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HOW JESUS COMMUNICATES #METOO

A PERSPECTIVE ON INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND HEALING IN THE ATONEMENT

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Abstract

This article offers a practical theological praxis of how the church may participate in Christ’s atoning ministry of healing towards persons who have experienced sexual violence. Drawing from the theory of intergenerational trauma, it uses the mentioning of “the wife of Uriah” in Matthew’s genealogy to convey how Jesus identifies with survivors of sexual violence. The article then focuses on the hypostatic union to establish how Jesus provides ontological healing in the atonement for said survivors. It concludes by demonstrating how Matthew’s Gospel calls radical disciples to a healing praxis of listening to stories of the disenfranchised, thereby pointing towards Christ’s atoning work of bearing and healing humanity’s weaknesses.

Introduction

The year was 1983. The family had gathered for the funeral of my grandmother’s youngest sister. When the graveside service was completed,

the family reviewed nearby headstones, but one memorial caught the interest of the only grandchild in attendance. The grave marker was for a baby, a little boy of approximately one year of age. Escorted by the natural curiosity of a child, the granddaughter inquired as to the identity of this infant. “Whose baby is this?” she innocently questioned her grandmother. While accounts vary as to how my grandmother responded, they all agree on one fact: the family’s matriarch identified the baby as being hers.

Pieces of the family secret unfolded concerning the stark reality of this baby’s existence in the aftermath of that visit to a cemetery: my grandmother had been 17; the interloper was a relative, probably an uncle; and he raped her in her family’s own home. While the baby’s identity had been largely unknown within the family system for almost 60 years, he was a member of the family: a son, a grandson, a sibling, and an uncle. Despite the secrecy surrounding him, the undisclosed violence that brought about his birth had carried unacknowledged repercussions within the family.

While most may perceive this event as tragic at best, not a few will view it as an isolated incident in a family, impacting only my grandmother. Some may even assert families are to maintain my grandmother’s silence by refusing to speak of such travesties. After all, the past is the past. However, trauma has far-reaching tendrils that stretch from the past into the present and from the victim to familial members of future generations, even when the trauma is concealed. This is the very nature of trauma: it silently moves to and fro within time, shaping the lives of others. Like a contagion infecting a time traveler, trauma’s repercussions within a family exceed the boundaries of time and the embodied victim.

Yet, it is precisely this apparently unbounded nature that may be used to speak theologically to Christ-followers, especially in the discipline of practical theology. I draw from the repercussions of trauma, specifically sexual assault, to aid in the development of a pathway that leads to how Jesus communicates *#metoo*. By using the psychological lens of trauma, particularly intergenerational trauma, I assert that the understanding of atonement is enlarged so that Jesus is seen to identify with those who have been sexually violated while also challenging Christ-followers in their response. Such an outcome will be accomplished in four movements: (1) by

outlining trauma theory, including the theory of intergenerational trauma; (2) by asserting that sexual violence is included within the genealogy of King Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew; (3) by demonstrating how Christ is the atonement, the healer; and (4) by putting forth characteristics of radical, welcoming disciples who are members of God's kingdom.

Trauma Theory: Repercussions

To begin, I provide a descriptive overview of trauma prior to discussing the transmission of intergenerational trauma. Caruth (1996) defines trauma as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (p. 11). Herman (1997) explains that traumatic events in most cases “involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death” (p. 33). But perhaps Rambo's (2010) description is most helpful as it points to both of the above definitions: “Trauma is often expressed in terms of what exceeds categories of comprehension, of what exceeds the human capacity to take in and process the external world Trauma is described as an encounter with death” (p. 4). As Rambo explains, this is not simply a physical death, but trauma is an event(s) that destroys a person's perceptions regarding the operations of the world and how one is to function within it. This means, as Rambo explains, that what was known in the world has become no longer “true and safe” so that life is no longer described in the basic manner it once was, but instead life becomes “always mixed with death,” involving uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure (p. 4).

