generously to the poor; unite those who are divided and separated; liberate those who are under civil strife; free the captives and bring an end to all violent-conflicts and afflictions in our societies.

We ask that you bless, give tranquility, wisdom, vision, discernment, and integrity to all our leaders; impart your wisdom to all who propose and make policies and laws in our countries and communities, that they may be to the benefit of all and to the glory of your holy name. May we be reminded that we belong to each other and to you. Lord of Lords, give us your everlasting peace; Healer of soul, body and mind, heal us and our lands from all wickedness, pain and violence. Amen

End of Gender Based Violence

We thank you Lord for creating us in your own image and likeness as male and female, and we as your creation can only abide by that. We confess that we have treated each other violently. We pray that you lead us to offer and keep your divine justice for all. We pray for those that have been wounded that you bring them healing and wholeness. Help us to listen to your word and voice to empower all in our communities and nations. Lord heal our land. Amen.
Benediction

Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

Lord make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.