

East Bay Lenten Caravan Service
The Way Christian Center
Wednesday, March 7, 2018
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It's Women's History/Herstory Month. So we're going to talk about a woman, some of us may have heard of her before, some of us, even though we are cradle Christians, we may have never heard of.

Judges 19:

This is what scholars call a text of terror. So I'm going to set a trigger alert out now for sexual assault, if the babies need to be excused because you haven't had that talk yet, or if you need a moment for yourself, do what you need to do for you. 2:15

2:19

and so, the text opens saying—we're going to get to the reading, I want to give you a little background, that there was no king in Israel. Do you know what it's like to live without a king? Or with a ?? king. If you're an American citizen, you what it's like to have an entire globe pointing and laughing at you. My husband and I encounter people halfway around the world and they say, "how could you let this happen?" and I'm like, "I didn't let anything happen."

So in this text there is no king so there is all kinds of chaos ?? and we're talking about a man, a Levite, so you would think that because we're seeing a priest, there would be some form of ??, some form of worship. But we find that his wife has fled from his presence. The text doesn't say why, I imagine it could be domestic violence, not taking care of home, but she runs back to her father's house for protection; I could stay right there, that's a whole different sermon. 3:31

And so he goes, after 4 months, to get his wife back, who the text calls, "a concubine." And the father-in-law is so excited to see him, he says why don't you come in? you've traveled a long way, you've got your servant, your 2 donkeys, before you take my daughter back with you, let's kick it. Let's crack open a little bottle of something, let's have some wings. 3:57

For 3 days they do this, on the 4th day, Eli is like, "alright, Pop, I gotta go...we gotta get back home, we gotta beat this traffic" the dad is like, "nah, stay, hang out a little bit."

Next day, Eli is like, "Pop, we really gotta go!" Dad's like, just hang out, Eli's like, nah, you not gone get me with this again, so he packs their bags and they head out.

4:28

Now as they're traveling, they're looking for a safe space to land. They come into a town and they can't stay there because it's enemy territory. He's a Levite, he can't be riding around with the folks from Benjamin and Nahum; he needs to know that he's in a safe space.

4:47 You see, where he was in a sunset town; like the old folks say you don't want to be caught in that town after dark; it's like Jackson, MS in the 50s; it's like Orinda in 2018.

5:10 ?? and so he winds up in a little town that was owned by the Benjamin tribe and he's in the square and an old man pulls up to the square and he sees the Levite and his concubine and his servant and he's like, "where are you going and where are you coming from?"

5:31 because before people help you they want to know who are you? Are you worth my time? Are you the enemy? Who are you? And so they decide that they will go to the old man's house, he's like, "it's all good. Peace be with you. I got you." Can you imagine living in a world where all you had to do was show up in a square and someone would just take you into their home and take care of you? There'd be no tenements, there'd be no homeless encampments.

You see all this drama, right? You don't need no soap operas, just read the Old Testament. Love and Hip Hop Ancient Israel

6:20 so here is where we enter the actual Biblical text.

Scripture reading

8:56 – prayer

9:25 A Sunset at Sunrise

9:34 there are fewer things more beautiful than a sunset. People who take in sunsets are typically on vacation, on a beach. Or there somewhere where they're relaxing and they have a fantastic view of the sun setting. And it's beautiful because you see these warm, lovely hues, oranges and purples and you're reminded of God's handiwork when it comes to Creation. Now some of us are not night owls, some of us are early risers—not me! Praise the Lord! I tip my hat to you.

10:08 but some people swear that sunrises are more beautiful than sunsets. There are some people for whom sunsets are never beautiful. Sunsets are triggers that darkness is on the way. Darkness means danger for some of us, who go to sleep and uncle joe comes

in late at night. Who wait at the home for drunk husbands to come home to beat up wives. Sunsets, darkness, danger.

10:42 in today's text, we encounter a situation where a woman, a wife, a priest's wife, so that makes her a first lady, flees her abusive husband. And she runs to her father's house to get solace, but he comes back to woo her with loving words, the text says. Because you know how abusers are: abuse, "it'll never happen again," abuse, "baby, I'm sorry," abuse, "I hit you, but you know I love you" so he kept coming home with his wife, with his concubine, the text calls her; and it's important to note that the text calls her a concubine even though she was his wife. You know in the black community we struggle with what we like to call respectability politics.

11:28 where someone might label you something and somehow that diminishes you and your worth. If I call you concubine, that means I don't have to honor the God in you. If I call you prostitute then that means that you can't sing on the praise team, if I call you a ho that means you can't pray for me. Respectability politics.

12:00 we enter this space with these 2 men eating lemon pepper wings, wet, washing it down with a bottle of Hennessy and all of a sudden these perverse men knock on the door and instead of telling these Brothas to go away, things get heated. And the Levite, the priest, the one who's supposed to help us get closer to God, performs one of the most selfish things in the history of this biblical text.