Trauma's Reverberations

Trauma's power is not simply isolated to a solitary incident, but it has persistent reverberations in an individual's being. When a woman is sexually assaulted, this traumatic event occurs at a certain place in time so that, in one sense, it becomes a part of history. However, as stated above, the impact of the event is not fully assimilated at the time of its occurrence. The event may have happened suddenly without warning and/or be so

horrific that the victim is unable to comprehend the original event in its full weight and magnitude; therefore, the victim is only able to grasp miniscule fragments of the original event. As Rambo posits, since the traumatic experience is not assimilated in time, it remains “an open wound” so that “a belated awakening” transpires, which causes the event to return (p. 7). As Herman describes, this returning is referred to as repetition compulsion in which the trauma is unconsciously repeated in various ways, such as in nightmares and flashbacks, sleep or eating disturbances, physical ailments, various emotional reactions (e.g., fear, anxiety, or shame) but also through various benign and/or harmful behaviors, such as in abusing others, having unsafe sexual encounters, or cleaning compulsively. Herman comments that the victim may not remember the event, but repeatedly expresses powerful emotions, or she is able to recall every minute of it, but the telling is devoid of feeling. She notes that in such forms of repetition that the victim is unknowingly attempting to relive the event, perhaps to change it, heal from it, master it, or die from it (see Herman, 1997, for a fuller explanation). This may appear when the victim has compulsive organizing proclivities that point toward a desire for some semblance of control since power was stripped from her during the original event. She may attempt to harm herself through risqué behavior in order to punish herself or to substantiate her inherent turpitude, or she may avoid any risks to assure herself of protection. If the assault occurred at night, she may struggle to sleep when it is dark due to the higher risk of harm. Rambo remarks that these types of repetitions are the principal challenges of trauma so that it is the aftermath of the original traumatic event that continues to exist and be explored. In short, the past event is alive in the present.¹

Intergenerational Trauma

With an overall portrayal of trauma theory, I now turn to the transmission of *intergenerational*, or *transgenerational*, *trauma*. Kaitz et al. (2009) define intergenerational transmission of trauma (ITT) as “the shown impact of trauma experienced by one family member on another family member of a younger generation, regardless of whether the younger family member was directly exposed to the traumatic event” (p. 160). In

other words, not only does trauma repeat in an individual but also within a multigenerational family system.

Studies have demonstrated that trauma experienced by the parents impacts the children. For instance, Zerach et al. (2017) conducted a longitudinal study of “123 Israeli father-mother-offspring triads” in which the fathers served in the Yom Kippur War of 1973, and it was found that the post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSS) in children were linked to both the fathers’ and mothers’ PTSS. In the sample, in which 79 fathers were ex-POWs and 44 were veterans who were not formerly POWS, the fathers who were ex-POWS contributed to elevating the mothers’ PTSS; this in turn engendered elevated PTSS in their offspring via direct and indirect paths. In another study by Suozzi and Motta (2004) of 40 Vietnam combat veterans and 53 of their adult children, it was determined that the “intensity of combat exposure influences the expression of secondary symptoms in children of veterans” (p. 32). While the children did not clinically exhibit post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Suozzi and Motta detected a difference between the offspring of those with high combat exposure and of those with low combat exposure 20 to 30 years after their parents’ war experiences.

Other studies reveal that trauma is transmitted to not only the second generation but also to the third. For example, a study by Scharf (2007) of 88 middle-class educated families living in Israel showed differences among the participants that correlated with whether or not both parents, one parent, or no parents were second-generation Holocaust survivors. It was concluded that when both parents were descendants of Holocaust survivors, those of the third generation had the lowest level of “psychosocial functioning” and the most inferior self-perception in comparison to others in the study. In such studies, it is not PTSD that is necessarily transmitted to second and third generations, but it is the psychological and relational effects of the trauma that appear. In other words, that which remains, the echoes, is what is transferred. Studies such as these convey how the echoes of trauma appear in future generations, and these echoes are a pathway that will allow me to assert that Jesus communicates #metoo, to which I specifically turn.

Sexual Violence within Jesus’ Genealogy: Identification

Sexual violence against women has been a silent epidemic in the world, including in the church. According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (2012/2013/2015), approximately one in five women will experience rape or attempted rape at some point in their lives, and one in four girls will be sexually abused prior to their eighteenth birthday. While the church has been slow to admit to its complacency, passivity, and complicity in the matter, twenty-first-century churches are now acknowledging that sexual violence is a prevailing ill in society and also within its own walls, as seen in the formation of such movements as #churchmetoo and #pentecostalsisterstoo. The latter movement is especially significant for pentecostals who have been known to resist a social gospel and to propose a theology of healing in the atonement without a robust theology of suffering. In a desire to contribute to the conversation on sexual violence within the church, I turn towards theology and Scripture as a lens through which to perceive sexual violence within a multigenerational family system. I begin by briefly delineating how I understand sexual violence prior to discussing the Gospel of Matthew’s genealogy.

