

Christ the King – Nov 24 2013

Jer 23:1-6; Luke 23:33-43 – White Ribbon Day

Intro: Today is a special day, and one to which our passages about men abusing their positions of power in contrast to King Jesus, speak very powerfully. Today is White Ribbon Sunday, which is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and launches us into a fortnight of international activities to address this scourge on our world, culminating in International Human Rights Day on 10th December. In Norfolk we have one week, starting at The Forum tomorrow where “Norfolk Says No” to domestic abuse, and this year focuses especially on the effect of domestic abuse on the children involved. Today we’re going to consider what we have to learn.

The Passages: The shepherds of Jeremiah’s day were the national leaders – those who had power and influence in the nation, and God was sick. This is one of the strongest warnings in the whole of Scripture. People in places of power, whose job it was to look after the vulnerable, the lowly, the powerless, the young – these people were neglecting their duty and making things even worse – destroying and scattering the flock.

There’s a moment when Popeye says “I’ve had all I can take, and I can’t take no more” – and then out comes the spinach, the bad guys are in trouble, and Olive Oyl is rescued. Here is God having one of those Popeye moments. “You shepherds are in trouble now, and I’m going to raise up shepherds who will do the job properly, and look after the vulnerable, the lowly, the powerless, the young.” Of course, Jesus is the ultimate fulfilment of this coming of God to the rescue – but can you hear the call to us here and now? God wants to raise us up to be those who will look out for the abused, the suffering, the betrayed, the vulnerable, and especially those who have suffered at the hands of those abusing their positions of power – an nowhere is this more pertinent than when this happens in the home.

King Jesus doesn’t abuse His power, by lauding it over others, by coercing, manipulating and seeking to control others. Even when people turn against Him, and He is undergoing the passion and ordeal of the crucifixion – Jesus embraces the suffering for the sake of the glory set before Him. Quite simply, this is how much God loves us. The Jews wrote their mocking sign calling him “King of the Jews” – but they had no idea how true the words were. We are called to receive the power of Jesus to be life changers in our own spheres of influence, no matter what the cost. Will we rise to this?

Our Situation: In our world, there are so many people who chase after power, and are quick to fight and control. Sometimes they even try to use Christianity to justify their exercise of power. There are those who are very quick to fight, and to raise their fists, rather than follow the example of King Jesus, who really was powerful, but didn’t assert his power in violence or disrespect. There are those who seek to control and manipulate, rather than follow the example of King Jesus, who simply bore witness to the truth and allowed the truth to do its own work, without any manipulation or guile. They are those who will kick you, punch you, spit at you, call you names, put you down, lie to you, rape you, tell you what to wear, wake you repeatedly in the night to deprive you of sleep, smash your things, move your things to make you think you’re going mad, push you down the stairs, deny they are abusing you, call you ugly, shout at you, mock you, tell others lies about you, isolate you, steal your money, choke you, burn you with cigarettes, hurt you in front of your children, hurt your children, stalk you, call you a failure, seduce your friends, keep you in fear, recruit your own family to gang up on you, maim you, tell you that you have no way out, hunt you, tell you that it’s because they love you, believe that they own you and that is not all. This is what domestic violence

can look like, and this is one of the biggest ways we see people failing to follow the model of King Jesus.

- 95% of people who suffer from domestic violence like this are women
- About 15% of men do some of these things to the women and children closest to them.
- 1 in 3 women globally will experience this at some point in their lives, and 1 in 4 in the UK.
- The trend is increasing, with 1 in 3 teenage girls having suffered unwanted sexual acts, and 1 in 4 physical violence.
- In Norfolk, a woman is murdered by a partner every 12 weeks or so.
- More women are killed or maimed through domestic violence than through war, AIDS, cancer and road traffic collisions combined.
- There is an assault on a woman in England and Wales every 6 seconds, all day, every day, 7 days a week.
- Former UN secretary, Kofi Annan said that this is: “The most pervasive human rights violation in the world.”
- Domestic abuse is just as common in church as outside – though people stay longer in abuse and tend to suffer more if they are Christian.

And some people justify this through their Christianity, I kid you not. After all did God not say that “the wife’s desire would be for her husband, and he would rule over her”? Well, yes, God did say that in Genesis 3, as part of the curse, along with pain in childbirth and sweat in work – but that’s no reason not to administer pain relief during childbirth, nor to abandon tractor production! This God, with a heavy heart, foreseeing what would be in a fallen world, not proclaiming what is his perfect will for the natural working of things. But, shouldn’t we expect a wayward wife to have to be brought forcefully into line by the head of the household if she doesn’t do what she’s told and behave how she should? She should submit, that’s what the Bible says. Well, yes, the Bible does say a woman should submit to her husband, right after it says that every Christian should submit to every other Christian, including husbands submitting to wives, and right before telling us that husbands should love their wives as Christ loves the church, self-sacrificially, without demanding, and with respect. And it is not lack of submitting or forgiveness to report him to the police for treating you like he owns you.

What Can We Do? There is plenty we can do make a difference with all of this, and we each have a role. We can pray; we can provide a listening ear and a supportive environment for women (or men) experiencing abuse; we can speak up against any teaching in the church that demeans women; we can help to guide and protect our young people as they explore relationships and may easily fall into damaging behaviours; we can give to support local refuges and other services, like Leeways, or Restored; we can educate ourselves by reading up on this, so we are armed in conversation; we can reflect upon and challenge our own attitudes and behaviours; we can adopt the Restored Charter at our PCC and pin it on the notice board; we can “Like” or “Tweet” or “Pin” www.breaking-the-silence.co.uk!

This year, the organisations involved in this are focusing on the way in which children and young people are impacted by this, often used as pawns in a vicious game that so-called “grown-ups” play. Let’s get involved in what is going on in Norwich this week, and look out for those who may be suffering in silence. Let’s stand up and speak out. For evil to prosper, it just takes good men to do nothing. King Jesus shows us how to use power responsibly, and it is up to us to use whatever power and influence we find ourselves with to help end the suffering of those who are less powerful and less influential – perhaps most especially the young. Go to the website to find out more about how you can make a difference.