



ANTI-DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DAY

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

Sunday, May 15, 2011

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Lection – Ephesians 4:26-27 and Proverbs 10:6 (New Revised Standard Version)

Ephesians 4:26-27

(v. 26) Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, (v. 27) and do not make room for the devil.

Proverbs 10:6

(v. 6) Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

Women are queens and children a blessing in your old age; both give life like the sun.

—African Proverb

The Domestic Violence Sabbath Observance (DVSO) established in 2000 by The Black Church and Domestic Violence Institute includes services intended to educate congregations and honor survivors of domestic violence. This service is nationally celebrated in October but churches may celebrate it at any time that is optimal on their liturgical calendar to highlight that it is the Church's responsibility to keep women and children safe and to preach against violence.

Anti-Domestic Violence Day is also the time on the liturgical calendar when individual churches, churches collectively, social service organizations, and community organizations come together to celebrate survivors of abuse, to lament the loss of those who have died at the hands of abusers, and to discuss ways to safeguard women and children. More than this it is a time in the African American faith community when it takes its head out of the sand and deals with a relevant, painful issue that is increasing.

II. Other Suggestions

- **See the Planning Notes for today's worship unit for great ideas for a worship service for Anti-Domestic Violence Sunday.**
- **See today's cultural resource unit for a list of books that address the issue of domestic violence.**
- **Have your diaconate, staff persons, or young adult ministry develop a list of ALL agencies in your community that assist battered women and children; especially include agencies that provide housing and provide legal assistance. Disperse this list to the appropriate church staff and church leaders. The list must include contact persons' names, addresses, and phone numbers.**
- **Make it public knowledge that one use of your church benevolence fund is to help safeguard battered women and children.**
- **At least once each quarter hold special classes that teach children which adults in your congregation can aid them if an adult in their family is harming them.**

III. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: Ephesians 4:26-27 and Proverbs 10:6

Part One: The Contemporary Contexts of the Interpreter

Growing up, I heard preachers quote Ephesians 4:26-27 when speaking to married couples. Their message was that although it was expected that couples would have disagreements, those disagreements were to be resolved before the end of the day on which the disagreement occurred. Failure to do this meant that a couple had given the devil a victory in their marriage.

What I did not hear growing up was how often women were beaten by their husbands and boyfriends. The Church advocated staying married. This was a good and needed thing for African Americans to hear. However, where was their advocacy for battered women and abused children? In thirty-plus years in the Church I have yet to hear of a pastor, deacon, trustee, or other male church leader losing their position in the church for battering their spouse or girlfriend or for battering their children. Thank goodness that more and more women are taking legal action against batterers, including batterers who belong to churches. The Church either does not have processes for confronting domestic batterers or chooses not to confront them. This silence is deadly. This silence is a slap in the face of women who typically make up seventy-five percent of most churches.

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

Ephesians 4:26-27 occurs in the context of the life of the Church. Its author is the Apostle Paul. The book's emphasis is on believers living as "new creatures" in Christ. Specific calls to this type of living are in chapters four through six, which include our first pericope. Andrew Lincoln in his book Ephesians lists four behaviors that he says Paul names as behaviors of those not born again through Christ: **anger**, evil talk, lying, and stealing.¹

Anger, which is the unregenerate behavior in today's text, is apparently an inevitable occurrence given verse 26a. However, verse 31 repudiates all anger. Verse 31 makes clear that hostile anger is **never** a good thing. Not only are we not to let the sun go down on our anger, but we are to avoid it because it is so dangerous.

"Be angry and do not sin" is a quote from Psalm 4:4. Debate has long raged as to whether or not Ephesians 4:26a allows for anger (and on its face it does) and what type of anger is acceptable by God. The positions have largely fallen along three camps: 1. Venting one's anger is necessary; this is an oft-heard socio-cultural-psychological determination especially in the Western world. 2. You can get angry but your anger must only amount to righteous indignation. Commentators have also suggested that many of the actions in the church at Ephesus were trivial and so could be handled before the sun went down; they did not merit righteous indignation. If anger is permissible, certainly domestic violence in the Church would qualify as something over which any Christian should be righteously indignant! 3. There is the conditional view. Lincoln gives his explanation of this view: "Anger is to be avoided at all costs, but if, for whatever reasons, you do get angry, then refuse to indulge in such anger so that you do not sin."²

