

Ekklesia

October 11, 2018



David Gilbert catches tell tale signs that Fall is on its way.

Sunday Worship

What do the Prophet Isaiah and the New Testament message of James have in common with today's New Atheists and Nones? The New Atheists wrote several best-selling books on the heels of 9/11 declaring that the religious radicals who hijacked and flew airliners into the World Trade Center twin towers in New York City represent the evil of religion in this world; *religion is the problem*. Nones are the surging number of young adults who answer the polls on religion with "none." Pew Research center has found the one-third of Millennials, born 1981-96, are nones. Although they vary in their belief in a higher power or God, they agree with New Atheists that *religion is the problem*.

I suspect that the New Atheists and the Nones would be surprised to learn that clear messages in the Bible agree with much of their criticism that *religion is the problem*. The opening words of Isaiah present a scathing message from God, "I have had enough of burnt offerings," "I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity." "Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen." James is a bit less direct but equally inflamed: "If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues, their religion is worthless."

There is one other point of agreement in Isaiah and James. True religion is focused on social need. Isaiah wrote, "defend the orphan, plead for the widow." James concurred: "care for orphans and widows in their distress." We can do without a lot of the religion plaguing our world, but we cannot live here without the justice that reflects the heart of God—Larry. Text: Isaiah 1:11-17; James 1:26-2:8

Prayer Concerns

Available to members.

Wednesday Dinner: Covered Dish

Next week's Wednesday dinner will be covered dish. We will have Creamy Baked Chicken casserole and rice ready for everyone. Please bring something to help finish out the meal.

Congregational Meeting Report

In our Congregational Meeting last night, we agreed on June 30, 2019, as the prospective date for ending our church, contingent upon progress toward selling the building, a change in the status of any of our 3 ministers, or attendance dwindling to the point it becomes difficult to maintain services. As we have said before, the ministers and the Leadership Council will make every effort in the coming months to keep the congregation informed and to allow for as much time as needed to provide for an orderly and meaningful conclusion.

Table of Grace

We served our October Table of Grace meal last night (Thursday). We served around 90 plates of barbequed pork, potato salad, baked beans and dessert. Thank you to all of those who prepared the desserts and who gave their evening to assisting in this important ministry.

No Meal or Service on October 31

We agreed in Congregational Meeting last night not to have a meal, service or choir in Halloween, October 31

LUAPA Food Fair

LUAPA invites their Grace Covenant friends to a food fair in Fellowship Hall on Sunday, October 28 at 3:30 PM. You are welcome to come and taste some wonderful food while at the same time giving support to the congregation and their caring support of their members.

YWCA Ribbon Cutting

After a long wait, Oak Ridge is delighted to celebrate the ribbon cutting at the newly renovated and re-opening of the YWCA, 1660 Oak Ridge Tnpk. The celebration will be Monday, October 29, 4:30 – 7 p.m. with the program beginning at 4:30 sharp. Come and meet the new staff and learn more about the YWCA's work in Oak Ridge and Anderson County.

Services for NHC

For most of our time together, Grace Covenant has joined with the Unitarian Universalist Church in doing Sunday services at the National Healthcare Center for the month of November. Our two Sundays this year will be Sunday, November 4 and 11. We will need volunteers to play the piano and direct the hymns as well as several people to assist residents in getting to and from their rooms to the service. If you can help in any of these capacities, please contact the Dipboyes.

Covenant Sunday

We will celebrate Covenant Sunday on November 11 this year. Please mark your calendars so that you can join us as we reaffirm our covenant and share a fellowship meal immediately following the morning service.

Calendar

Weekly GCC Calendar

Sun: 10:30a—Fellowship	11:00a—Worship	1:30p—LUAPA
Wed: 5:00 p.m.—Thoughts and Prayers	6:00 p.m.—Dinner	7:00 p.m.—Grace Chorale
<i>Sundays Iglesia Apostolica worship service (1:30 p.m.) Thursday evenings/Saturday—Iglesia Apolsolica service & music practice</i>		
October 28	LUAPA Food Fair (Fellowship Hall, 3:30 p.m.)	
October 31	No meal, service or choir practice	
November 4 & 11	Services at NHC (9 a.m.)	
November 11	Covenant Sunday	
November 5	Community Forum on Alternatives to the Death Penalty (11 a.m., Fellowship Hall)	
November 8	Table of Grace	



