

“What Would Jesus Say to #Me Too, #Church Too?”

Sermon Scripture: Luke 7:36-39, 44

Family Activity for the Week: Psalm 37:30 says, “The mouths of the righteous recite wisdom; their tongues discuss justice.” Invite each family member to share a time when they experienced someone being bullied or hurt. Ask each person how they felt and how they responded. Discuss if they felt they did what was wise and just in God’s eyes or if they wish they had said or done something differently. Role play ways to respond to these situations with God’s wisdom and justice. For example, practice what you might say or do when someone is being left out at school. (Include the person at lunch and on the playground.) When others say mean things about someone, how can you respond? (Speak up for the bullied person.) If someone tells you they are being hurt, what should you do? (Believe them, be their friend and tell a safe grown-up.) Pray and ask God to help you speak words of wisdom and justice!

Monday, May 27 – Read Matthew 19:3-8, Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-23. Jesus’ enemies quoted Bible to him, saying Deuteronomy 24:1 allowed divorce (only for men) for any reason. Jesus said, in effect, that law reflected human frailty, and the Creation stories showed God’s ideal more clearly. Even emerging from a strongly patriarchal culture, the poetically structured words of Genesis 1:27 made it clear that God created both male and female “in the divine image.”

- Some rabbis in Jesus’ day “graphically claimed that a husband could divorce his wife even for burning the bread; a later...rabbi added, ‘or if he finds someone more beautiful.’” Deuteronomy 24:1, they argued, said “something inappropriate” gave a man that right. But Jesus firmly said the creation stories were also in the Bible, and taught a higher, more loving ideal. When have you seen snippets of Scripture used, as the Pharisees did, in ways that hurt or limit people, especially women?
- Some have used Genesis 2:20’s word rendered “helper” (“helpmeet” in older versions) to say God made women subservient to men. Pastor Stuart Briscoe wrote, “The word ‘helper’ occurs twenty-one times in the Old Testament and on fifteen of those occasions it refers to God helping man in one way or another—which casts doubt on the common suggestion that woman as man’s helper was in some way subordinate and inferior.” What norms did your upbringing teach you about how men and women relate?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you stressed the parts of the Bible that elevated human dignity, not those that seemed to diminish it. Guide me to value all your children, female and male, as bearers of the divine image. Amen.*

Tuesday, May 28 – Read John 4:5-26. We often see this story about a woman who had “had five husbands” described as meaning that she was immoral or unfaithful. However, there are no records of a woman in Jesus’ day being the one to initiate divorce. More likely, she had been rejected 5 times. Her current arrangement was probably not about casual sex. If a man wanted a woman of lower class, he could bring her into his pre-existing marriage as a concubine or second wife; this was very possibly her only means of survival.

- John 4:27 said Jesus’ disciples were “shocked” to see him talking to this woman. They might have understood him lecturing her about her racial or moral inferiority. But he was offering her “living water,” and telling her that he was the Messiah everyone longed for. In short, he was treating her like any other human being he cared about and came to save. How can Jesus’ example upgrade the way we treat and relate to any “Samaritan women” we encounter?
- The woman tried to keep the conversation abstract and impersonal, especially in verse 20. But Jesus wouldn’t take the bait—he kept aiming for her heart, and eventually reached it. Are there issues or questions that at times help you keep God “at a distance,” an interesting subject for study and discussion rather than a life-changing Savior and Lord?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, teach me anew this week to recognize and value your image in myself, and in all the people, male and female, happy and hurting, who cross my path. Amen.*

Wednesday, May 29 – Read Matthew 15:21-28. The regions of Tyre and Sidon were Gentile territory North of Israel, not Jewish. As in Samaria, the disciples were no doubt nervous, wondering “What are we doing here?” It appears that Jesus went there, at least in part, to teach them a lesson. His seemingly rude answers to the woman in need were like parodies of the disciples’ biased attitude. But the woman cleverly pressed her case, and Jesus honored her faith.

- Written words can’t show tone of voice or expression. If verses 24 and 26 showed Jesus’ true feelings about this desperate mother, his action and words in verse 28 don’t make sense. Might we understand the story better if we imagine Jesus with an ironic edge to his voice, and a bit of a twinkle in his eye? Clearly, in the end, Jesus chose to honor the mother’s plea. How did his behavior seek to change the disciples’ outlook from verse 23?

