

# The Love of our Mothers and the Rape of our Sisters

Acts 2:1-21

A transcript of a sermon preached on Mother's Day at CMM 8 April, 2016 by  
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Without our mothers, we would not be. The only way into this world, the only way into this world, is through the womb of our mothers. The only way...

Our lives began, our lives were all conceived, in the hidden depths of our mothers being, intricately woven together from the moment of conception. Conception, resulting from the sexual intercourse of two people. It is a profoundly intimate act, the bible calls knowing—to be known—to become one—one flesh. Intercourse that carries with it the powerful potential to make life. Yet, we do not refer to it as “making life”. It is referred to as something equally mysterious, equally marvelous—“making love” connecting to humanity's deepest need, deepest desire and deepest longing.

Precisely because sexual intercourse embodies such beautiful, such vulnerable, such wonderful, such intimate power to create life and love or express love that is literally beyond measure. When sexual intercourse is entered into without mutual consent and respect, whenever it is forcefully or violently committed, the horrifying destructive damaging violation is equally beyond measure. It is a torture of both body and mind. We call it rape. Rape is a torturous act. Rape turns the wonder of love into a weapon of war. Rape turns what is beautiful into something brutal. Rape turns what is an act of vulnerability into an act of violence. Rape turns what should be an act of equality and mutuality into an act of dominance, selfishness and power. It turns an act of pleasure into an act of pain, an act of love into an act of fear.

It takes place within a context of society and history that through the centuries have attached shame and guilt to the victim and survivor of rape, rather than the perpetrator. This further isolates the survivor. So often the narrative of blame follows the rape survivor as they are interrogated. “What were you wearing, where were you, were you alone, I bet you were asking for it?” The insinuation of her irresponsibility puts all responsibility on her for the crime that has been committed against her.

So, not only is rape a torturous act, but it is followed with after shocks of secondary trauma. Secondary not as in less than, but secondary as in more than, because a survivor of rape must re-tell her story. She must re-tell it over and over again under the microscope of a bunch of stranger's questions. She will have to prove her case. She will be accused of lying or conniving. “Ms. Khwezi” is the pseudonym of the woman who accused Jacob Zuma of rape. People called for Khwezi to be burnt like a witch. When she explained that she froze, paralyzed and therefore was unable to resist it was interpreted as consent, turning the man into the victim and she into the violator.

This situation is pandemic in our land. In the year 2014/2015 over 53,000 cases were reported. That is around 150 a day and we are told that 8 or 9x as many are actually committed, but not reported. That would make it 480,000--over around 1,000 cases a day that go unreported. It is no wonder that students at Rhodes University have created a campaign to stop rape and have bravely, courageously, protested topless saying, “this is mine. Whether I wear anything at all, you have no right to touch me without my consent.”

Now we know research tells us that rape is not about sex per se'. So many of the men who commit rape have access to sex. It is about power. It is about domination. It stems from many sources not the least of which are a warped sense of masculinity fed and formed by a hyper patriarchal society that says that women are second class citizens. Men are believed to have certain entitlements in relationships to women, not the least sexual. That a woman's primary role is to serve men. That women belong to men and are owned by men. Students are

helping us to see that when we enter into this context through an intersectional approach, that the issue is not only gender, but also color, class and sexual orientations. In other words there are multitudes of levels of power at play.

There are so many different layers that make so many people in society profoundly vulnerable. Did you know that in the last year 2014/2015 gender based violence cost this country in financial terms a figure that KP&G has just researched—anything between 28 and 42 billion rand per annum. You can never quantify the violation of women in rand and cents, but that gives some sense of the incredible situation that we have. So here is the question I want us to wrestle with: All of us owe our lives to our mothers, not one of us came into this world without our mothers, but the way men treat women denies and betrays the life giving source of women in our very lives. Why? *How is that possible?*

What is the source of the disconnect between our life giving mother and the violation we can cause to women? Have a look at the scripture that we have read today. Paul and Co. are walking around teaching and there is a slave girl. Talk about trans-sectional, she is a woman and she is a slave. There are layers of oppression she falls under. Yet, she has a certain gift, they think she may be a psychic. Men have caught onto her gift and used her to make money. She sees the truth and names it. She sees Paul and says, “These men are slaves of the most high God.” She knows what it is to be a slave. She sees Paul and Co as slaves of the most high God. She insightfully sees this and names it to be so for all to hear. She proclaims this on and on and on and it begins to irritate Paul. Now, I have preached from this text before and what I normally do at this stage is to come up with theories as to why and how Paul was irritated to soften the blow or to rationalize why he told the woman to shut up.

