

Jesus says, “Me too”

Rev. Starlette Thomas

Luke 4.18-19, NRSV

www.villagebaptistbowie.org

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Theodore Roosevelt delivered a speech titled “Citizenship in the Republic” in Paris, France on April 23, 1910 wherein he said this,

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better.

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again;

Because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause;

Who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly. ...”¹

Theodore Roosevelt reminds us that anyone can complain and in fact, everyone does. It takes no energy, no exercise in planning, for education or specialized training, no money, no movement on our part to *say* that something is wrong. There is no shortage of those who are willing to identify what is wrong with us or any other person without provocation or invitation. Such persons will do it for free and many persons do it as a matter of habit.

And we have names for them: backseat drivers, Monday- morning quarterbacks and armchair theologians. These are persons without a license or a car who feel the need to correct or at least inform our driving. It describes persons with or without actual professional football experience, who are not on the team or in the game but feel empowered to comment on plays because they own season tickets, a television and team jersey. These are people who offer unsolicited advice, critical reviews of Christians and our faith practices while they neither attend a church or regularly practice their faith.

Roosevelt makes it clear that it is easier, safer even to point the finger and say, “You are wrong” or “You did it wrong.” But, it takes courage to point the way. And if you are not going to do the latter, then I would suggest that you are in the way.

This summer, I, along with much of the world, witnessed women come forward and share their stories of sexual predation, harassment and abuse. A child of the South, it is a long time coming and something that I thought I would never see or hear. Using the hash tag “Me too,” women tell the stories that have been the cause of their unearned shame, recounting events for which they have been blamed. Their bodies, our bodies, the scene of the crime, women (and even some men) have ripped the yellow tape from their mouths.

They said, “Don’t get him into trouble.” “He’ll lose his job.” “You’ll break up your family.” “You wanted it. “You must have said something, done something to lead him on.” “You had it coming.” “What did you expect at this hour and with that outfit on?” “That’s just the way men are.” “He made a mistake.” “It won’t happen again.” “Let’s keep this quiet.”

So, we agreed that it was best that she kept silent—until the whispers turned into a shout, until there were more women than we wanted to count. Hands raised in every family, in every community, every city and country. She was tired of being both the victim and the perpetrator.

Her body treated as object and a moving target, seemingly punished for being a woman. Never in the right place and always appearing at the wrong time in the wrong clothes, she is guilty of it all. Thousands of years later, she continues to take the fall. “*She made me do it.*”

It has taken years and way too many women before her— before we believed her. We knew it wouldn’t be a ripple. The wave of shock is misplaced; it is foolish to cover our mouths now. She is only saying what we have known and seen and shushed all long, a global, social, traditional, familial conspiracy. Tired of being the sacrifice for his rise to fame, she dared to tell the truth in the face of the lies we love.

But, this is not a new story; one told in the Bible but not often repeated is that of rape.² I suppose the rape of Dinah, Tamar, the nameless concubine and so many others do not go well with our hymns and liturgical colors. It never seems like the right time to tell this story and we don’t come to church to be made uncomfortable. But, “‘tis the season.” As we jingle bells, she is pointing the finger and shifting our gaze to the perpetrator. Still, it is regrettable that Jesus had to come to set the captive free³ when we hold the key, when we can let this caged bird sing and believe her *the first time*.

I am encouraged that these women have paved a way for other women to come forward and better still, to make men who would consider her a willing partner in their debasing of her think twice and

then again. With the cat out of the bag, this boat has been rocked—because she “dared greatly” and decided to make waves.

While it seems that churches are asleep at the wheel, Jesus comes to take it. While his disciples are asleep on the boat, Jesus has one eye open, waiting for us to speak to the storm, the waves of accusations that drown out all excuses and true stories that she has carried and buried. And she did.

Women were and are being thrown to the lions in the arena, sacrificed to the god of patriarchy, to the pomp and circumstance of male chauvinism. And women are coming out of the stands to show their scars, to recount when they were bitten and to protect women from attack. Still, there are those critics, who would rather bite her head off. “Lay down with lion,” they say.

But, Jesus came not for staged photo opportunities, to make backroom deals with Caesar, to live the capitalist American dream, to simply smile and wave. Jesus didn’t come to earth just to “go along to get along.” The kingdom of God will not be televised, commercialized, supervised. We will never see it coming and we pray for ears to hear.

Jesus answers his call to ministry and an old Testament ad placed for the Messiah, the Savior of the world. He is not a hired hand but heralded by angels. The Word made flesh, he can only repeat after God and the prophet Isaiah because the Scriptures must be fulfilled.⁴ With scroll in hand, he declares:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Yes, the Spirit is upon him— not to jump through our theological hoops, not to turn a blind eye to the suffering of others for the sake of our success, not so that we can shout and say, “Amen,” which is not be confused with doing “the Father’s business,”⁵ not to capitalize on the sometimes true but often false, cultural and generational imprisonment of others. But, to open eyes blinded by our society, closed shut by our prejudices and stereotypes of mythical proportions.

Jesus enters the world through the womb of a woman so that we can go free. He does not make a grand entrance but waits to be born, tarries with Mary, tied to her umbilical cord, connected to her suffering. When she cried out in pain, he said, “**Me too.**” Amen.

End notes

¹ Brene Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent and lead*, (New York, NY: Avery, 2012), 1.

² See Genesis 34.7-31; Judges 20. 6-11; 19.16-128; Deuteronomy 22.25-27; Second Samuel 13.19-20.

³ Luke 4.18

⁴ Matthew 26.54

⁵ Luke 2.49