Definition

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (2010) offers the following definition of sexual violence: “Sexual violence means that someone forces or manipulates someone else into unwanted sexual activity without their consent. Reasons someone might not consent include fear, age, illness, disability, and/or influence of alcohol or other drugs.” The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (2013) notes three characteristics of sexual violence. First, it is unwanted and encompasses words and/or actions. Second, the person may be unaware the words/actions are harmful due to chronological and/or mental age, drug/alcohol influence, and I would include, culture, upbringing, etc. Finally, it may not be illegal, as in the case of sexual harassment or, I would add, as in the case of cultural attitudes. These attitudes emerge when a culture historically ignores various kinds of sexual violence because of its ingrained perceptions, such as “Women are

not human”; “Women are to submit to men”; “Boys will be boys”; or “She really wanted it.” This cultural element is instructive as I reflect on sexual violence and Jesus’ genealogy in Matthew’s Gospel.

The Story of Sexual Violence in Jesus’ Genealogy

Matthew describes Jesus as “Emmanuel,” God with us (*New English Translation*, 1996/2019, Matthew 1:23). As God with us, Jesus, the Eternal One, entered time by becoming a part of a specific multigenerational family system, the royal line of King David. Matthew highlights this point by placing Jesus’ genealogy at the beginning of his Gospel, summoning the reader to regard Jesus and the remainder of this Gospel through this genealogical lens. As is evident in the genealogy, God did not elect a spotless family system in which the Incarnate One was to belong, as if such an undertaking were even possible. Instead, this multigenerational family system is one of dysfunction that includes sexual violence, exposing humanity’s vulnerability. In other words, Eternity enters time by claiming a family as his own with characteristics of lust, immorality, and sexual injustice and demonstrating his own risk, uncertainty, and emotional exposure. For instance, readers who are familiar with King David’s line may recall how David’s beautiful daughter Tamar was raped by his son Amnon, resulting in David’s son Absalom killing Amnon (2 Samuel 13). While this incident is omitted from this genealogy, the sexual improprieties of David’s line are not concealed. Instead, Matthew alludes to King David’s own sexual violation, as if implicitly to say of Jesus: “He took our weaknesses” (*New English Translation*, 1996/2019, Matthew 8:17), including the inclination towards sexual violence and the impact it has upon surviving victims and their generations, such as Tamar.

Matthew’s genealogy revolves around Jesus being a king through David’s royal lineage as it flows through Joseph. My focus is narrowed by the uniqueness of the inclusivity of four women, five if one incorporates Mary, the mother of Jesus. Women were not normally recognized in genealogies, and as Keener (1999) underscores, these women were uncharacteristically unlike the women who were married to patriarchs, such as Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel. My focus is not on Matthew’s purpose for incorporating these select

women (see Keener pp. 78–80) but rather I am centering on King David and “the wife of Uriah” (*New English Translation*, 1996/2019, Matthew 1:6) because of the themes of royalty and God’s reign in this Gospel. As Nolland (1997) perceives, the phrase “the wife of Uriah” (Bathsheba) reminds readers of David’s sin and God’s judgment as well as God’s faithfulness through the inclusion of Solomon in the royal line. Clements (2014) asserts that while Bathsheba emerges in three pericopae (2 Samuel 11–12; 1 Kings 1:11–31; 2:13–25), Matthew’s use of the phrase “the wife of Uriah” points to the account in 2 Samuel, which employs the same phrase on four occasions. Clements reminds her readers that the women “are the first indication that Matthew’s Gospel is concerned with the construal of a new identity for the people of God . . . an identity that is based on responsiveness to Christ lived out in relationship with others” (p. 278). King David’s actions in the story of “the wife of Uriah,” then, are in contrast to the actions of King Jesus and those who welcome God’s reign.

The story from 2 Samuel 11–12 is one of a King practicing *power over* rather than *power with*, resulting in sexual violence. Several clues emerge to inform the reader that the King has abused his power, which Grey (2019) underscores. First, as Clements indicates, this story repeatedly uses the word “send,” demonstrating the power of the individual. For instance, David *sends* out Joab (11:1); David *sends* someone to ask about the woman (11:3); David *sends* messengers to fetch Bathsheba (11:4); David *sends* a message to Joab, which states, “Send me Uriah,” and Joab *sends* Uriah to the King (11:6); David *sends* a letter with Uriah to Joab (11:14); Joab *sends* a report to David (11:18); David *sends* for Bathsheba (11:27); and Yahweh *sends* Nathan to David (12:1). Similarly, as Clements conveys, the only time Bathsheba, who is passive in this story, has any power is when she is pregnant, causing her to send David a message (11:5). Second, Clements notes that the actions of 2 Samuel 11:1–3 are slow in contrast to those in 11:4. Verse 4 mentions four verbs in quick succession: sent, took, came, and lay.

