

Domestic Violence: Let Justice Roll!

By Julie A. Owens

Every year, October is the month when we focus on two of the main killers of woman in the U.S. – breast cancer and domestic violence. Two insidious scourges that plague all too many of our mothers, our sisters, our daughters, our friends, ourselves. We hear a lot more about breast cancer, don't we? I know how awful that is. My mother is a survivor. But Domestic violence is still mostly hidden for the most part, and still carries a stigma, even in the church. It is so hard to believe that it is as widespread as it really is. 1 out of 3 women. Did you know that? That means every 3rd woman sitting in this sanctuary this morning has been or will be abused by an intimate partner! It is outrage. But most of the time we never even know it is happening, And often the abuse is not physical, but terribly damaging nonetheless.

You know, the abuse of women is nothing new, although the term is. It has been around as long as recorded history. Throughout the centuries, women have been routinely subjugated. Because of their inferior legal status, primarily as the actual property of husbands, they were routinely punished. During the Renaissance, for example, there were the “The Laws of Chastisement”. These took for granted that violence against women was a part of the divine order of things. In the medieval church, clergy taught that abuse was a husband's *obligation*. In Friar Cherubino's “Rules of Marriage”, men were instructed that if a wife disobeyed, the husband was to “take up a stick and beat her, not in rage, but out of charity for her soul, so that the beating will rebound to your merit and her good.” Even though laws have changed, and attitudes have changed to some degree, domestic violence is still the most common cause of injury to women in this country. In fact, it results in more injuries than rapes, muggings and car wrecks- combined. It is stunning, sad fact with which the church must grapple.

Fortunately the home in which I grew up had no domestic violence. Therefore I knew or understood nothing about. Even later, when I was in the midst of it myself, I had no name for the chaos and misery in my marriage. We are a very close family and my parents are role models for a mutually respectful, affectionate, caring marriage partnership that is rooted in Biblical equality. My father is a well-respected minister who, many years beyond retirement now, still preaches every Sunday. My mother is a classically trained soloist and former church choir Director who is so well known for her hospitality that a Christian women's shelter is named in her honor.

When I was in my abusive marriage, the abuse was extreme but it was not physical. No one from whom I sought support – from the church friends to numerous ministers to professional marriage counselors - ever actually called it 'domestic violence', so of course I never considered myself a battered woman. While my supporters were very kind and caring, they were untrained and essentially ignorant about the issue so no one "named it". Instead, the focus of their attention while intervening was either on repairing my fractured marriage or addressing my husband's personal problems. Neither the impact that his extreme behavior was having on me or his potential for physical violence was ever discussed. As a result, I was in the dark regarding the dynamics of domestic violence and the escalation of violence that typically occurs at the point of separation or divorce.

It was not until several months after a dramatic post-separation attack on my father and me that I called a secular community agency for help. Although our church had rallied around us and supported us every step of the way, it was in a secular domestic violence support group, like those at My Sister's House, that my healing journey began in earnest. As a result, I have spent considerable time in the intervening years trying to prepare church leaders and communities of faith to help other families that find themselves in similar situations.

Based on the stories I continue to hear on an almost daily basis, it is clear that despite much progress there is still much more to be done in terms of educating the church and urging involvement. I hope that by sharing my experiences and

the lessons I've learned, those of you who are not yet educated on the issue of domestic violence will understand the importance and value of enhancing your base of knowledge as citizens and as followers of Jesus Christ.

My story, like that of so many other survivors of abuse, started in a seemingly ordinary way. I was 32 when I married David, a man who adored me, who professed to love my God and who appeared to have so many of the qualities I was looking for in a husband. He doted on me, laughed easily, got along well with my friends and loved spending time together. There was no hint of abuse or controlling behavior during our courtship, just sweetness and sharing, fun and togetherness. My friends loved David and thought we made a wonderful couple. We were both ready to settle down and shared the dream of living a simple life in the Texas countryside. Since we were older and convinced that in each other we had found "the one", a prolonged engagement seemed unnecessary. We were eager to begin our life together. After discussing the many options, we decided to marry in a sweet, simple ceremony. We exchanged vows at sunset in a lovely little chapel on a river, surrounded by friends. At my request, a friend read aloud from my favorite chapter of the New Testament, First Corinthians 13. "Love is patient, love is kind, love isn't jealous or boastful or proud. . ." We immediately started planning for a more traditional ceremony and honeymoon back home in Hawaii that would include my large family and my many friends there. I couldn't wait to introduce David to my family and to the islands. I knew that he would love them both.

