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Trinity by the Sea (Kihei, HI)
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20th Sunday After Pentecost

Job 1:1; 2:1-10
Psalm 26
Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12
Mark 10:2-16

Well. I think I've heard enough. You don't have the readings printed out for you so let me read again what we heard from the Book of Job:

“Then his wife said to him, ‘Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die.’ But he said to her, ‘You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips.”

Um, no. In my book, saying to one's spouse, no matter the gender, “You speak as any foolish woman [or man] would speak” is in fact “sinning with one's lips.”

We know you were having an epically bad day, Job. A day so bad we'll all still be talking about it thousands of years later. But don't take it out on your spouse. And if you do, apologize.

Maybe in another era, another time in our country's history, these words wouldn't stand out so glaringly. But today they do.

It has been a tumultuous few weeks in this country, and for many, an acutely painful time. A friend of mine is a psychologist and she has had more calls to her office this past week than during any other week since she started practicing fifteen years ago. Victims of assault and abuse, ready to tell their story, needing to tell their story. It is as if these events are forcing it out of people, even when it causes great anguish. The curtain is being pulled back, revealing that assault and abuse are an epidemic. Not isolated events, not a problem only within the hallowed halls of the Roman Catholic Church or the beer-stained walls of frat houses and college dorms, but everywhere. In homes, on dates, on Boy

Scout camping trips, in schools, in jail, on airplanes, in bars, and on streets. It happens mostly to women, but there are plenty of male victims, too.

These past two weeks assault has been rudely politicized, but make no mistake about it: sexual assault is not a political issue. For victims, it is a deeply personal issue, one that often haunts their lives forever. It's a social issue, expressive of a gross abuse of power, which we must work to change.

Now, devout churchgoers like yourselves may be asking where Jesus is in this whole unfolding. It's a good and necessary question — maybe even an urgent one. When turbulence is happening within us and around us, we naturally want the comfort Jesus provides, his perspective, his wisdom. His presence.

This morning's gospel fittingly offers us a few clues as to where we can look for Jesus today. In this scene from Mark's gospel, Jesus is challenged with a question regarding another related power dynamic, that of divorce laws in 1st century Judea. Here we find Jesus being tested by some Pharisees who are trying to trap Jesus by asking him a question for which there is no good answer. "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" It was a controversial issue of the day, and they are hoping Jesus says the wrong thing and offends someone with his answer.

Divorce was relatively commonplace back then, as it is now, but with one major difference: in Jesus' day, it offered women no safety net. The certificate of divorce terminated women's rights, including the right to own property. There was no alimony. There was no legal recourse for her at all. Far more often than not, divorce was an arrangement that privileged the husband. If a man wanted to divorce his wife to marry someone else, he could do so with little consequence. His wife would bear the burden of his decision. Hebrew women were not allowed to divorce their husbands, but could be divorced for anything from burning the dinner to adultery. Palestinian Hebrew women were among the

poorest in the world in Jesus' day, and to be cast out from the patriarchal household was disastrous. In this context, Jesus' response to his challengers is exceptionally *protective of women*.

So when Jesus quotes from the Book of Genesis, telling them that when they married they became one flesh, he is not casting judgment on divorced people. He is reminding them that the Kingdom of God has an entirely different way of doing things and seeing things, and reminding the husbands of his day that their duty and responsibility to their wives is forever. Why? Their patriarchal culture gives them power over their wives and the laws allow them to dispense with their wives with ease; Jesus is drawing a distinction between what the law allows and the right thing to do, the good thing to do. If something is lawful, that does not make it right. These are human laws, made by the humans who have the power, often to preserve that power at the expense of the powerless.

In God's Kingdom, the power shifts. The vulnerable — the women, the orphans, the children — are given preferential treatment. The abused and assaulted are given preferential treatment. Jesus NEVER stood with the arrogant proud and those who abuse their power. Not once. That's why those very people condemned him to death. He didn't flatter them with false deference. He didn't apologize for himself. He didn't stop healing the sick simply because it made them uncomfortable. And because they couldn't control him, they got rid of him.

It is not a coincidence that this scene ends with a reference to the children. Always, Jesus knew that the young ones are the most vulnerable in our midst. Children, the orphan, the widow, the refugee, the immigrant, the prostitute, the outcast, the sick: This is where Jesus goes. This is where we look for Jesus today. And this is where we find Him.

Take comfort in this: two millennia ago, on Good Friday, as the clouds rolled in and the world went dark, the state exercised its greatest power.

It executed someone. And not just anyone, but God's very Son. To preserve its own power, it eliminated what it perceived to be a threat.

But that only set Jesus loose. The Spirit of God is not so easily extinguished. The Spirit is far more resilient and powerful than that. The Risen Jesus is more available to us now than he was walking around 1st century Judea some 2000 years ago. The political and religious authorities thought they were defeating Jesus, but they were setting him loose.

This week as one brave woman stood in front of the powerful in Washington, fearing her voice would be ignored, crisis call centers saw an increase of more than 200% in their usual call rate. Watching Christine Blasey Ford telling her story gave thousands of others the courage to tell theirs.

This week, despite the maneuverings of the powerful, women's voices were not defeated. They were set loose.

Our Gospel this morning teaches us that what is lawful is not necessarily what is good or right. It is not necessarily of the Kingdom. If you are looking for Jesus, you will find Him in the good, in the truth, in the vulnerable. In *your* truth, in *your* vulnerability, in *your* goodness. And in that of the person who sits to your left and to your right.

We live in an imperfect world. But we also live in the Kingdom of God. Make that your home. Let it set you free. And from there, tell someone in this imperfect world your story. You can tell me. And if you are one of the lucky ones who have no story to tell, I bid you: be kind. Be tender-hearted. Be brave. You too have a role in this historic moment.

Let us pray for our nation, its leaders, and all those who have been hurt by them. Let us continue to show up in this beautiful house of prayer and continue our work for compassion, justice, and peace in our time.

Amen.