Third, the story demonstrates that David is aware of his abuse of power as he utilizes his power to hide his sin by sending for Uriah. When Uriah arrives, the King instructs Uriah, “Go down to your house and wash your feet” (*The New International Version*, 1973/2011, 2 Samuel 11:8), which

Grey notes is a substitute way to say that Uriah was to lay with his wife (11:8). Since Uriah resists sleeping with his wife on the first night (which, as Clements comments, is in stark contrast to the King), David serves alcohol to Uriah on the second night with the sole purpose of making him drunk so that he sleeps with his wife; however, this plan is foiled by Uriah's integrity (again, in contrast to King David), resulting in an order to Joab (a use of the King's power) for Uriah to die in battle.

Fourth, the parable of Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 12:1–4) indicts David, not the wife of Uriah, as David is the one with wealth and power. In the parable, the rich man is the one who took the lamb and feasts upon it. Nathan recognizes David's power and his abuse as implicitly seen in the use of a parable to convict David. Grey explains:

To address the powerful king, Nathan uses a judicial parable. Why must Nathan veil his criticism of the king as a parable? To confront David directly suggests that, like Bathsheba, even the prophet is vulnerable to harassment and harm by the king. So if Nathan the prophet, known to David, is possibly open to physical harm by offending the king, then how could Bathsheba be expected to have rejected his sexual advances? Even if she was not unwelcoming of his advances, she would have no choice regardless. It appears that this king is dangerously intoxicated on power and despotism (p. 21).

In short, David exploits his power to serve his lust for Uriah's wife. Whether or not Bathsheba physically resisted is not the issue. According to 2 Samuel 11:27, "the thing David had done displeased the LORD" (*The New International Version*, 1973/2011, 2 Samuel 11:27). David had power over Uriah and his wife by virtue of his office; thus, he abused his power by having sexual intercourse with Bathsheba, murdering her husband, and covering it up. Matthew's use of the phrase "the wife of Uriah," then, clearly underscores David's sexual exploitation of his power within Jesus' genealogy.

Jesus' Identification with Survivors

By drawing from the above event in Matthew's genealogy and combining it with intergenerational trauma, I assert that Jesus identifies with survivors of

sexual violence.² The reader bears witness to the presence of the sexual misuse of power in the genealogy of Jesus, and the echoes of sexual violence become a part of succeeding generations within Jesus' multigenerational family system through the lens of intergenerational sexual violence. For instance, the repercussions of David's sexual misconduct upon the family system may be interpreted when David's son Amnon committed incest by raping David's daughter Tamar (2 Samuel 13). This means that David's sexual exploit of power is not a self-contained incident, but it impacts future generations. Furthermore, the prophet Nathan declared that a member of David's household would have sexual relations with David's wives for all to witness (2 Samuel 12:11). This indicates that various patterns of relating within the family system are passed from one generation to another so that members of the multigenerational family embody the rules, roles, and attitudes/emotions of the system. It is in this way that I connect Jesus to his identifying with the survivor by considering the power of intergenerational sexual trauma and the multigenerational family system. The lens of intergenerational sexual trauma allows Matthew's words in 8:17, "He took our weaknesses and carried our diseases" (*New English Translation*, 1996/2019) to have a bearing on survivors of sexual violence. Wilkins (2004) seems to affirm this by noting that this verse follows Matthew's portrayal of "how Jesus' messianic ministry brings restoration to people who were often marginalized within Jewish culture: lepers (8:1–4), Gentiles (8:5–13), and women (8:14–15)" (p. 339). Matthew, then, conveys that Jesus identifies, or takes on, humans' afflictions of the disenfranchised of society, which includes the infirmities of sexual violence. As such, Jesus is able to communicate #metoo to the survivor. However, he not only identifies with said survivors, but as I aim to demonstrate, he also provides a way towards healing for them.

Healing in the Atonement for Sexual Violence: Reconciliation

Having sought to convey how Jesus communicates #metoo, I demonstrate in this section that Jesus not only identifies with those who experience the impact of sexual violence, but he also provides an avenue towards healing through the atonement. Since I have established sexual violence within

Jesus' genealogy, I am now able to argue that what is assumed by Jesus Christ is that which is also healed.