We were surprised but overjoyed when we learned very soon after our wedding that we were expecting our first baby. We immediately called our loved ones to share the wonderful news and then went to work shopping for baby items. We had spent many hours dreaming and talking of how wonderful it would be to have children together, and we were thrilled that our dream was coming true already. I couldn't wait for a baby to snuggle and love, and David wanted nothing more than to raise a child in a close, loving family that would be different from the abusive home in which he had grown up.

I couldn't have been happier. It was not long, however, before David seemed to begin to change right before my eyes. Instead of being the playful and sweet man I had fallen in love with, he was becoming more and more moody and critical everyday. Before we married he had seemed to love my independent, out-going personality. Now he made cruel, hurtful remarks about me and accused me flirting if I innocently made eye contact with any other man. He wanted the two of us to be together at all times and seemed threatened by anyone else with whom I spent time, co-workers and friends alike.

He insisted on driving me each morning to the school where I worked, then picking me up each afternoon. He popped in to my classroom to bring me gifts at, showed up to take me out to lunch and called frequently during the day to check on me. Soon he was even volunteering part-time in my classroom, where the hearing impaired students and teachers loved him. He seemed unwilling to leave my side for fear I would betray him somehow. These things which seemed like acts of sweetness initially later were revealed as merely a means to monitor and control me.

At home when we were alone, periods of increasing darkness began to creep in and overtake the good times, eroding my newlywed happiness. At first I wrote it off as marriage adjustment issues which would take care of themselves as we spent more time together and adapted to life as a couple. I wanted nothing to spoil my happiness. I was married to a man I loved and I was having his baby. I had a job I loved and I was content with my life, I would tell myself.

Before long, though, our relationship began to deteriorate to such a degree that I could no longer pretend it would somehow magically get better. I had to consider for the first time that perhaps the man I had married had hidden a great deal from me about his true nature. His affectionate ways and loving attentions had given way to ever-increasing displays of unfounded jealousy and insecurity. Although I was faithful and fully committed to David, for some reason that I could not fathom, he was not able to trust me. As a result, he insisted on knowing every single detail of my comings and goings, and became very agitated when he was not included in every minute of my daily plans. I could not comprehend why the

man to whom I was so completely devoted would behave in such a way. He had begun to routinely berate me and call me names, swear at me and disrespect me in ways that were unthinkable. I was dejected and confused.

On the one hand, I was thrilled to be carrying the precious baby that we so wanted, but on the other hand I began to fear that perhaps I had made some terrible mistake. While David's devoted attention had been wonderful before we married, it had become increasingly oppressive. Before long I was feeling like a prisoner, under siege in my own home. We lived far out in the country, away from other houses. This was in the days before cell phones, and the home phone soon was being ripped out of the wall and thrown across the room whenever I received or made calls. The car keys were even hidden from me in an effort to keep me home.

At one point David started to routinely wake me in the middle of the night to interrogate me or accuse me of crazy things. I was exhausted from the pregnancy and from working full time in a stressful position, but he would refuse to let me go to sleep or stay asleep. Instead, he would follow me from room to room harassing me, even insisting that the baby I was carrying was not his. Nothing I could say would calm or appease him. I would sob in frustration and beg him to let me sleep. My heart was breaking. When he started going through my many old boxes of mementos, tearing up photos he found of me with any other male, friends and relatives alike, I was dumbfounded. Even my favorite picture of my grandfather and me was ripped in half. When things were at their worse and I told him that I couldn't take it any longer, I would attempt to leave the house. But he would body-block or restrain me, refusing to let me out the door. Once he even took the spark plugs out of the car so that I couldn't leave the property. I tried to remain calm during these turbulent times, but I'd never felt so helpless, dejected or alone.

When things were calmer, I would try to comprehend the downward spiral that my marriage had taken. It simply made no sense. I could only think that David must be sick. Since David was in recovery from a drinking problem and attended AA meetings, I called an addictions counselor. I was urged to attend an Al-Anon

group. I did so, and the members were kind, but they didn't seem to understand what I was experiencing any better than I did. They told me that when he acted irrationally, I should, "Just see the word SICK flashing on his forehead." When I described the horrible things he called me, I was told to ignore it. "If he called you a chair, would that make you a chair?", someone asked. I was told to remember that addiction is a disease. I had pledged to love my husband "in sickness and in health" and now he did indeed seem to be sick. In fact, he seemed to have morphed into someone I no longer even knew.

