



## **ANTI-DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DAY**

### **LECTIONARY COMMENTARY**

**Sunday, May 2, 2010**

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**Lection - Galatians 5:16-24** (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 16) Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. (v. 17) For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. (v. 18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. (v. 19) Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, (v. 20) idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, (v. 21) envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**Luke 17:1-2** (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 1) Jesus said to his disciples, “Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come! (v. 2) It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble.”

#### **I. Description of the Liturgical Moment**

Proclaimed by The Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute in October 2000, the Domestic Violence Sabbath Observance (DVSO) includes services intended to educate the congregation and honor survivors of the tragedy of domestic violence. Further, candlelight vigils are held to memorialize the thousands of women and children who do not survive each year. African American advocates, working within public agencies, that offer faith based services are sought out to provide domestic violence information. Even as the community of faith embraces the somber reality of violence against women, the emphasis of the observance is the continued cultivation of an appropriate response that includes breaking the long tradition of silence regarding domestic violence.

The services offer participants an opportunity to experience the spiritual power of God's working through humanity to care for the beloved community. Ultimately, this outpouring of compassion encourages participants to mature into a caring congregation capable of providing the essential resources, spiritual support and referral; rather than shaming and ostracizing the victimized. The Domestic Violence Sabbath Observance is conducted across the country during October, although some congregations prefer to include these services in February, along with Black History Month worship and/or Mothers' Day and Women's Day events.<sup>1</sup>

## **II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Galatians 5:16-24 & Luke 17:1-2**

### **Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter**

Recently, domestic violence has been a popular topic as high profile cases appeared in the media, i.e., *Bynum v. Weeks* and *Rihanna v. Chris Brown*. Deemed a "women's issue" only a decade ago, domestic violence lurks at the core of many of the spiritual ills currently plaguing African American and other families. Sixty-three percent of males under the age of 21 who are serving sentences for homicide were convicted of murdering their mother's battering partner.<sup>2</sup>

The Department of Justice estimated that every nine seconds, a woman is battered.<sup>3</sup>

Domestic violence is any coercive behavior that is used by one adult over another in an intimate relationship. It consists of any type of abuse, which may be one or a combination of any of the following types:

- physical (beating)
- verbal (threats)
- sexual (rape)
- economic (taking a person's money)
- psychological (mind games).

Domestic violence is often overlooked as "a lovers' quarrel" or a "private family matter," but it is an epidemic that affects women of every class, race, sexual orientation and religion. Ninety to ninety-five percent of domestic violence victims are women, and many of these women are active members in their local churches.<sup>4</sup>

#### General Statistics About Domestic Violence:

Nearly 2 in 3 female victims of violence were related to or knew their attacker.<sup>5</sup> Over two-thirds of violent victimizations against women were committed by someone known to them: 31% of female victims reported that the offender was a stranger. Approximately 28% were intimates such as husbands or boyfriends, 35% were acquaintances, and the remaining 5% were other relatives.<sup>6</sup> About 75% of the calls to law enforcement for intervention and assistance in domestic violence occur after separation from batterers. One study revealed that half of the homicides of female spouses and partners were committed by men after separation from batterers.<sup>7</sup>

Women charged in the death of a mate have the least extensive criminal records of any people convicted. However, FBI statistics indicate that fewer men are charged with first-or second-degree murder for killing a woman they have known than are women who kill a man they have known. Women convicted of these killings are frequently sentenced to longer prison terms than are men.<sup>8</sup> Abusive men who kill their partners serve an average of two-to-six year prison terms.<sup>9</sup>

This epidemic of violence against Black women is discordant with the deep spiritual bonds formed in the common experience of African American church folk working to eradicate racial discrimination. Learning about the dynamics of domestic violence, without defensiveness, invites African American men and women to reclaim the zeal for a meaningful intimacy borne out of healing shared grief. This enables one to advocate for another's wellbeing.

## **Part Two: Biblical Commentary**

The text is an excerpt from a letter. The image is one of Paul - experiencing a familiar frustration of leadership; feeling his efforts may have been wasted. In Paul's epistle to the churches at Galatia, there is not the usual greeting about the goodness of God or his expressed yearning to reunite with the membership there. He exercises the diligence to lay out for the readers how he came to know God and live out his call, not through commendations earned by conforming to tradition or certifications conferred by human beings, but by divine revelation that results from adhering to the *truth* of the gospel. Paul defends his call as a specific ministry to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. (1:11-16).