I take the stance that righteous indignation, which is not the same as hostile anger, which is sin, should remain as an impetus to help stop any unrighteousness that riles our hearts to begin with. Such indignation leads to justice and to salvation but is guided by the wisdom of God. Those who are victims of domestic violence need the church to become righteously indignant about the gross amount of violence against women and children that occurs in the African American community. However, and most importantly, victims of violence need the church to "do something" with their indignation. If the type of anger that is raised dissipates the same evening as the church service that addressed the issue, such indignation is useless. In fact, it likely does more harm than good. It may give victims hope that the Church cares only to have that hope

dashed when victims seek help or justice. This is the epitome of “making room for the devil,” which Paul speaks against!

If placing these verses in sermonic form, the outline would at least include: (a) the warning verse, 26a; (b) an explanation verse, 26b; and (c) the warning/outcome of unbridled anger verse, 27. Then, by coupling Proverbs 10:6—“Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence”—with the Ephesians passage, the main body of the sermon gains a more *certain* and *serious* tone. Certainly those who are righteous are blessed, but what is it that makes people righteous? Sitting by idly or quietly while domestic violence escalates in one’s church and community after another is certainly not behavior of the righteous. Ignoring domestic violence as a private matter between adults or parents and children is not righteous behavior. So, just as the wicked are violent beginning with their speech which conceals and yet reveals violence, those who aid them by acts of omission are culprits too. Interestingly, the Proverbs verse speaks of the “mouth of the wicked concealing violence.” At first glance, this does not make sense. How can one’s mouth conceal violence? But all we have to do is think of the many, many, many stories where after committing horrible acts of violence batterers return to their victims offering apologies galore, promises galore, and excuses galore. All of this talk is intended to conceal violence. It is intended to calm the waters until the next explosion.

When I was young, if someone pointed to something you did wrong, they had “called you out.” In 2011 the Church universal and specifically the African American church must be called out and called into action. Then any sermon would have to discuss the serious pronouncement that those who are violent are wicked, beginning with the use of their talk. In other words, this coupling makes it impossible for a preacher who accurately uses and discusses both texts to miss a discussion of violence, especially on Anti-Domestic Violence Sunday. The violent are called out—they are wicked! In fact, any sermon worth its salt would almost certainly have to do a roll call of acts of violence against women and children; these acts must be called out too. This call would be accompanied by a roll call of ways to stop the violence; in other words, ways to stop “making room for the devil.” This is the harder part; this is the real work of the righteous—to do the work that liberates not enslaves, the work that safeguards not oppresses, the work that brings hope to the oppressed in spite of the determination of the wicked.

Challenge

Let us pray. God, you are a God of justice. At this moment and in moments in the future, no longer let us turn a blind eye to women and children who are victims of domestic violence. Convict us of being complicit by being silent. Embolden us in our activism. Let us embrace the victims and no longer shield the batterers. Let us raise money, support safe-havens for the battered, and talk about it in our Bible Study groups and in our Sabbath schools. Most of all, God, hold the righteous accountable for doing what we can do to lessen domestic violence now and in the days ahead. This is our sincere prayer. Amen.

Descriptive Details

The descriptive details that could be used when discussing these passages include:

Ephesians 4:26-27

Sights: The angry faces of church members, the angry face of a batterer, the sun setting; activities that increase the presence of the devil (evil); the scars of women and children who have been battered; police cars arriving at a residence where domestic violence has occurred, the Church hugging and embracing women and children who have been battered;

Sounds: The angry tones of church members, the angry tone of a batterer, women pleading with batterers; children crying and pleading with batterers; women declaring their freedom from abuse; the applause received by a woman or child who has escaped abuse; and

Colors: The bright yellow of the sun, and red blood.

Proverbs 10:6

Sights: Righteous people receiving blessings from God; a wicked person causing violence; and

Sounds: The words of a wicked person that conceal violence.

Notes

1. Lincoln, Andrew. Ephesians (Word Bible Commentary 42). Dallas, TX: Word Press, 1990, 293–300.

2. Ibid., 301.