I was exhausted. I tried to reason with David. I prayed for wisdom. I talked with doctors and with pastors. I wanted nothing more than to get away from the constant chaos, but I loved my husband and I wanted to help him. I thought I knew "the real David", and I wanted him back. When, in frustration, I asked him one day why he had never done any of this before the wedding, his chilling response was simply, "You never would have married me!" It stopped me cold. For the first time, I was forced to face the possibility that perhaps in our courtship David had purposely deceived me. I had to wonder if now he really knew what he was doing when he acted so terribly.

Still, he had never once hit or physically hurt me, and he seemed incredulous and pained when I told him that I feared that he might. He insisted that he would never ever hurt me, that he loved me more than life itself. But I was beginning to fear his anger and the threats that he had begun to make during the explosive episodes.

By the end of my first trimester of pregnancy, I was exhausted, miserable and having stress-related pregnancy problems. Although my OB/GYN didn't ask what was causing my stress, she insisted that I do whatever it took to reduce it and protect my unborn baby.

I finally left David after a particularly terrifying event during which he woke me in the night and threatened to commit suicide with a loaded gun. The evening before, I had tried again to gently approach the subject of a temporary separation. I managed to take the gun from him and spent another long harrowing, sleepless night listening to him rant and rave. In the morning after he

left for work, I called my school and told them I needed an emergency leave of absence. Some dear friends helped me pack up my belongings and I left town.

I cried all the way home as I fled to my sister's home on the west coast and then on to my parent's home in Hawaii. I was devastated and confused. For three months, I stayed with my parents and sought support and answers from anyone who would listen. I attended counseling sessions and sought out spiritual advice. I was treated with compassion and counseled to try harder, to pray harder and not to give up on my marriage. After a lengthy separation during which David received intensive counseling, he joined me at my parent's home for a trial reconciliation.

Living with my family seemed wiser than moving away and becoming isolated with David, just in case he returned to his old ways. David had agreed in advance to this arrangement and also to attending three AA meetings each week and other conditions. Together we saw a licensed psychologist for marriage counseling once or twice a week. Still, no one named what had happened in our marriage as 'abuse' or 'domestic violence', and so I was never warned that David's old behaviors would most likely resume and probably even escalate. We attended church regularly and talked to pastors. My church friends commented on how much he obviously adored me and how we seemed like a great couple.

At first things were better and David was on his best behavior, but after a month or so, his jealousy and erratic, unpredictable behaviors began to return. He usually hid them from everyone but me. We continued the weekly marriage counseling.

When two months later our baby was born, we immediately fell madly in love with him. David had chosen his name, Joshua, after vividly dreaming that God had chosen that name for our son. Despite our joy over the baby, David's verbal and emotional abuses didn't abate. He was apparently threatened by my close family, who stood by me and intervened whenever they witnessed him being rude to me. He began staying out until late at night and would never tell me where he had been. Once when I tearfully suggested another separation, he told me that if I

ever left him again, he would take the baby and I would never see him again. This was something new and terrifying.

David adored and admired my father, who treated him like a son, and doted on my mother, who was always kind and nurturing. Nevertheless, he clearly resented the fact that he could not dominate me while we all lived under the same roof. I didn't want to expose my parents to any unpleasantness, but I also knew instinctively that things would be much worse if we moved elsewhere. I worried that the baby might pick up on our stress and that his development might be adversely effected, so I tried to be cheerful despite the misery in my marriage and was happy that Josh had his grandparents to distract him and play with him when things were tense.

Over and over, I prayed for insight. I wanted to be a good wife, but I wanted peace and I knew I couldn't live like a prisoner indefinitely. I was becoming depressed. In my head I would sing the same scriptural song over and over. I had learned it in church and it always brought me peace. While David would rant at me, or drive recklessly with us over the mountains, I would calm myself by silently singing, "You are my hiding place. You always fill my heart with songs of deliverance. Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. I will trust in You. Let the weak say 'I am strong in the strength of the Lord'. I will trust in You." This became my daily mantra.

Despite all I was doing to try to hold my marriage together, it continued to unravel. One horrible night David came home around two o'clock in the morning, and grabbed me up out of my sleep, holding a carpet knife to me as if he were preparing to slice me. This was the first ever physical assault on me, although I was not injured. David began interrogating me nonstop, demanding to know who I been on the phone with when he had called and gotten a busy signal earlier in the evening. This hostage situation went on for hours and was terrifying. He held the knife to me the entire time, although I pleaded with him to let me go. Even when I had to go to the restroom, he held tightly onto my arm and kept the knife close to my face, murmuring and threatening me under his breath. He promised

to hurt my father if I made any noise and woke him up, and so I cried silently all night.