There is nothing in the text that says anything other than he was just irritated, which men can be...more than occasionally. Notice she is unnamed. Whatever Paul does to her, she loses her gift. So now she is of no use economically. She is no use to the men even who exploited her. If you notice, she is just dropped from the page. There is not a single mention of her again. This nameless woman is just forgotten. We don't hear of her again.

What we hear of, is the men exploiting the women take up their monetary case against Paul and Co. Basically they get Paul and Co. thrown into jail. There is a big earthquake which we attribute to God's liberating presence and power breaking open the jail cell and the jailer thinks, “Oh gosh, they have escaped!” So, he is about to commit suicide. They say, “No we haven't escaped. Don't commit suicide.” Paul and Co. then come out and say, “you thought we were just Jews. We are not, we are Roman.” Welcome to the identity politics of the Roman regime! They use their privilege and power that comes from being a Roman citizen and trump their accusers, but where is the woman? Did someone stop her from committing suicide, now that she has no means whatsoever to make a living? Where was the earthquake to liberate the woman from the prison of patriarchy?

These are the stories in scripture that are written from a man's perspective and preached by men like me who don't focus on the woman at all. We forget her as soon as the author forgot her and we just go with the text. That perpetuates the marginalization. There is an African proverb: *Until the Lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter.* As long as men are writing the story as long as men are preaching the sermons, women fall off the page.

So, let me spend a few moments on going through a few passages of scripture. I will dip in here and there to show you how the scriptures themselves and our interpretation of scriptures, specifically masculine interpretations of scripture have perpetuated a patriarchal society, namely a second class citizenship for women, which in turn perpetuates the rape and abuse of women by men.

Think back...you may have had little arguments in school that went like this, “men first women second, because God created women second. Ha, ha, ha, so that means you are second class. You are just from a man's rib, ha,

ha.” We may laugh, but it is not a joke and what is more it betrays the scriptures, for in actual fact that is not what the scriptures even say.

There is no mention of gender whatsoever. The word **Adamoi** in Hebrew means “earth-creature” (from the soil) and it is from an earth creature that a rib was taken—a genderless earth creature. Gender was formed at the same time in Genesis 3. And in Genesis chapter 1, both men and women are born in the image of God, therefore God embodies and transcends gender—all gender. The sexist stereotyped memory of the Eve and Adam story goes something like this: Eve fell for the snake first. Then Eve obviously tempted Adam sexually to fall for the same mistake the snake made her make. That is how the “first sin” became falsely associated with sex. This mis-interpretation turns the man into the victim and the woman into a cunning serpent like creature – almost an incarnation of the snake or evil.

From that moment of blame, women have taken the blame for just about everything including rape today. Take barrenness--when women in the bible were barren, you know what men could do? They could have intercourse with their servants. They believed that the problem of barrenness was purely the women’s making. If we can’t have a child, what is the problem? The woman is the problem. Men were never interrogated about this. Please notice as well, notice what a man’s semen is called— seed. What do you do with a seed? You plant it in the ground. So it was thought: woman is soil. Women are nothing but the ground. You walk over ground and you plant in it. It is the seed that contains the entirety of life, so men in their seed contain the entirety of life....they were ignorant of a women’s ovary containing eggs as a necessary ingredient for life.

Not to mention the menstrual cycle. When a woman bleeds you are still not allowed to talk about that. Just the other day Time magazine reported on it as their cover story and it caused a stir. We are in the year 2016 and we cannot talk about a natural process of women bleeding. Something that is profoundly beautiful and necessary for life. If women bleed they are not allowed to come to Holy Communion in some Churches even to this day. Donald Trump makes derogatory comments about it like many men who undermine a woman’s emotions but consigning their significance to “that time of the month”.

Women in scripture were considered the possessions of their fathers or husbands and if they got divorced or widowed, they became nothing because the primary question became not *who* are you, but *whose* are you? If you no longer have a husband or a father, you were considered worthless.

