

This morning I am going to be sharing two stories which are both very difficult stories to read. Both of these stories involve descriptions of rape, the physical abuse of a woman at the hands of a man. One of these stories is found in the Bible and I imagine that this biblical story is one which you never heard in Sunday School or Vacation Bible School. You may never have heard a sermon preached on this story either.

This biblical story is skipped over in the lectionary, the passages which are assigned to each Sunday of the year. But this story is found in the Bible and so we are going to read it. It's not fair to the Bible to just read the comfortable stories. This story is here in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel so we are going to attempt to allow this story to speak to us today.

After we hear this biblical story I am going to pair it with a second story that involves a rape. The second story is about physical abuse which happened here in the Allison Creek community. I am going to trust that God is going to speak through these stories to reveal something that we need to hear today whether we want to or not.

Over the past few weeks we have been reading through the Old Testament stories which describe the early kings of Israel. We are now reading stories about King David. Last week we heard the sordid tale of David and Bathsheba. David and Bathsheba is the story of the very powerful King David taking advantage of a married woman who became pregnant through their encounter.

David then arranged for Bathsheba's husband Uriah to be killed in battle but David's sin is soon revealed through the prophet Nathan. Last week I said that David's actions with Bathsheba changed the course of his tenure as king. Today we are going to read about what happens next.

This story is about David's children.

**Read II Samuel 13:1-22**

Now you tell me. Is King David the first parent to cover up for their children's misbehavior? Of course not. We know all too many stories of children doing some terrible things but their parents simply wish it all away.

I saw a recent court case where a child was on a football team and he spiked the other team's Gatorade with bleach. This act caused tremendous sickness among the other team's players. They were all lucky that it was just sickness because it could have been much, much worse.

When the Mom of the boy who poured the bleach into the other team's Gatorade was asked in court about her son's actions she tried to downplay what he had done. She used phrases such as, "it wasn't just him. It wasn't that much bleach. He's really a great kid." Instead of dealing with the misbehavior of her son Mom was trying to cover it up as being no big deal.

David falls into that category but his son's misbehavior is so much more than pouring bleach into a cooler of Gatorade. David's son raped David's daughter and David's response was to overlook this vile act because the text says "David loved Amnon for he was his firstborn." That's not love. That's trying to protect the family name and reputation. This is pure selfishness on David's part.

But if we focus this story on the powerful David and his son we miss a very important character in this story. We cannot focus on David and Amnon and overlook the female victim Tamar.

Tamar is the obedient character in the story who is abused at the hands of the privileged and powerful and well connected. Who is going to believe her story or care about her? Today we are reminded of the many women who were allegedly abused at the hands of Bill Cosby or the young boys who were abused by Jerry Sandusky. Who would believe them and, unfortunately, they were right.

Tamar suffers incredible harm in this story. Like many abused women Tamar suffers shame and embarrassment. She is described after this event as a “desolate woman who remains in her brother’s house.” Where is the good news for Tamar? Where is the good news for rape victims who suffer shame and ostracism in a culture that does not value their opinion especially when the perpetrator is well off and well connected?

Now I want to invite you into a story which happened in this community. This is a story that happened in the 1870s. Harriet Simril was a former slave who was attacked by the KKK in the Allison Creek community. She courageously appeared before the Federal Court in Columbia to testify against the white men hiding behind KKK robes and masks.

Coincidentally, her testimony occurs immediately after the testimony of a man named Jerry Clowney. Jerry Clowney is the direct ancestor of a celebrity from York County. You may recognize his last name of Clowney. One of the folks that testified against the KKK’s activities in the Allison Creek community in 1870 was an ancestor of pro football player Jadeveon Clowney.

But I want to read today the testimony of Harriet Simril. Today in worship we have some of her descendants with us. Let us listen to her experience in the Allison Creek community. In her testimony she will refer to this area as Clay Hill. Clay Hill was the name of this area prior to the adoption of the name Allison Creek. Let us listen to her testimony.

**(Read from Harriet Simril testimony from Federal Court records of being raped by 3 KKK members in 1870)**

Harriet Simril's story is one of many stories from our area in the 1860s and 1870s. Spencer Simril, Jr., who is here from Athens, GA today, is uncovering lots of stories from our past here at Allison Creek which are difficult stories to hear. In fact, Spencer has sadly discovered this week that while the KKK attacked, raped, and burned down homes in our area, members of this church, Allison Creek Presbyterian, joined in or stood silent, even when they knew what was about to happen.

Upon hearing these stories of the past our initial reaction may be to say that this is the past and we need to leave the past in the past.

But I believe that what is happening in this church and the 23 acres that is being redeveloped as a place for spiritual healing is a part of a much bigger story of redemption and renewal. I wonder if what we are being led to create here with trails and prayer stations is a part of bringing healing in a way which is so much bigger than any of us can imagine.

I wonder if what we are being called to create is going to be a part of healing that spans generations of pain and shame. I wonder if these stories from our past are coming to life again because God is working through these stories to bring about something new today that involves God's radical healing and transformation.

When bad stuff happens to us we expect healing and redemption to happen immediately. If you suffer emotional or physical pain through the hands of another you may become frustrated that healing for you doesn't happen to you overnight.

You may be angry that the abuser is enjoying the good life while you suffer daily pain and shame. But I wonder if we are now hearing stories about people like Harriet Simril because we are being invited to be a part of God's healing and redemption which may be 150 years in the making.

If you or your family has stories like the rape of Tamar and the rape of Harriet Simril we don't have to hide these stories any longer. God is a God who works in God's time to bring about healing and reconciliation. We don't have to hide our family secrets and pretend that we are the perfect family.

God redeems even the worst part of our lives and the worst part of our families and God redeems the worst part of our community and God redeems the worst part of our church.

For that we can be thankful and trust God to continue to bring about healing and renewal. Thanks be to God the Great Healer and the one who restores. AMEN.

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-Given: August 9, 2015 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)