

Biblical reflections for individual or group study

Equality? Yes!

John 4:9

This verse falls within the long narrative of John 4: 1-42 which records Jesus, a Jew, and his encounter with a Samaritan woman. In the time of this story, Jewish men were forbidden to speak publicly with a woman. Additionally, there was a rift between Jews and Samaritans, these races did not speak with each other. So this Samaritan woman would have experienced discrimination because of her gender and her race. Hence, you can imagine her surprise that Jesus would take the time to talk with her as she was silenced in the public space.

In several contexts across the world, rivalries exist between different groups of people across ethnic, racial, and religious lines. Unfortunately, religious groups have also been complicit in maintaining these conflicts, sometimes to the detriment of human lives. And, when the casualty is female, the outrage or response is negligible.

Many persons and organizations have based their treatment of women on biblical passages. Abused women have accepted these teachings and endured various forms of discrimination. Jesus' actions denounced, rejected gender and race based forms of discrimination. He gave her a voice and affirmed her as a person of worth. Jesus' actions ran counter to the prevailing cultural practices. Today let us say no to all forms of discrimination and abuse in times and spaces of conflict or rivalry.

Question- How can we affirm the dignity and worth of each human being?

Rev Doreen Wynter, Jamaica Baptist Union

Open Arms

Matt. 19:13-15

Is there any room for children? In our days of activism, it is easy to focus on women and forget children, the young girls, teenage mothers who are denied a space for their development. When doors are shut and the community excludes them - Children and youths have rights too.

In Matthew's account children were being brought to Jesus by their parents and guardians to be blessed. It was a symbol of goodwill towards them. However, the disciples of Jesus became stumbling blocks, human barriers refusing to grant access to Jesus. Jesus rebuked them and instead opened a space for the children indicating that they rightfully belong to the community. Here Jesus publicly defended the rights of the children. He determined that the disciples did not have the right to decide which doors should be opened or closed to the children.

In the 2018 Joint World Children's Day Celebratory event, the WCC and UNICEF reaffirmed the rights of our children, confirming the need to protect them from rejection, bullying, abuse, and any form of violence. This includes the Children First programmes in several WCC Member Churches across the globe.

Discrimination towards children? No.

Let us follow the example of Jesus.

Question- What can we do affirm the rights of the children in our community and church?

Silence is not Golden

Judges 19

Silence has often been touted as golden. The belief being that some things are best left unsaid, hidden, or overlooked. The atrocities against women have often fallen in this category. Their stories are not heard, glossed over or not recorded. They have been silenced. The gang rape of an unnamed concubine who was later dismembered by her 'husband' is a frightening story recorded in Judges 19. Attempts to seek justice for *her* rape only resulted in the subsequent rape of 400 women of one tribe and another 200 women from another tribe. This explicit story in the bible is unacceptable. Yet it is recorded and the cruel acts are not covered up. It 'jars' us and stands as a constant reminder of what ought not to be.

Gang rape of our women is still prevalent today and because of shame, status in society women and girls are encouraged to be silent especially by family members. Far often, there is a conspiracy of silence which only makes the problem worse and allows the rapist(s) to think that they have won. The atrocities against our women must be revealed, recorded and dealt with; regardless of caste, culture or social standing. Remember evil flourishes because good people fail to act or speak out.

We can no longer keep silent.

Questions- How can we become voices for these voiceless, abused women?

- Who would record these women's experiences as means of confronting society?

Remember: The Lost Sister?

St. Luke 15:8-10

The parable of the lost coin is of a woman who has ten coins and loses one, but refuses to be contented until that lost coin is found. She searches high and low and when it is found, calls her neighbours to a time of celebration. It could have been easy for this woman to comfort herself in that she had nine coins which were enough to compensate for the one still outside the family of coins. But nine coins meant that the set (or family) was incomplete.

This parable, although not addressing the issue of violence, speaks to us about our lost sisters: women who are experiencing abuse, women who have been broken by oppressive systems which removed their ability to 'fit in' with the community of wholeness. Violence against our sisters reveal women who have lost their freedom to be, to become who they can, to enter their own space, they are lost. There can be no full joy until all are freed from oppression, and discrimination. The lost ones need to be returned to the family, and – if necessary – nurtured back to wholeness. It requires a rejection of complacency; of self-absorption or self-satisfaction; for if even ONE sister is not free, all sisters are not free.

Dare we forget?

Questions- we who are in top leadership have we forgotten the struggle to get the door open?

- How have we forgotten the discrimination shown towards other sisters across the globe?