Jesus Is the Atonement

Historically, pentecostals have adhered to a belief of healing in the atonement, supported by Matthew 8:17: "In this way what was spoken by Isaiah the prophet was fulfilled: 'He took our weaknesses and carried our diseases'" (*New English Translation*, 1996/2019). Typically, the attention of pentecostals has focused on Christ's suffering and death on the cross in their explication of the atonement. In other words, they have highlighted the work of Christ on the cross over and above his very being. By emphasizing the phrase from Isaiah 53:5, "with his stripes we are healed" (*King James Version*, 1769/2019), pentecostals imply that the atonement concentrates on Christ's suffering and death, and it is through his crucifixion that healing is experienced. While I agree that the doctrine of atonement includes his suffering and death, I also hold that it encompasses his life, resurrection, and ascension. The atonement is not limited to Jesus Christ's pain and death on the cross, but it incorporates the entirety of who he is. Torrance (1971) explains:

[I]t was not the *death* of Jesus that constituted atonement, but Jesus Christ the Son of God offering Himself in sacrifice for us. Everything depends on *who* He was, for the significance of His acts in life and death depends on the nature of His person. It was *He* who died for us, *He* who made atonement through His one *self-offering* in life and death. Hence we must allow the Person of Christ to determine for us the nature of His saving work, rather than the other way around. The detachment of atonement from incarnation is undoubtedly revealed by history to be one of the most harmful mistakes of Evangelical churches (p. 64, italics in original).

God comes to humanity as a personal human being with a specific family system, who lives, dies, resurrects, and ascends. Humans know God through the person of Jesus Christ, through the coming of his being. It is his being, his own person, that is the action (work). As Torrance (2009) writes:

We are not saved by the atoning death of Christ, . . . but by *Christ himself* who in his own person made atonement for us. He is the atonement who ever lives and ever intercedes for us. He is, in the identity of his person and work, priest and sacrifice in one. His *being* mediates his great redeeming work (p. 73, italics in original).

By saying that Jesus' being is his action, I am pointing toward two movements that transpire in Jesus Christ, the divine-human one: Jesus as the divine one reveals God to humanity, and Jesus as the human one reconciles (heals) humanity with the divine. In the former movement, God is revealed to humanity through the being of Jesus. When humans see Jesus, they are seeing God. As Torrance (1992) asserts, there is no other angry God standing behind the Son for people to fear. As Jesus tells Philip in John 14:9: "The person who has seen me has seen the Father!" (*New English Translation*, 1996/2019). In the latter movement, Jesus is in solidarity with humanity, living out his life in complete obedience to God, which means he heals humanity. Purves (2015), in writing about Torrance's view of atonement, comments how reconciliation is "worked out within the hypostatic union," which indicates it "begins with the conception and birth of Jesus, when the real union between God and humankind is established"; thus, it is Jesus' whole life and death that is reconciliation (p. 238).

Since it is both Jesus' vicarious life and vicarious death that provide healing, it means that every aspect of Jesus' life heals. Gregory of Nazianzus' words from the fourth century substantiate such a view: "For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved" (*Early Church Texts*, n.d.). Gregory argued that if Jesus Christ is not completely human while being wholly divine, humanity is not completely redeemed. His words support the doctrine of the hypostatic union in which Jesus is one person with two natures, divine and human. The divine is with humanity not only as Jesus walked with humans on earth, but also, and more importantly for my purposes, the divine is with humanity within the being, or person, of Jesus Christ. Matthew's Gospel confirms this when it informs its readers that Jesus is *Emmanuel*, God with us (1:23). The divine is securely, eternally attached to humanity within the

person of Jesus Christ, the divine-human one. Such an attachment not only indicates that through his genealogy Jesus Christ identifies with those who are affected by sexual violence, but he also provides healing from the acts of sexual violence within his very being, his person.

Jesus' provision of healing without his experiencing the defilement of intergenerational trauma is demonstrated throughout Jesus' life as he was not tainted by sin and sickness. For instance, Matthew 8:1–4 depicts a leper approaching Jesus and requesting to be made clean. Keener writes that the word “leprosy” could refer to a variety of skin disorders. Nevertheless, those with leprosy during Jesus' day were considered defiled and were forced to live outside the community. If one touched a leper, that person was also defiled; thus, one may imagine the shock of those present when Jesus touches the leper, making the leper clean rather than Jesus becoming ceremonially defiled. Keener comments:

Jewish Law forbade touching lepers (Lev 5:3) and quarantined lepers from regular society (Lev 13:45-46; Jos. *Ant.* 3.261, 264), and people avoided contact with them (2 Kings 7:3) Yet by touching Jesus does not actually undermine the law of Moses but fulfills its purpose by providing cleansing (pp. 260–261).