Paul's compelling letter bluntly gets to the point, rather quickly, by asking how they got so off-track in such a brief period of separation when they had been "running well." (5:6) In Galatians 5:13-24 (which contains one of our scriptures for today - 5:16-21), Paul gives an exhortation that is a warning against corruption by the flesh. 5:13-24 is a stern admonition to the new believers at Galatia to "walk in the Spirit" and not become confused by temptations or freedoms of the flesh even if these are socially acceptable or "legal" (5:16-18).

Paul makes clear that if one is led by the flesh and not the Spirit, they are asking for trouble (5:19). In fact, Paul, who so often speaks of liberation in his letters, makes clear here that to preserve liberation or freedom, one must deal effectively and appropriately with the flesh. People of faith are not bound by the limits of the physical realm and need not act out in a destructive manner, simply because it occurs to them to do so or because all others around them are doing it.

To avoid "devouring one another" (5:15) requires personal responsibility, restraint and stewardship of care for one another. Anyone who continues in a pattern of behavior that is dissimilar to our Godlike nature, such as "licentiousness," "strife," "jealousy," "anger," "quarreling," "dissensions," "creating factions," "envying," "drunkenness," and "carousing" will choke the potential fruitfulness that God wants us to experience and, Paul says bluntly, will not enter the Kingdom of God (5:19-21)! Paul is somber and serious because he understands that the end-result of the fruits of the flesh is destruction; Destruction of self, of others, of families and communities. Also, we can clearly see from the sad laundry list given by Paul that acts of domestic violence are still caused by many of the same un-Godlike behaviors of which Paul

spoke so long ago. The more things change, the more they stay the same. Love, which is what Paul urged the Galatians to show, cannot thrive under these conditions and will never yield the fruit of the Spirit. The *works of the flesh* are not the path to loving relationships, healthy communities or peacemaking; love is. In other words, “The Jew [says Paul to the Galatians] is obliged to do the Torah (cf. 3:10, 12; 5:3; also 6:13), while the Christian fulfills the Torah through the act of love, to which he has been freed by Christ (5:1, 13). This points to a decisive difference between law and love; the prescriptions and prohibitions of the Jewish Torah stand before the Jew as demands “to be done” by him, while love is the result of liberation and the gift of the Spirit...About this gift one can also say that it the fulfillment of the Torah...”<sup>10</sup>

Our second text from Luke contains a stern warning from Jesus, that harming children will result in severe adverse consequences. In fact, the perpetrators who harm children will be so acutely affected that it would be better if they had a brick hung around their necks and were tossed into the sea. Jesus, too, is somber and serious. Also, note that in this passage regarding children, Jesus says, “Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come!” In other words, we all sin, but when it comes to mistreating children, the least able to defend themselves and the most innocent, “woe” to those who engage in such behavior.

Just as Paul and Jesus were both serious about how Christian folk are to live, it is past time for the church to be serious about ending domestic violence. Silence is not an option. Sermons that gloss over the behavior of batterers and further victimize victims are no longer an option. Turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to the malnourished and scarred children who stumble into our youth programs and Sunday schools week after week is no longer an option. If we stand on the side of violent behavior against women and children (through omission or commission of our acts and teachings) we will get a pass and enter the Kingdom of God?

Paul concludes Galatians 5 with an antidote—the fruit of the Spirit and the crucifying of our flesh and the desires and passions of the flesh! We can walk in the Spirit and crucify all un-Godlike behaviors if we walk in love. Love must be maintained regardless of surrounding circumstances, writes Paul.

The Church believes that God can give us power to live as liberated, God-acting individuals. We believe that it is possible for abusers to learn another way and for victims to find full freedom from abuse. We believe that relationships can exist in harmony because of what Christ did for us and because of what the Spirit does for us, day in and day out. Through the living out of the fruit of the Spirit, men love their families and parents love their children. Through the fruit of the Spirit, people become kind, patient, joyous and peacemakers rather than abusive hell raisers who refuse to deal with their own demons and instead harm others mentally and physically. Christ and the Spirit make the difference.

## **Celebration**

Thanks be to God that the Word does not leave us comfortless. Our diligent walking in the Spirit, along with God’s grace, will yield the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, humility, and temperance. God’s promise is that we will surely reap a bounty

when we choose to live in the Spirit. These are the conditions for a truly joyous and peaceful life!