Finding Voice

Sermon

Genesis 1:26-31; I Corinthians 14:33-35; I Timothy 2:8-15; Gal. 3:26-28

October 7, 2018

carolyn dipboye

These last couple of weeks, we've been on something of a roller coaster. Thursday a week ago, many of us were glued to our television sets, hanging onto the testimony and then counter-testimony unfolding before our entire country. As this past week proceeded, we marveled at the spectacle of a nation severely divided. Some dismissed the charges brought forward as totally beyond belief. The woman speaking them was belittled as lying or, to put it more kindly (perhaps), merely "mixed up." She and her anguished testimony were roughly put aside as representing nothing more than a political attack waged by the minority political party against the current administration and the majority party in Congress. The rage manifest by those seeking to tear down the testimony and the woman bearing it was matched, on the other hand, by those infuriated by the refusal to take the testimony and the woman's credibility

seriously. As the situation unfolded, the #MeToo movement that came into view about this time last year was joined by a second movement—the #WeBelieveYou movement—as people stepped forward in support of women who have found themselves repudiated and alone in their search for justice. A third movement unfolded as individuals who had experienced sexual harassment and abuse took to the air ways and social media to explain #WhyIDidn'tReport, observing that victims of harassment and assault often do not speak up out of fear of humiliating rejection and disbelief.

This week, one of my favorite publications entered the fray, seeking to provide counsel and resources to churches and their ministers. Christian Century's editors collaborated in an opinion piece, "The Power of Christine Blasey Ford's Testimony," applauding Ford's courage. Noting that Ford's testimony emboldened other women to speak about their own experience, the editors noted a reported 338 percent increase in calls to the National Sexual Assault Hotline in the 72 hours following the televised hearing. In a country where every 98 seconds an American is sexually assaulted, nothing short of a "transformation of cultural norms and expectations regarding gender, power, and privilege," the editors concluded, is acceptable. "Engaging in that work is everyone's civic duty."

We are, to put it bluntly, at a moment of crisis in our nation; and as is the case with most crises, we can determine together whether it devolves into chaos or opens into a moment of opportunity. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in five women and one in 71 men in the United States will be raped at some point in their lives, and the incidence of other forms of sexual violence is even higher. Children are particularly vulnerable, as are LGBT people, Native Americans, people who are incarcerated, and students on college campuses (where more than 90 percent of sexual assaults go unreported). In a recent survey of pastors, 90 percent acknowledged they have dealt with sexual assault in their work as ministers. The problem, you see, is not just "out there" afflicting the lives of those other people, it threatens our communities, our loved ones, our children. It is appropriate—no, *stronger*—it is *mandatory* that we as the humane and open society we like to deem ourselves to be face it and deal with it now and effectively. And more, it is appropriate and in view of the God of compassion, also mandatory that we as the church address it and address it effectively. Where, we must ask ourselves, has the church contributed to the problem, and what must we do to fix it?

The Bible reflects a conflicted view of women. Noting the number of high profile evangelical organizations and individuals pushing for a quick dismissal of Dr. Blasey Ford's charges, an article distributed by Sojourners remarks upon the readiness of some in the evangelical community to "stand by a man who would serve their conservative interests rather than seeking the truth" [*Sojourners*, September 24, 2018]. "I should not have been surprised," author Nancy Hightower, molested at the age of 5, acknowledged. "Blaming the women for a man's sin is as old as the Bible." She went on to recount the story of Jacob's son/Abraham's great-grandson, Judah, and his sons' abuse of Tamar in Genesis 38.

More than a single instance, ancient biblical stories recount a number of occasions depicting the unconscionable abuse of women, including, for example, the story of Abraham traveling through Egypt and claiming that his wife Sarah is his sister in an effort to safeguard his own life against any that might desire her. Lot, Abraham's nephew in Sodom, offers his daughters to raging, wicked townspeople seeking "to know" his heavenly guests. In a similar story, a man throws his concubine out to raging townspeople, who rape and murder her and throw her body on the man's threshold. The man, seeking to establish the justice of his cause, then cuts the woman's body up and presents it back to his neighbors.

John Shelby Spong's *The Sins of Scripture: Exposing the Bible's Texts of Hate to Reveal the God of Love* puts the writings of the Bible in context. Citing "the all but universal quality among human beings of a pro-male, anti-female bias," he notes Plato depicting Socrates in *The Republic* questioning whether there is "anything at all practiced among mankind in which the male sex is not far better than the female?" Ancient Hindu texts bar women from being competent students of the Vedas and put women under the lifelong control of fathers, husbands and sons. In Buddhism, one was considered to have been born a woman because of one's bad karma in a previous existence. A book of Jewish prayers included a prayer thanking God that one had not been born a woman, and the Talmud proclaimed, "It would be better to burn the words of Torah than to entrust them to a woman." The Qur'an pronounced woman to be "half a man" and as "inherently weaker in rational judgment" [p. 72].