Near morning David finally fell asleep and I took the knife and hid it. I sat and waited for sunrise, trying to figure out how I could get away from David without jeopardizing my family. The next morning, when he awoke and realized that I had hidden the knife, he demanded to know where I had put it. When I refused to tell him, he looked me right in the eyes and coldly stated, "I should have killed you last night when I had the chance."

My dreams were totally shattered. It was clear that I could not stay married to David. I knew now that he could really hurt me. The next day I visited a Christian attorney from our church for advice. I told him everything. I said I was terrified for my family and myself. He agreed to help me with a divorce, but he offered no other support or information. When I got home and told David I had filed for divorce, he punched me in the face. I almost dropped the baby. This was first time he had hit me.

Two weeks after this, David reluctantly moved out. Several months later in my first support group, I learned about Dr Lenore Walker's 'Cycle of Violence theory'. I could easily relate to it. The three distinct phases she described were clearly evident in David's pattern of behavior, although in many relationships I am told this is not the case.

The 'Tension-Building' phase is the first and the longest. It is dominated by tensions that build and build, much like a pressure cooker. The 'Explosion Phase' follows, after which there may be a temporary reduction in tension. Walker dubbed this the 'Honeymoon phase.' I never liked this term, since true honeymoons don't follow violence. It has also been referred to the 'Hearts and Flowers phase' or the 'Period of Loving Contrition'. My support group leader called it the "Manipulative Kindness" phase. That is a perfect description, since the "kindesses" that follow violent episodes are anything but random. This phase is especially evident in the early stages of an abusive relationship. After acting abusively, the batterer usually begs and pleads for forgiveness, cries and perhaps plies his victim with gifts. Because she loves and pities him, and often because she

really believes that she has “the real him back again”, this works for a while. Eventually, though, the Tension starts to build again, and the cycle repeats. Usually the ‘Honeymoon’ period will disappear altogether eventually. The irony is that neither the victim nor the abuser can see this pattern at the time.

For the first few days after moving out, David was cooperative and pleasant, trying to win me back any way he could. He dropped in whenever he wanted, against my wishes but it was always to bring me money or gifts or to make promises to change. (Manipulative Kindness). But when I was resolute about getting a divorce, he became spiteful and cruel, and started to leave hate-filled messages and accusatory notes for me. (Tension Building) Just five days after he moved out, the Explosion occurred with all its fury. Of course I never saw it coming.

My mother was out of town and Dad and I had accepted an invitation to join some church friends for a dinner picnic on their sailboat. It was a beautiful and peaceful evening, the first I had enjoyed in a very long time. Afterward, I picked up the baby from the sitter’s and arrived home about forty-five minutes before Dad. As Josh slept peacefully in his car seat, I got out of my car and was ambushed by my estranged husband. I instinctively screamed as he grabbed me and threw me up against a wall in the darkened hallway just inside the house. He closed the outer door, and pressed a knife against my throat, threatening to kill me if I didn’t shut up. He was wild. He swore and screamed and savagely beat me over and over and over in the face. He stuck the knife into the flesh of my neck so I could no longer speak or scream.

After being subdued, I was forced at knifepoint into a chair in our bedroom. David told me that he had come to kill my father, and that he intended to “cut his eyes out” and “drip every drop of blood from his body.” I was horrified and couldn’t believe that this was happening. It seemed as if everything was occurring in slow motion. I was disoriented and in shock.

David told me that he had already cut the phone lines and that there was no use trying to get help. Try as I might, I could think of no way to stop the horror that was unfolding before my eyes. I was paralyzed with fear and disbelief. I tried to

think of how to stop him. I knew I could never overpower him. He was agitated and seemed possessed, demonic. He opened and closed his fists repeatedly as he berated and mocked me. I pled with him to leave us alone, to spare my father. All this time, David watched the window. When he finally saw the lights of my father's car arriving, he listened for the door to open and then suddenly released me. He raced out in to the hallway with the knife over his head, screaming wildly as he ran. I yelled a warning as Dad opened the door and lunged after David, attempting to hold him back. In a flash of fury, he turned and stabbed me deeply in the abdomen to get me off of him. I had no idea that I had been hurt. I could only think of trying to save my Dad. David immediately began slashing at Dad. The knife cut through his eyebrows and across his face. Later more than 40 stitches were required to repair his largest wound. Miraculously, Dad's eyes were untouched, although we didn't know this until later. The assault in that dark hallway did not end until I heard a clear message, "Turn on the lights. When he sees what he has done, he will run." And this is exactly what happened. I learned an important lesson from the Holy Spirit that night - that abuse can only exist in the darkness. It is not until we act, by shining a light on it, that I will ever end!

