

Theme: We are standing in a time of great transfiguration, where the transforming revelation of who Jesus really is, has powers to bring healing to transgressions for us and for the world through the telling of our stories and forgiveness.

Sermon: #beyondmetoo

February 11, 2018, Transfiguration Sunday

Mark 9: 2-8

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Maybe Jesus treks Peter, James and John up a high mountain because he knew that in order to be open to what they are about to behold, they had to be emptied and out of breath. I think we have experienced moments of openness and clarity when, in our surrender to exhaustion, we have been rendered breathless for beauty and terror.

We are about to consider both, in light of today's scripture and today's headlines, as we move through and beyond, #metoo.

While we may find ourselves somewhere between skeptic sensationalism and outrage, what is happening is unprecedented partly because of social media's instant and viral capacities, and we need to pay attention in this kingdom bringing opportunity.

Twelve years ago a social activist Tarana Burke coined "Me Too" as part of a movement to promote "empowerment through empathy" among women of color who had suffered sexual abuse, particularly within underprivileged communities.

She was talking to a 13-year old girl who told her of her own experience of assault, and Tarana was speechless. She wished afterward that she had empathetically said, "Me too".

This fall, when accusations against Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein surfaced and continued to surface, actress Alyssa Milano tweeted #metoo, and said, "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'me too' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem." (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Me_Too_movement).

Within 24 hours, 4.7 million people in 12 million posts and dozens of languages, used the hashtag.

Since #metoo caught on, a mountain of terrible accusations and confessions have left us breathless and tired in the breadth of this endemic condition. Its gnarly roots have us tripping in our mountain paths over the likelihood of stories, statistically existing as one in three, meaning that 120 men and women here in church this morning have experienced sexual assault. For all, we pray, “Take heart,” for just being here is evidence of your ability to survive this terror and we are about to, through the power of Christ in us, lean into the light to illuminate the beauty of healing.

For millions of women, men and children of all races, generations, genders, nationalities, socio-economic station, education, occupation, and religion; the realm of actuality and possibility is everywhere.

Those who have not suffered themselves are called to be what we know ourselves to be in the healing circles of moral injury: “the people of strong heart,” those whose willingness to empower through empathetic listening will deliver healing into this

moment and prepare us for recognition and intolerance that will move us beyond.

While we are using this hashtag illustration, the truth is that some part of every one of our stories needs healing.

We are going to hold our hearts up to the power of transfiguration that is Christ in us, tell our story and work forgiveness.

Here where the air can be cleared, **hear** the first strums of the refrain that we all know, singing, “With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me.”

Here, at the top of the mountain, take a Romans 8:11 breath, “If the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, God who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through the Holy Spirit that dwells in you.”

From this vantage point we are seeing an avalanche of stones as the sin of objectifying a person and using bodies as bartering tools is seen to be not about sex, but about power.

What an evil perversion, to take the most intimate, precious, loving, curious, miraculous, partnering, design of God

--that is also the means to secure the fruitful multiplication of humankind, which God so loves-- and use it as a weapon to leverage power.

It's in Old Testament stories, like when the wicked men of Sodom came to Lot's door (Genesis 19) and first demanded he send out the two messenger angels who had come to visit so that they could humiliate and "know" them in the biblical way, so as to degrade them.

Round one: sexuality as a weapon for power.

In round two Lot begs them to leave, and when they will not be dissuaded, Lot offers to put *his two engaged daughters* out on the porch for them to assault instead! The offering of assault for power!

The angels pull Lot back into the house, see him and his family safely out of the city, and destroy Sodom. Lot's wife turns to a pillar of salt because she looks back, and then, the generational abuse continues in round three.

Here, Lot's daughters get their father drunk so that

they can lie with him to secure their own future generation. Assaulting their father for progeny is a demented story.

In the New Testament stories, Jesus condemns sexual violence in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:28), stating that a man's desire to possess and dominate a woman is an offense against her.

Jesus further clarifies that for a man, it is not only acts of violence against women that are condemned, but

also thoughts and words of violence, for they are a power play in sexual coercion and abuse.

Jesus' condemnation of violence extends into this patriarchal society to protect the rights of the culturally powerless and vulnerable.

He speaks clearly to the perpetrators of abuse to children too.

Woe to any who cause a child to stumble... it would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a great millstone around their neck. (Mark 9:42)

Today's news has been full of the heart-breaking stories of Olympic gymnasts, some as young as six

years old, who suffered sexual abuse. This is perhaps one of the most heinous illustrations of systemic failure to protect hundreds of young female athletes abused by former USA Gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar.

The Olympic system, USA Gymnastics, and Michigan State University are all implicated in failure to investigate complaints stretching back decades.

What if we had established a cultural change where victims were educated and conditioned to recognize, assess and expose abuse?