The writings attributed to the Apostle Paul are often blamed for the negative view of women in the church. Reflecting the second story of the creation of human beings in chapter two where male and female are created separately rather than at the same time as depicted in chapter one, I Timothy and I Corinthians, both read this morning, insisted that women should be silent in church, I Corinthians going on to say that if women had questions, they should ask their husbands at home. (Chapter 11, on the other hand, had instructed women to cover their heads when speaking in church). Founded squarely upon the continuation of the second story of creation in chapter three depicting the Fall, the word of a woman is not to be trusted because she was created second *and* deceived by the serpent.

The silencing of women and failure to take their word seriously reflects Paul—but not the *whole* Paul. Focusing solely on Paul's purple passages, obscures the extent to which he also reflects a positive view of women. The book of Acts relates stories of his working appreciatively with women colleagues in planting churches—Priscilla, Lydia, and Chloe; and his letters are filled with words of appreciation and greeting to numerous women. His words come to their apex in his letter to the Galatians. Seeking to breakdown walls between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, the economically disadvantaged and the economically advantage, he utilizes the wording of the first story of creation: "There is no longer *male and female*; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." The divisions between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female remained in the social reality of the day. It took the work of centuries yet to come to remove stigmas and barriers that remained. But "in Christ" and "in baptism," those stigmas, those biases had no grounding at all.

In Christ, we are compelled to enable the voices of those who have been victimized by sexual violence. In our practices in the church and in our lives in broader society, we do not, as we have said before, doggedly seek to live by everything in scripture. There are those beliefs, practices, and attitudes that belong to a different age. Take, for example, I Timothy's prohibitions of women not braiding their hair or wearing gold, pearls, or expensive clothes. We seek rather to search for the high points in scripture, those that are timeless, those whose truth calls us to higher responsibility. We do not seek to duplicate all of the social realities cited in scripture. We seek rather to find the trajectories of change toward which scripture points. Slavery, unfortunately, remained a part of society's and the church's life for centuries, despite Paul's words. Similarly, the distrust of women and the dismissal of women's words remain a part of our heritage from the ages that went before us. If we are faithful to the God we have encountered in Christ, however, we are called to a higher standard; and we are called to the work of reshaping church and society to protect those made vulnerable by our abdicating to biases that afflict us still.

In 1997, Tarana Burke founded Just Be Inc, a nonprofit focused on helping young girls who have been victims of sexual harassment and assault. Along with Just Be's advocacy for survivors of sexual violence, Ms. Burke focused on using arts and culture to change not just the way we talk about sexual harassment and assault, but also the message we give young women in America about romantic relationships, the objectification of women, and media portrayal of black and brown girls. In 2006, she founded the Me Too movement, focusing on the lack of resources for survivors of sexual violence and seeking to build a community of advocates. In 12 years, the organization has built a community of survivors and paid particular attention to helping young women of color heal. On October 15 of last year, the actress Alyssa Milano asked her followers to share their own experiences of sexual harassment and abuse using the hashtag #MeToo. Within days, the movement, along with Ms. Burke's decades of work, went viral.

Despite the lack of coverage Burke's faith has gotten, the influence of her faith on her advocacy has been crucial. "Christianity," she says, "has been co-opted by people who have a political agenda, and have a very particular narrative that is steeped in racism, and classism, and sexism, and all of these other forms of oppression" She, on the other hand seeks to be "the kind of Christian that recognizes who Jesus was — and Jesus was the first activist that I knew, and the first organizer that I knew, and the first example of how to be in service to people" [#MeToo Founder Tarana Burke: 'Jesus Was The First Activist That I Knew' (by Olga M. Segura) 9-24-2018].

In the midst of all the contention this past week, the Nobel Prize Committee recognized two other advocates for women. Dr. Denis Mukwege, a surgeon, Director of Panzi Hospital and President of the Panzi Foundation, is also a pastor and an activist in the Democratic Republic of Congo where he treats victims of sexual violence and seeks to bring international pressure upon the Congo to end the conflict. Nadi Murad, who at 19 was kidnaped, sold, and endlessly raped by ISIS, travels the world at the age of 23, seeking international support and condemnation of the genocide being inflicted upon the Yezidi people and demanding the release of more than 3,000 women still held in bondage.

These and others are working tirelessly in our world to become a voice for those who otherwise have no voice. Some are compelled by faith and others by the simple demands of justice. We who recognize the oneness of all God's beloved children can do no less. Knowing ourselves compelled to speak on behalf of victims of sexual violence and seeking to enable them to speak in their own voice, we do not have the choice of turning a deaf ear or demeaning those who speak.

Ekklesia

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