12:32 in order to protect himself, he pushes his concubine out into the crowd. Now what really struck me was that the old man, and the master of the house the text says, offered not only his virgin daughter, but also the Levite's concubine. SIR, the concubine is not even yours to offer! How is it that people try to give away things that don't even belong to them?

13:07 so the concubine is pushed out and they abuse her, they ravage her all night long. And it's not until the morning when they're like uh-oh, the cover of darkness is leaving us, 'cause you know, folks like to do dirty deeds in the dark, as soon as you shine that light on 'em, they scurry like roaches.

13:38 And so I want to talk about the morning, the dawn, and the light. 'cause they're all different things. The morning comes at a particular time; the clock strikes midnight, so technically, it's morning, but it's still dark outside so it's morning, but there's no light. Then dawn is just when the sun starts to peek over the horizon and light is when the sun is fully shining. You see, she was abused until morning, but it wasn't until dawn that she crept to the threshold. And it wasn't until light that the Levite came outside to find her.

14:17 Here is the Levite; the "man'd of Gawd" as we like to say. Who didn't expect to see his concubine ever again, much less at the door to the old man's home. The text says

that he was getting ready to go back home so he didn't expect to see her again. He was going about his day as if it were normal, as if it were business as usual, as if he wasn't responsible for the death of his wife.

And so he finds her. And instead of saying, "I'm sorry." Instead of saying, "I was a punk, my bad." He says, "get up." How is it that the person who put you in the situation like that is the first person to tell you to stand up? Ma'am? Sir? You are the reason why I'm here.

And so when she doesn't answer, he picks her up and puts her onto his donkey.

15:12

And I wonder, at what point did he realize that she was dead? Was she really dead or was she just unconscious? We may never know, but the text says she was dead. But we know who wrote this text: Brothas with political agendas. Brothas, who had a point to press. Brothas who saw women as property and nothing more. So, of course, the message that you're gonna get is that women don't matter. Black women don't matter. Queer Black women don't matter. Trans Black women don't matter. That's the message that the text is sending us. But, I believe, there is a God Who sits high and looks low and says look at My Beloved Creation. You are the apple of God's eye! 16:11

I rejoice over you with singing. You are created in My image and My likeness. That's the God that I love. That's the God that I serve.

16:25 Morning, the dawn, and the light.

So when the light hits us and we see the truth and the terror of this text, we can't expect a "whoop" at this kind of sermon. We can't expect 3 points and a close with this kind of sermon. But we can expect some interior dialogue; we can expect some self-reflection.

16:52 Because it's real easy to talk about these perverse men banging on the door. But think about the last time you were a perverse woman or man. Think about the last time you were a perverse group of Christians. Think about the last time you had something to say about a visitor, about a foreigner, about someone who wasn't a part of your clique.

17:17 It might be real easy to talk about the Levite, the priest, the one who's supposed to lead us into the presence of God. But think about the last time you were the Levite. Think about the last time you threw somebody under the bus. Think about the last time you were the cause of somebody's demise. Think about the last time you caused someone's spiritual death.

17:47 It might be real easy to point the fingers at the men in this text. But know that we have our own stuff to deal with. According to the Black Women's Blueprint, at least 60% of Black women are sexually abused before they turn 18. At least, and it's underreported, so that number is low. Think about that. The Black Church is 85% women, so that means that every Black church, at least *half* of your congregation has been sexually assaulted, before they turn 18. If your pastor didn't at least *acknowledge* #MeToo, you need a new pastor. If your pastor didn't at least *acknowledge* #MeToo, you need a new pastor. And so my role is to have you think about the ways in which God is calling you into total liberation. 19:01

Total freedom. We like to talk about freedom in Jesus. We like to talk about early Sunday morning. We're so quick to rush to the sunrise that we never dealt with the sunset. We're so quick to get to the resurrection of the Savior, we don't even pay attention to the 33 years that He lived and walked and breathed. You know, if only we celebrated Holy Saturday as much as we celebrated Resurrection Sunday.

Some of us don't even know what Holy Saturday is. It's the Saturday after Good Friday and before Resurrection Sunday. It's the Saturday when the disciples didn't know what to do because their Messiah was gone. It's the Saturday when the Virgin Mary had to mourn her Beloved Son's death. It's the Saturday when people were like "we got to get up out of here, because if they killed Him they gonna surely kill us."

20:01 It was a Saturday. I wonder if there are any Holy Saturday Christians in the building who don't need to rush through pain, who don't need to rush through grief, who don't need rush the healing process, but trust God to be big enough to stick with you in your mess.