Of course the events of that night are the stuff of which nightmares are made. Dad and I were taken to the hospital where our wounds were explored and tended. I was hospitalized for three days. David was located and arrested the night of the attack. He was eventually charged with attempted murder and kidnapping among a host of other felonies. He later pled no contest to attempted manslaughter and was given a twenty year maximum sentence and a ten year minimum.

In the aftermath, as stated earlier, our stunned church stood solidly with us. Over time, our wounds healed. God remained faithful and blessed my family abundantly. Until that time of healing, though, there were many new and different struggles ahead of me.

When several months after the assault I was told about the Rev. Marie Fortune's book, *Keeping the Faith: Questions and Answers for Abused Christian Women*. In it, I found information, spiritual encouragement and comfort. Rev. Fortune

explained that that by seeking a divorce from an abusive husband, a Christian wife has not failed her marriage. Instead, she wrote, husbands who abuse their wives have already broken the sacred covenant of marriage. By abusing their wives, they abandon them emotionally. The wife's declaration of divorce merely makes public what has already been done by the abuser. I think I breathed an audible sigh of relief. I went on to read and understand so much more about what the scriptures had to say, not only about about abuse in marriage and divorce, but about mutual submission, forgiveness and suffering. That little book became my constant companion, and I shared it with many, many others.

Meanwhile, my husband was in prison awaiting trial. At first I received numerous apology letters from him. He claimed to be sorry for what he had done, but he never really seemed to take responsibility for it. He seemed sorer about being in jail than for doing what he did to Dad and I. I felt great pity for him, but as I learned more about domestic violence, I began to realize that these insincere 'apologies' were his way of trying to manipulate his victims and make us feel guilty. He was more angry than sorry, especially because we were cooperating with the state in his prosecution, although we really had no choice in the matter. When I read the words of Psalm 55, it seemed to speak directly to me. "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart. His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords."

I struggled to understand what had happened, to forgive David and to find God's will for my future. I wrestled with the command of Jesus to "forgive seventy times seven." I wanted to forgive, but I wasn't sure what that meant. Despite my fear of David, I was tempted many times to do just that. I wanted him to get help. I often thought about the words of Jesus, "I was in prison and you did not visit me." I put myself in David's shoes and wondered how it would be to be imprisoned and separated from my baby. I didn't think I could survive that, and my heart hurt for him. If there was any possibility that he could learn and really change, I reasoned, maybe at least Josh could still have a father again. After all, we serve a God of miracles! I knew that no one was beyond the reach of Jesus' healing touch, and I prayed for a miracle.

Fortunately, however, Christian friends who had a sophisticated understanding of the complexities of domestic violence and the danger of contacting David advised me not to intervene with him directly. One dear Christian sister, JoAnn, who was also a survivor, saw my struggles. She explained gently that if I injected myself into David's recovery process, I would simply "become an occasion for abuse." He was obsessed with me, she reminded me. By distracting him from his own necessary inner work, she said, I would actually be a stumbling block to him! I felt immediate peace and confirmation that she was speaking the truth. I felt great sorrow but also great relief to know that I was not responsible for tending to David's spiritual needs. I would have to trust God to send others to do that.

In my survivor support group, I also learned that it is possible to love someone and to consciously choose not to have him in my life. I was reminded to focus on my long-term best interests and urged to accept that I could not be the person to help my husband, although I secretly sent others to minister to him. I focused on caring for my baby and on keeping us safe. I was still heartsick, but I told myself that my job was to stay strong for my son and create a future for us. It was not easy, but my family, friends and church supported me. I went back to college and earned a degree in Human Services, graduating with honors. I never worked in special education again, but instead focused my efforts on domestic violence prevention and intervention.

After almost 25 years of creating programs, shelters and "doing justice" on many levels, I learned last September that David was dying, in prison. By God's grace, I was able to take my son to meet his father. This is something I certainly never had expected to do, but I felt compelled by the Holy Spirit to do it, knowing that all would be well. There in that cell with my son and his father I learned the great gift we receive when we also follow the Biblical mandate to "love mercy". David had taken full responsibility for his actions. He had humbled himself and he asked for forgiveness. I could see the changes that God had made in his spirit. What a beautiful time the three of us had together. David died at peace this past January. Only God can do such wonders.