This is not the only occasion in Matthew that Jesus heals the other without becoming defiled. In chapter nine, Jesus is touched by a woman with an issue of blood (vv. 20–22), and Jesus touches a daughter that has died (vv. 24–25); in both cases the impure are healed. Healing (reconciling) not only occurs when people have diseases, but also among those who are perceived as transgressors. In Matthew 9:10–13 Jesus is described as dining with sinners, an action that is considered to have a negative influence on Jesus; however, as Keener points out, rather than Jesus being unduly swayed, the divine-human one heals, or reconciles, sinners to God—that is, he sways them to be more like him. Jesus chooses to associate with sinners because he characterizes himself as the physician who socializes with the sick, those who acknowledge their need for healing (9:12). In using Keener's reference to Diogenes Laertius who is speaking of an earlier philosopher's words, this physician attends to the sick without becoming sick himself.

Jesus' Healing Power

Thus far I have described how Jesus restores those within his proximity on earth. However, it is important also to maintain that Jesus' healing matches and exceeds the repercussions of human trauma given its tendrillous nature throughout familial generations. Theologically, Jesus' healing power remains in everlasting abundance since he is for eternity the divine-human one. This connotes that ontologically the divine is securely attached to humanity so that healing is continuously flowing towards humanity. Since he is fully divine, Jesus is imbued with divine qualities, indicating he has an immeasurable amount of healing power for humanity. Thus, as the echoes of trauma are heard repeatedly through a multigenerational family system, Jesus Christ's healing power ensues and surpasses each repetition. Even though trauma impacts the whole being of the survivor, Jesus' healing is also ontological as seen in the doctrine of the hypostatic union in which the divine heals humanity in the person (being) of Jesus. His ontological healing may be said never to tire as it remains an unwavering reverberation that counters the echoes of trauma and contains a power that is able to supersede them. When the deaths that accompany trauma also play their repetitive tunes, the healing being of Jesus breathes into those deaths the power of the resurrection, raising that which has died into newness of life. That is to say, no matter how the repercussions of trauma repeatedly ripple through time and even though they may fade slowly, Jesus Christ's relentless rhythm of reconciliation is heard resounding throughout eternity without decay.

The Healing Response: Participation through Story

If Jesus' genealogy contains intergenerational trauma allowing Christ to respond #metoo while also providing ontological healing, the question remains for the church, "How may the church's praxis reveal God who ontologically offers ongoing healing to the survivor of sexual violence that will counter the echoes of trauma?" For me, the place to begin is with "radical discipleship," a theme in Matthew put forth by Keener. Radical discipleship includes the embodiment of God's reign by Christ followers,

which is a way to participate in Christ's healing ministry to the oppressed. Just as Matthew portrays Jesus Christ as one who identifies with and supplies healing for "the sicknesses of others through his own suffering and death" (Wilkins, p. 345), so also is the church to participate in this ministry by supporting others who are wounded. Keener, in commenting on 8:17, confirms, "Jesus' sacrifice to bear others' infirmities may also provide a model for his disciples" (p. 273).³ In considering the subject at hand, I aim to demonstrate that radical disciples serve others by transforming any attitudes that exhibit power over, which shame said survivors, and instead develop attitudes that validate their worth by honoring their stories through listening that heals. This will be accomplished (1) by briefly outlining antiquity's cultural worldview of meritocracy, which is in contrast to God's kingdom; (2) by claiming that storytelling of the trauma is often necessary for healing; and (3) by asserting that Matthew's Gospel embodies a praxis of healing ministry for the church by listening to stories of the marginalized—that is, the survivors of sexual violence and their multigenerational family systems.

Society's Meritocracy vs. God's Reign

Radical disciples understand that the characteristics of the kingdom of God are contrary to the meritocracy of a society that values status and competition. Such a contrast is seen in Gorman's (2001) description of the Greco-Roman world of antiquity:

In this cultural context, "power" and "glory," or "honor," were associated with high culture and status. Among the means of possessing and displaying power and honor were wealth and abundance; political, social, and military achievements and influence; family heritage and status; friends; impressive physical appearance; learning; and eloquent speech. Not to possess, or to lose, these status indicators resulted in shame; people who did so were not powerful but weak (p. 270).