We have mentioned the nameless women. Most of the women in scripture are nameless, unrecognized, not important enough to have a name. The church fathers in interpreting the scriptures also said some terrible things. John Calvin said, “Women are created inferior.” Martin Luther said, “If women get tired and die of bearing children. There is no harm in that, let them die as long as they bear children.”

These are the fathers that have shaped the doctrines of the church. David raped Bathsheba but he did not fall. There was never a hash tag, David must fall, like so many other men in power. The New Testament tells us, wives must submit to husbands. Husbands must lead. Husbands are the head of the household. Women keep quiet. Therefore some reason women can’t be a pastor or priest and so the exclusion and the less than and the second class status is reaffirmed over and over and over. Not to mention the male pronouns used for God in the English language (unlike the Hebrew). Linguistically teaching us that if God is male, then male is God. The message is clear, women better worship men.

Then there is Mary. Mary we know, must have been a virgin. Men want women to be pure. We want to have sex with women, but we don’t want those women to be the mother of our children. The ideal is therefore a virgin, and that a good woman is not meant to be sexual? We could go on and on and on. Especially down in this part of the world. The worst swear words that you can possibly imagine are all body-parts of a woman. I dare you to try and draw up a list of swear words, those which demean men and those which demean women and your list is going to be ten to one against women.

Can you see that this narrative has influenced society—a culture—it has contributed to fostering a patriarchal society that makes women second class citizens. Some of you here couldn't open your own bank account because you needed your husband's signature. Some of you couldn't even own property for it had to be in the name of a man. Patriarchy has influenced the law—the economy, education—forming what we call our culture. People will say, “this is part of our culture” but where does culture come from? It comes from multitudes of narratives sewn together overtime more often than not determined by the powerful who have vested interests in remaining powerful.

Let me end by just highlighting a few alternatives in the scriptures. By and large the scriptures are a patriarchal book. We need not pretend otherwise. But there are wonderful counter narratives running through scriptures that we need to highlight in order to challenge the patriarchy of our times as they challenged the patriarchy way back when.

Scripture says both men and women are born in the image of God...therefore we are completely and utterly equal. That gets rid of all roles. There is no such thing as a man's role and a women's role. We are all free to discover and honour our humanity as our integrity and the integrity of our relationships calls.

Think of the midwives that saved Moses, think of Moses' mother, think of Pharaoh's daughter who went against her despotic father. Think of Rahab, think of Mary who sang her song about bringing down the powerful and lifting up the lowly. She is basically the one who taught Jesus everything he ever knew. Jesus' entire ministry was based on Mary's song.

Think of Jesus' encounter with a bleeding women. He met her and he didn't cast her aside. He welcomed her touch. In fact, he treated the bleeding women ahead of Jairus the male religious leader. Jesus prioritised her pain over his privilege and power. Think of the Samaritan woman by the well, again there are layers of intersection power, a Samaritan, a woman, an outcast. Jesus pierces through them all. We think of the shepherd that loses the sheep, and the Father who misses his son. We easily associate the Shepherd and the Father with God, but what about the woman who lost her coin? In the parable, she plays the exact role, the one that is searching for the lost, but we often fail to make the connection of her being an incarnation of God. And don't forget the women are the last standing by the cross and the first to awake to the resurrection.

Please, we have a pandemic on our hands in this country. We need to work for the day that every woman can walk down any street at anytime without fear. Nothing less than that will be enough.

If we are going to celebrate Mother's Day, let's confess and deal with the sexism and the patriarchy within our world. That we come across all day long. Men in particular, we need to be educated. As someone who has grown up in a patriarchal society, I am not immune to patriarchal ways of thinking and doing. I must confess that I am sexist despite my desire not to be and much of the time I don't even know it. We must also confess that the Christian religion and our scriptures have contributed to patriarchy in the world and unless we learn to re-read them they will continue to do so. As men we have work to do. We need to be healed of the patriarchal beliefs that continue to legitimise our treatment of women as anything less than equal. As men we have work to do.

Amen

Audio recording of this sermon can be found at: [www.cmm.org.za/sunday-sermon/](http://www.cmm.org.za/sunday-sermon/)

KPMG report Too costly to ignore Violence against woman in SA:

<https://womendemanddignity.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/too-costly-to-ignore-violence-against-women-in-sa-report-by-kpmg-2014.pdf>

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