In one of her books about domestic violence and the church, my mentor the late Biblical Scholar Dr. Catherine Clark Kroeger wrote “It is tempting to say that what goes on in somebody else's home is none of our business; but that is not true in the household of faith. Steps must be taken to ensure that abuse is stopped. This will require time, effort and endurance from the church. . . We need to be men and women of hope & vision, 'binding up the broken-hearted', and 'showing all people everywhere a more excellent way'

We need to support the victims in our midst and hold abusers accountable. But we cannot do this until we acknowledge the fact that abuse is common, that it is a sin and violation of God's laws. We cannot afford to hold the sanctity of marriage above the sanctity of life as so many in the church have done. Numerous scriptures are still routinely misinterpreted, taken out of context, and misused in counseling, preaching and Biblical teaching. Rev Fortune discusses the various theological roadblocks to safety & healing & healthy living that can and should be *resources* when taught properly in churches. These include the theology of forgiveness (repentance rather than “cheap grace”; the theology of suffering (abuse is not a woman's “cross the bear” ; Jesus took up the cross willingly, it was redemptive suffering; abuse is not!) ; And of course there is the theology of submission in marriage. Every year Christian battered women remain in dangerous life-threatening relationships because they are counseled to “stay, pray and obey”. Many of them are battered. Some of them are killed. When this happens, it is tragic, because their Shepherds, who are commanded to safeguard the lives of the sheep, have supported the wolves instead.

Imagine being an abused wife and hearing this verse out of context over and over in your church, as so many women do: “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.” Ephesians 5:22-24 The verse that follows is rarely included:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy. . . In this same way, husbands ought to love their

as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves also himself. . .”Ephesians 5:25-28.....

This speaks to mutual submission to each other, out of reverence to Christ.

The fact is, though, that there IS much more advice to wives in the Bible than to husbands. William Barclay addressed this in his classic New Testament Commentary, regarding Peter in particular. He wrote “His advice to wives was six times as long as that to husbands because the wife’s problems were far greater.”

The Rev. Evan Ash has written “The duty of mutual submission is based on the call to be ‘imitators of Christ.’ It is the imitation of this kind of self-effacing love that is the foundation of the duties the author gives for spousal roles. The guide is not to make a claim on another person and their behavior, but to base *our own personal behavior* on imitating Christ in our lives. Our actions towards our spouses is to be *sacrificial*, and sacrifice is a choice we make, not an obligation we owe. In this way, both spouses would seek to walk humbly with each other as they would walk with God . . .Any other application of these verses fails to live up to their message. Any use of these verses to justify violence and domination towards another person is a travesty of God’s inspired Word, and is in itself doubly sinful”

But I ask you, why do we even need a chapter and a verse to tell us that domination & abuse is wrong? We have the model of the character of Jesus and all of His teachings, and that should be enough!

Those of us who bear the name of Christ must be working to make a difference in our society, where we know that 1 of 3 women is abused.

We must be contagious Christians, channels of God’s love, instruments of His peace, and ambassadors for Christ, agents of reconciliation in a broken and fragmented world!

This is where change must begin, in our own churches, in our own homes, in our own lives; for if it does not begin here, why should we expect it to happen anywhere?

The prophet Isaiah wrote:

“This is the kind of fast day I’m after:
to break the chains of injustice,
to get rid of exploitation in the workplace,
to free the oppressed, to cancel debts.
If you get rid of unfair practices,
if you quit blaming victims,
if you quit gossiping about other people’s sins,
if you are generous with the hungry
and if you start giving yourselves to the down-and-out,
then your lives will begin to glow in the darkness.
You’ll be known as those who can fix anything, restore old ruins, rebuild and
renovate, make the community livable again.”

Jesus later echoed Isaiah’s words when he said
The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners.”

Would you join me in echoing the words of the great prophet, Amos, who
famously said,
“Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.”
Please respond after each of the following statements by stating together,
“Let justice roll!” . . .

As we strive for a world where abusers of all sorts will be held accountable, we
say together:

“Let justice roll.”

As we create responses to victims that support them and do not blame them, we say together:

“Let justice roll.”

As we model for the children the great value of gender equality, marriage equality via mutual submission to Christ and non-violent conflict resolution, we say together:

“Let justice roll.”

And as we work for a future where no one will be allowed to control, stalk, abuse or enslave another fellow human being, we say together:

“Let justice roll.”

Amen