Where truth telling was the assumption and the accusations honored with the integrity of investigation--every time, at the first mention, and brought into the light of the law and duly assigned the consequence.

I am not supposing that all sexual offenses are the same.

Nor am I saying that every offending action needs legal response, but it does need to be brought into the light.

No one need ever be silent because of the fear of greater terror.

If this cultural change had evolved, not only would hundreds of these women and children have been spared, but dare we say, even in our disgust, that Dr. Larry Nassar might not be condemned to die in prison within the next 175 years.

For whatever is just punishment for this deviant molestation, might have also been rehabilitative through consequences, therapies and medication. Who knows? But their voices were not heard.

Silent in confusion, aloneness, doubt, fear, shame, blame, embarrassment, lack of evidence, witness, respect, lack of self-awareness, misplaced trust, ambition...go on!

And although some clearly had the opportunity to do so, no one spoke for these girls, for decades, until the avalanche.

I know what this feels like. I know that when I was seven years old no one spoke of molestation.

I certainly wasn't going to tell.

He told me I'd get in big trouble.

And he told me the facts of life.

Like 90% of victims, I knew my abuser; he was not a stranger, he was a neighbor and a friend.

It was odd how I didn't want to get him or myself in trouble and how I didn't want to be disobedient.

Power, there it is again.

When other indicators alerted my parents to ask me questions, they made it safe for me to tell them everything.

My father went to the kitchen closet shelf and pulled out a rifle I didn't even know was there.

My mother stopped him saying, "And what will happen? You will go to jail and I will have to raise five kids alone."

I quit walking on his side of the street.

I skipped by on the opposite side acting like nothing was wrong.

When his wife came for coffee one day, I asked my mom if she knew.

She sternly asked me if I wanted to be the one to tell her. It might ruin her life.

No, it was easier to keep silent.

My mother called the other moms in the neighborhood and created her one-name "whisper list".

When we were in the buffet line of another neighbor's daughter's wedding, I was behind my mom when I heard her tell my assailant that she knew what he had done.

I heard her tell him through gritted teeth that he better never touch me again.

I heard him say that he could not promise that.

I backed away and spent the wedding dance in the bathroom peeking under the stalls for men's shoes.

My mom would talk to me about this incident even 48 years later, in the clouded days of hospice care.

I knew she carried regret.

She called me the day his obituary appeared in the paper, as if to breathe a sigh of relief that at last, he would not do this again.

#Shetoo was a victim.

Over those years, my story was not a secret.

I processed it again with my mom who was doing the only thing she knew to do to not cause further damage.

In talking this story, I experienced healing.
The greater healing came, as
through time,
I forgave him.
Not to his face,
not because he asked for forgiveness,
but because in **not** forgiving him, I sat in toxicity.

This is why we pray; forgive us our debts as we
forgive our debtors. (Luke 11)
This is why Jesus said that we are to forgive seventy-
seven times. (Matthew 18:22)
This is why Jesus said, what you hold bound on earth,
will be bound in heaven, (Matthew 18:18).

I often thought this was binding up the one we
choose not to forgive.
But I'm thinking the ties might be ours, on earth as it
is in heaven,
yet a binding we **will** deal with ultimately anyhow;
so begin, in sacred slowness, unbind.
The right response, and the one I hope I would have
taken for my children, would have been to report.
I have nightmares about what else he might have
done to others.

Think of all the stories that are untold and cut us off
in a stranglehold.

Think of the 30% who suffer with unprocessed and
untold abuse that often ruptures only to have them
act later in the same offensive way to another,
in a deliberate or subconscious attempt
to regain their own lost power.

Think of the offenders who are powering over
another because at some point their own power and
identity had been threatened or perversely elevated
by a culture, an ego, and society.

Time's up.

Transformation will require us to see the other
beyond their biology or even gender identity, as
diverse creation, people,
sacred beings,
whose one-of-a-kindness is centered in their spirits
far more than their anatomy.

Then, in the climb to the mountaintop, we will
glimpse the dazzling glory of God's beautiful holiness
in ourselves and in one another. We can begin to see
one another as God bearers, as
Thou, whom we would honor and not offend.

We would be transfigured

John 1:4: Greater is the one living inside of you, than he who is living in the world.

Have I told you I'm a grandma?

Dear Sloane Rae,

I can't say that there won't be one who will try to bully you in order to make you feel small so they can feel bigger. I can promise you that whatever your story, sad and happy, we will always listen and be here for you. You carry a God light in you, and it will give you power to be dazzling and holy. I can see it.



You carried it in your right hand the night you came into the world. It is from Jesus, he has a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and metoo.

Love, Granny

Benediction: I love the transfiguration story. I love picturing Jesus dazzling in bleached whiteness. I love imagining Jesus ready to clean some house.

Let us go into the world, knowing the dazzling power of Christ dwells in us for a reason, to clean some



house.

Go in peace!