20:24 'Cause we all got some mess. Some of us dress it up a little nicer than others, but we all got mess. We in church on a Monday night, 'cause we all got mess. Sunday morning just isn't enough, 'cause we all got mess. YouTube wouldn't be "just right," 'cause we all got mess. 'Cause some of us have been treated like concubines. Used for the pleasure of other people and then discarded like a piece of trash.

21:00 You see when you no longer play your role in keeping the system pumping along as business as usual, people have a problem with you. See, when you decide that you really gonna live out Wakanda, and you're not going to give in to capitalist desires and you disrupt the global economy with your \$1.3 trillion buying power—that's when things begin to change. Because sometimes, even in church, we can be treated like concubines.

21:40 Jerome can lead the choir and direct the praise team as long as he don't bring Dante on Sunday mornings.

21:58 Concubine.

22:06 Tanisha didn't get pregnant by Tanisha by Tanisha self. But Tanisha can't praise dance no more, she got to be "sat down," but Trayvon still on the drums. Concubine.

22:38 We talking about how pastor is a man of God and he is a man after God's own heart—22:42 my pastor is a man of God!

22:56 But you always gotta give a little side eye to the pastoral counseling visits, because something seems amiss. You don't need a nighty on to be counseled by pastor. So you have to think about the ways in which we are not only treating each other in the Body of Christ like concubines, but we are treating the Body of Christ as if She were a concubine.

23:23 Coming into the churchhouse to get your value and your self-worth, to get your ego fixed. See back in the day when we were building this here Black church, our ancestors, our foremothers, our forefathers, they would be called "the n word" on the street. But when they came to church, they were "Deacon so and so." And so I realize the sanctity of the African-American religious tradition. But you cannot use the church to appease your insecurities.

23:55 We have so much work to do. So many unsheltered people, so many migrant brothers and sisters who are about to be raided and deported, so many women and boys and girls who are being trafficked, so many crooked politicians that we need to vote out of office, so many capitalist vultures who don't care about you being in debt, who would literally profit off of having their foot on your neck.

24:23 To be trying to worry about your insecurity. Deal with your stuff. Go to 211. Go to PsychologyToday.com, find you a therapist, sit down once, twice, three times a week and deal with your stuff so we can go on and do the work God is calling us to do!

24:56 And once you build up yourself enough, you fortify yourself in Christ, you will not allow people to treat you like a concubine...even if that person is yourself. Fatherlessness is running rampant in our communities. Mass incarceration, we spend more money in California building jails than we do building schools, and we wonder why our family system is broken. So what I'm trying to say is we have to work on our own stuff internally; work on our own stuff individually so we can work on our own stuff communally; and then we can work on our own stuff nationally; and then we can work on our own stuff globally, because that's what God is calling us to do.

25:55 So no matter what situation, no matter what time of day it is for you, it might by morning, it might be dawning, it might be the light. God is calling you to a new season, where sometimes the sunrise is scary. A lot of us are used to the sunsets. We're used to the disappointments. We're used to the letdowns, but just because that's what you're used to, doesn't mean that's what you deserve.

Trust the God of the sunrise. Trust the God Who doesn't want you to be a concubine. Trust the God Who doesn't want you to diminish your value in your own eyes. Know who you are in God.

And if a concubine is ever on the threshold of your doorstep, the only thing you need to say, "I know. I believe you. I'm so sorry this happened to you. It was a terrible, sinful thing, and it wasn't your fault." That's it. 26:55

So as we work to embrace the God of the sunrise, I want you to hold on to whatever God has challenged you to speak out about. Because the close of this text, the Levite says, "to consider it, to take counsel, and to speak up." God is calling us to speak up and to speak out. And not for those—I can't stand the phrase, "Well, I'm just a voice for the voiceless." Unless you are mute, you have a voice. It's just that people are silencing that voice. It's just that people aren't amplifying that voice. It's just that some people are hogging the mic when they need to pass it on down. So speak up and don't be shamed into being quiet. 27:56

Speak up and help your testimony help somebody else. Speak up and speak out so that we can run towards the God of the sunrise.

'Cause we've got to let the sun set on domestic violence. And let the sun rise on loving Black women. We've got to let the sun set on rape culture, and let the sun rise on gender equity. We've got to let the sun set on ICE raids and let the sun rise on resistance. We've got to let the sun set on unshelteredness, and let the sun rise on compassion. We've got to let the sun set on trash theology, and let the sun rise on liberation. We've got to do the work, people of God, so as you journey through the Lenten season, believe that God is calling you to give up some things.

28:55

But, I'm not talking about meat and sweets. I'm talking about things like male privilege. I'm talking about things like white supremacy. I'm talking about things like Walk with the God of the sunrise and watch God and watch some things in your life begin to shift. Walk with the God of the sunrise, and let God throw a wrench in the enemy's plans. Walk with the God sunrise and watch God expand your horizons. Walk with the God of the sunrise and watch God blow your mind. Walk with the God of the sunrise and do the work as God walks alongside you.