In essence, human kingdoms do not value the embracing of vulnerability and trusting God for one's identity, but they esteem power

over the other to gain honor. DeSilva (2000) writes, “Honor is essentially the affirmation of one’s worth by one’s peers and society, awarded on the basis of the individual’s ability to embody the virtues and attributes that his or her society values” (p. 519). Worth, then, is dependent upon the approval of society. Competition for honor ensued since, as Neyrey (1998) points out, the perception in antiquity was the availability of only a limited amount of good. If one’s neighbor had honor, then less honor was accessible for others.

Contrary to this competitive grasping for power and respect, Matthew’s Gospel depicts a portrayal of those under God’s reign, or radical disciples. Matthew begins with Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in which he underlines characteristics of those who are honored in God’s kingdom, conveying a reversal of values in contrast to human kingdoms, such as David’s. In a human kingdom, those who assert and defend themselves, exerting their power, are the ones who are honored, but in God’s kingdom those who are humble, merciful, peacemakers, persecuted, pure in heart, hungry for righteousness, or mourn are the ones who are highly esteemed. Unlike David’s reign, in which the king exerts his power over a woman, Matthew counters David’s behavior with those who are under God’s reign: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (*New English Translation*, 1996/2019, 5:27–28). Under David’s reign, murder was committed, but under the reign of Jesus, one is not even to be angry with or insult the other (5:21–22). Stassen and Gushee (2003) remark that these are not “high ideals,” or “strenuous demands,” but “transforming initiatives” that deliver and heal (transform), while providing hope for healing in relationships (pp. 132–136). That is, the person is transformed from being one who harms the other to one who protects the other and the relationship.

Besides the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew continues to subvert the power and meritocracy of human kingdoms by putting forth the welcoming of vulnerability and grace of God’s kingdom. For instance, in chapter 16, Matthew highlights Peter’s perception of the Messiah, which is

one of dominion without vulnerability (vv. 13–23). For Peter, suffering is not a characteristic of a Christ who is powerfully to overthrow governments like Rome. As Keener (1999) notes, Jesus' rebuke of Peter indicates that power without the cross is a characteristic of Satan's kingdom, not God's. Nevertheless, it is not only the Christ who is to refuse to cling to merit and status but also his disciples as they are to deny themselves, take up their crosses, and follow him (16:24–25).

Shortly thereafter, Matthew speaks of the importance of becoming like children as citizens who welcome God's reign. Contrary to children in antiquity who are powerless with no status, as Keener (1999) describes, in God's kingdom those who become like children and are hospitable to the powerless are considered the greatest (18:1–5; 19:13–15). Gorman (2012) comments about a similar account recorded in Mark 9:34–37: "Since the parable is Jesus' response to the argument about achieving greatness, which would mean also achieving honor and power, his 'upside-down logic' means that greatness, honor, and power are achieved by service to those without honor and power" (p. 188). Jesus, then, is admonishing his disciples in these verses to welcome the little ones and the children, the vulnerable and powerless.

Communicating Stories of Trauma

The welcoming of humanity's vulnerability and powerlessness is what members of God's kingdom are to exhibit, which includes the hearing of experiences of trauma. However, such welcoming may be resisted when extending it to stories of intergenerational trauma as some may question the benefit of speaking about said trauma to the second and third generations. Similar to my grandmother, families traditionally refrain from discussing horrifying traumatic events. Some question why one is obliged to unwrap hidden, depraved events of the past, adhering to the old adage, "Let sleeping dogs lie." Some may wonder about traumatizing their children by revealing their traumatic experiences of the past. Christians may additionally argue that past atrocities are not to be mentioned because believers are instructed to think about positive things, such as what is pure, lovely, or of a good report (Philippians 4:8) or because in Christ all

things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17). However, secrecy does not necessarily silence the trauma as is evidenced in a qualitative study of 15 adults who were children of Holocaust survivors. In a study by Braga et.al (2012), the Holocaust survivors that remained silent or communicated indirectly about their experiences transmitted traumatic symptoms to the next generation; however, if the participants openly and affectionately shared, even with humor, about their experiences, it produced resilience in the offspring. Alpert (2015) writes about silence, “Grief and intolerable pain cannot be hidden, not from the victim, nor from the generations that follow” (para. 1).