- Matthew's gospel seems to have spoken particularly to Christians of Jewish background, some of whom struggled to accept Gentiles in the church (see Acts 15). How would this story have spoken to the ethnic, cultural and gender divisions the early church faced? How does it speak to divisions today, including between those who wish to silence and "send away" women who've faced abuse and those who demand we take them seriously?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you weren't about to let national or gender prejudice keep you from responding to this mother's heartfelt plea. Give me a willingness to do all I can to respond to pleas for help, even from beyond my comfort zone. Amen.*

Thursday, May 30 – Read Luke 7:36-50. Luke said the uninvited woman at Simon the Pharisee's home was "a sinner." Women in that day had few options. "Sinner" almost always meant a prostitute. The Pharisee Simon saw only a fallen woman, but Jesus said he'd forgiven her "many sins." In Jesus' eyes, Simon, a man who felt no need for forgiveness, was in much greater spiritual danger than the woman grateful for forgiveness.

- In verse 44, Jesus asked Simon a telling question: "Do you see this woman?" Simon only saw sin, but Jesus saw the woman and her lavish display of humility, nurture, generosity and love. He saw a beloved child of God, cause for a party in heaven (see Luke 15). How did Jesus' pointed contrast in verses 41-47 show the spiritual hollowness of Simon's pious front, fed in part by his patriarchal assumptions of male superiority?
- Jesus was famous (or, in some circles, infamous) for forgiving. He gave this woman the priceless gift of freedom from guilt, which also gave her freedom from feelings of shame before others. If not, she would not have been able to be so socially bold in expressing her gratitude and love to Jesus. Have you ever felt "ashamed to show your face" for any reason? How can opening your life to God's love and forgiveness set you free to live more fully?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, Simon didn't see the woman, just the "sinner." But you saw her, and you valued and forgave her. Heal my inner sight from any self-righteous blindness that hides any of your beloved daughters from my sight. Amen.*

Friday, May 31 - Read John 8:2-11. John made it clear that this ugly scene didn't happen by chance. The woman seems to have been exploited by Jesus' enemies to put him on the spot. The circle of male "prosecutors" demanded punishment only for the woman. Her missing partner (she couldn't commit adultery alone) was probably working with the accusers. The woman was likely a prostitute they hired, which made it easier to catch her in the act.

- Scholar Jaime Clark-Soles wrote, "Jesus skewers the 'good old boys' network where 'Boys will be boys' while women must remain pure....[he] raises the woman to equality with the judgmental religious authorities and invites all of them to leave their various sins (one being no better or worse than another) and embrace abundant life." What helps you to accept Jesus' idea that none of our sins are better or worse? Jesus invites you to embrace abundant life. Do you, or will you?
- Jesus told the circle of self-righteous men, in effect, "To condemn others, you need to be sinless. If that's you, cast the first stone." By Jesus' standard, do you qualify to "throw stones" at anyone else? Does anyone? What steps can you take in your home, your office, your school, or your church to make stone-throwing a thing of the past?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me remember clearly how much it hurts when someone else throws stones at me. Help me learn from Jesus' merciful example, and every day grow more like him. Amen.*

Saturday, June 1 – Read Luke 10:38-42. In Jesus' day, most rabbis thought women couldn't learn, and were not worth teaching. But Jesus matter-of-factly taught Mary. Dorothy Sayers, a devoted follower of Jesus, was the first woman to receive a degree from Oxford (with highest honors). She said Jesus was, "a prophet and teacher who never nagged at [women]; never flattered or coaxed or patronized; who never made arch jokes about them; who never treated them either as 'The women, God help us!' or 'The ladies, God bless them!'; who rebuked without [demeaning] and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no axe to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend."

- In the New Testament, to "sit at someone's feet" meant becoming that person's disciple. In this story, Martha did what the culture valued in women: cleaned the house and cooked the food. Mary did what the culture valued in men, became a disciple. Jesus did not scold Martha for getting things ready for the meal. He did challenge her notion that it was wrong or improper for Mary to listen. (In John 11:17-27, we see Martha, as well as Mary, as a disciple in dialogue with Jesus.) The story was striking because Jesus treated these women the same way he treated his male disciples. In what ways does our society still need to catch up to Jesus' ideal? How does Jesus' example either affirm or challenge any of your personal attitudes and actions?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, in our "enlightened" times, we still too often hear jokes about "woman drivers" and similar topics. Guide me as I discern and live beyond any gender stereotypes that my heart still harbors. Amen.*