### **Descriptive Details**

The descriptive details in this text include:

**Sights:** Persons engaged in fornication and other impure acts; persons displaying strife, envy, anger, being drunk and carousing; the bruises on the bodies of women; fractures to the bodies of children; life-lasting scars on the bodies of children;

**Sounds:** Angry shouts, quarreling; persons expressing dissension; the sounds of those who are drunk and carousing; women crying, children screaming and crying; and

**Smells and Tastes:** The smell and taste of alcohol.

### **III. Recommendations for this Sunday for Preachers and Christian Educators**

- Experiential accents to enhance the observance of Anti-Domestic Violence Day can include the following: purple, white or black candles for vigils; purple gladiolus (African sword flowers); children's purple construction paper handprint cut-outs around the sanctuary. These handprints represent the theme "Hands are not for hurting."
- **Available on The Black Church and Domestic Violence web site for use in Anti-Domestic Violence services:**
  - ❖ Poster 16" x 20"
  - ❖ Bulletin Covers (models)
  - ❖ Bookmarks
  - ❖ An example of a Candle Lighting Ceremony
  - ❖ Frequently Asked Questions
  - ❖ General Statistics
  - ❖ Assessment Material
  - ❖ Offering Envelopes for your church to support Anti-Domestic Violence efforts within your church and or in your community and
  - ❖ A DVD titled The Preachers: Working to End Sexual and Domestic Violence features sermons by ordained clergy who have survived partner violence. Each sermon contains insightful discourses into domestic violence as it relates to the issues of faith. This video also includes a companion study guide to facilitate discussion.
- See The Children's Sabbath Observance developed by the Children's Defense Fund. Online location: <http://cdf.childrensdefense.org>

### **Books**

- Cole, Johnnetta B. and Beverly Guy Sheftall. Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities. New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2003.
- Triplett, Gillis. Why People Choose The Wrong Mate: Avoiding The 9 Deadly Booby Traps. Atlanta, GA: Most Valuable Publications, 2004. Online location: <http://www.gillistriplett.com/articles/content/voice.html> accessed 12 October 2009. Triplett comments specifically on the Galatians 5:16-21 text.
- Robinson, Lori. I Will Survive: The African-American Guide to Healing from Sexual Assault and Abuse. New York, NY: Seal Pr Feminist Publishing, 2003.
- McClure, John S., and Nancy J. Ramsay, Ed. Telling the Truth: Preaching About Sexual and Domestic Violence. Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1998.
- West, Traci C. Wounds Of The Spirit: Black Women, Violence And Resistance Ethics. New York, NY: University Press, 1999.

### Songs

The Negro spiritual “I’ve Been ‘Buked and I’ve Been Scorned” is especially suited for Anti-Domestic Violence observances with its resounding messages of freedom (human liberation). This song can be used by liturgical dancers during your service. Dance facilitates internalization of the song’s messages through dramatization of movement.

### Notes

1. For more information visit The Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute. Online location: [http://www.bcdvi.org/keynotes\\_dvso.htm](http://www.bcdvi.org/keynotes_dvso.htm) accessed 12 October 2009
2. See, “Partner Abuse in Illinois: Knowing the Facts and Breaking the Cycle.” IDPH Report to the Illinois General Assembly. 1996. The Illinois assembly the report can be viewed on The Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute website. Online location: <http://www.bcdvi.org/facts.htm> accessed 12 October 2009
3. See, Department of Justice Statistics on domestic abuse for 1991 at The Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute website. Online location: <http://www.bcdvi.org/facts.htm> accessed 12 October 2009
4. Information obtained from The Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute website. Online location: <http://www.bcdvi.org/facts.htm> accessed 12 October 2009
5. Department of Justice. “Violence Against Women: A National Crime Victimization Survey Report.” Ronet Bachman, Ph.D. Bureau of Justice Statistics. (revised July 1, 1996, NCJ 161405) January 1994. p. iii. Online location for pdf: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=775> accessed 12 October 2009
6. Ibid, p. 1.
7. Hart, Barbara. “Remarks to the Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect.” The Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute. April 1992. Online location: <http://www.bcdvi.org/facts.htm> accessed 12 October 2009
8. Browne, Angela. When Battered Women Kill. New York, NY: The Free Press, 1987. p. 11.

9. National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women. 1988. Online location: <http://www.ncdbw.org/> accessed 12 October 2009
10. Betz, Hans Dieter. Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia--(Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible). Nashville, TN: Fortress, 1979. p. 275.