Yet, it is not only the informing of a family system of its secrets, but it is the way in which the information is passed to the next generations that also may determine the character of the repercussions. This was apparent in study by Shrira (2016) of 450 Hebrew-speaking, Jewish Israelis involving 300 offspring of Holocaust survivors (OHS) and 150 who had parents without a Holocaust background who were used for comparison. A difference among the OHS emerged in the second generation’s attitudes towards aging, which was linked to how their parents relayed their wartime experiences. The offspring whose parents maintained a more intrusive method of communication about the Holocaust, such as discussing their suffering during the war in relation to something their children did to upset them or conveying their wartime experiences in order to minimize their children’s difficulties, were more anxious about aging and death and perceived themselves to be aging less successfully. This was in contrast to the offspring whose parents’ form of communication was more informative, such as discussing wartime experiences or being willing to share their experiences from the war in relation to current events. While this study may not be generalized to all instances to intergenerational trauma, it is an example of how telling the story of trauma may move a multigenerational family system towards healing. Alpert (2015) concludes that in order to decrease the power of the “transmitter” of intergenerational trauma, “the stories must be told” (conclusion section, para. 50). For Alpert, the stories do not die with the traumatized persons, but they live within the members of the multigenerational family.

Listening to Stories of Trauma

In light of these studies that depict how a salutary telling of the stories of trauma generates a path toward healing for certain multigenerational family systems, I assert that members of God's kingdom may participate in Christ's healing ministry through the embracing of vulnerability and powerlessness by listening to stories of trauma of sexual violence. This is based on Matthew's Gospel, which is an embodied story of being hospitable toward the powerless, making it a praxis for the church. Matthew begins with a genealogy that puts forth five women (see above) as being in the Davidic line. By the distinctive naming of these women in Jesus' genealogy, the hearers of Matthew's Gospel are drawn to their existence, and it is the ambiguity surrounding the reasons for their inclusion that beckons the hearer to be attentive to the stories. It is this very essence of Matthew's Gospel that furnishes the church with a praxis: the honoring of the stories of women, the disenfranchised.

The honoring of these women's stories in Jesus' genealogy conveys the inversion of God's kingdom from that of human kingdoms. Unlike human kingdoms, God's kingdom is not one of status, merit, and positions of power in which one gains the upper hand by taking what one does not own (e.g., Nathan's parable to David in which a wealthy man takes the poor man's cherished lamb). Instead, the reversal is true in which one who is last is first, and one who is first is last (20:16). Since women had very little power in the culture of antiquity, Matthew's inclusion of them in the divine-human one's genealogy honors and validates their humanity. Validation of a story normalizes the experience and produces a wholeness in the storyteller, which is healing; hence, God's participation in humanity's story by becoming human ontologically validates and provides healing for all of humanity. Nonetheless, the inclusion of these women in Jesus' genealogy focuses on one element of this healing. It demonstrates how Jesus specifically participates in human (hi) story in a way that entails the embracing of the vulnerable and the oppressed, validating their humanity, while simultaneously healing them.

When Matthew explicitly mentions "the wife of Uriah," he creates space for her story of powerlessness in an act of sexual violence, thereby inviting the hearer also to offer space to similar stories. Since Matthew's Gospel honors the disenfranchised of a society (like "the wife of Uriah") by bearing witness

to their stories and portrays Jesus as the bearer and healer of humanity's weaknesses (8:17), Jesus' disciples are to act accordingly. The offering of support through the listening to stories of sexual violence is a way to participate in Christ's healing ministry to the powerless, society's marginalized. Jesus' disciples may participate in Christ's ministry of healing of humanity when they listen, thereby validating the other's story. In the case of trauma, the telling of the story enables the survivor to take traumatic events, which are disruptive in time, and create order amidst chaos, moving the person towards wholeness. These are specific ways, then, radical disciples may serve the other: honor, listen, and validate, thereby participate in Christ's healing ministry.

As I have relayed an intergenerational story of the trauma of my grandmother, the telling of this story has been a healing experience for me. Likewise, as individuals have read this article, they have participated in both my family's story of intergenerational trauma and Christ's ministry of healing through listening. That is, readers have embodied God's reign by allowing space for humanity's vulnerability and powerlessness as seen in hearing my story of intergenerational trauma of sexual violence. As participants in Jesus Christ's healing ministry, readers may now point towards Jesus who communicates #metoo.



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Notes

- 1 Portions of this discussion on trauma were included in my paper I presented virtually at Society for Pentecostal Studies in March of 2021.
- 2 While this paper centers on survivors of sexual violence, it may also be said that Jesus identifies with the perpetrators of sexual violence since King David is in his genealogy.
- 3 Keener's support of his assertion is Romans 15:1–3 and 1 Peter 2:20–24.

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