

## Second week of Lent 22- 28 February 2021

©Written by Rev Dr André Groenewald



“It is important to give a health warning when asking people to think/talk about the subject of trauma, even just in theory. People are not always consciously aware of **what past trauma** may be stored in their body/unconscious memory” (Hilary Ison 2021).

### Setting the scene:

Violence (visible and non-visible) is often the biggest cause for trauma. Traumatic violence affects and changes how we perceive and make meaningful connections with other people. It affects memories and even shape cultures, often negatively. It can be experienced by individuals or whole communities, nations, and entire regions (see Jones 2019: 27)<sup>1</sup> When trauma is experienced by whole communities, it is referred to as “collective trauma” especially “when either significant individuals are traumatised or when the group’s way of relating and understanding of the world are damaged in a life-threatening way”<sup>2</sup>(see Jones 2019: 28)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, S 2019. *Trauma and grace. Theology in a Ruptured world*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Louisville, KY: WJK.

<sup>2</sup> Conference of Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education, 3-4 November 2021. Grosch-Miller, CA: **Trauma-informed ministry for these times**. Handout.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, S 2019. *Trauma and grace. Theology in a Ruptured world*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Louisville, KY: WJK.

When individuals display a set of reactions after experiencing violent trauma, it is called “post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD) “because traumatic violence so decisively violates one’s personal-physical-emotional borders, the desire to build emotional protective armor around oneself is all consuming and, sadly, results in a sense of dramatic isolation” (Jones 2019: 28)<sup>4</sup> Only a few people end up with PTSD after a traumatic event - the vast majority will suffer some trauma reactions in the immediate and medium aftermath of a one-off shock event, and will reboot their nervous systems as they are reconnected with their resources (friends, prayer, exercise etc etc) and will have integrated and grown through their experience (see Hilary Ison 2020:60-62)<sup>5</sup>.

If we look at our Bible reading carefully, we should be able to identify the visible (in yellow) and invisible traumatic violence/abuse (in green).

### **Bible reading** Mark 15:16-20

The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. 17 They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. 18 And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” 19 Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they

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<sup>4</sup> Jones, S 2019. *Trauma and grace. Theology in a Ruptured world*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Louisville, KY: WJK.

<sup>5</sup> Ison, H 2020. Working with an embodied and systemic approach to trauma and tragedy in Warner, M & Southgate, C & Grosch-Miller, CA & Ison, H (eds). *Tragedies and Christian Congregations*, 47-63. Oxon: Routledge.

took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

### **Questions to ponder upon?**

1. Have you ever been embarrassed by someone else in public?
2. Have you been beaten unjustly?
3. Have you been mocked or called names?
4. How would you feel when someone else captivate you and strip you of your clothes?

### **Reflection**

In our reading we experience the full spectrum of violence in its visible and invisible forms. Mark wanted to make the point that "Jesus tried to prepare his disciples for what could happen to him when he demonstrated against Roman imperial power concerning its violence" (Borg & Crossan 2008:91)<sup>6</sup>.

The soldiers took Jesus to the courtyard of the palace of the late king Herod the Great, where the Roman governors normally stayed while they were in Jerusalem. It is clear from our reading that the local authorities are present as well. Jesus follows the same fate as all the political prisoners before him. He is flogged, tortured, abused, humiliated and shamed. He is

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<sup>6</sup> Borg, MJ & Crossan, JD 2008. *The last week. What the Gospels really teach about Jesus's final days in Jerusalem*. London: SPCK.

powerless in their hands – they undress him, they clothe him with a purple cloak, they put a thorn crown on his head, they abuse him, they spit on him, they undress him again, put his own clothes back on and lead him to be crucified. In all this Jesus is passive while they are actively engaging in a brutal act of violence, shame, humiliation, and abuse.

Matthew 27:28 says it was a “scarlet robe” while Mark and John 19:5 refer to a “purple robe”, possibly all using it as a synonym to the ‘red’ of the cloak worn by Roman soldiers (Mare 2004:55)<sup>7</sup> The “crown of thorns” was not intended so much to add to Jesus’ suffering as to parody the laurel crown worn by the emperor. Jesus is mocked as a pretender, but he is in fact the real Heavenly King. The Gospel writer Mark wanted to emphasize that Jesus’ kingship was characterized by humility and servanthood and was different from all the kingships of the world” (Brooks 1991:252-254).<sup>8</sup>

## **Contemporary lesson**

Traumatic violence is part of our world and to some an everyday reality.

Recent statistics being released revealed that **domestic violence** has surged since the start of the coronavirus lockdown. “The UK’s largest domestic abuse charity, Refuge, has reported a 700% increase in calls to its helpline in a single day, while a separate helpline for perpetrators of

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<sup>7</sup> Mare, W. H. 2004. New Testament Background Commentary: A New Dictionary of Words, Phrases and Situations in Bible Order (p. 55). Ross-shire, UK: Mentor.

<sup>8</sup> Brooks, J. A. (1991). Mark (Vol. 23, pp. 252–254). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

domestic abuse seeking help to change their behaviour received 25% more calls after the start of the Covid-19 lockdown” (Mark Townsend *The Guardian*, Sunday 12 April 2020).

Violence against children is also a sad reality of our present day a common occurrence. On the Unicef website (<https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/violence/>) it defines violence as: “Violence against children takes many forms, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and may involve neglect or deprivation. Such violence not only inflicts harm, pain and humiliation on children; it also kills.”

And then there is the violence caused by wars all around the world. McBride (2016 :83)<sup>9</sup> says in his book that the violence to and torture of Jesus can be seen in the world today in the way political prisoners or enemies of the state are treated. He refers to the Jewish death camps where the Jews were stripped from their clothes and made to feel like animals. This behaviour is also still replicated around the world today.

So what is our role as believers? Jones (2019: 31)<sup>10</sup> says that we need to give anyone who is suffering or has suffered from Traumatic violence a voice to speak out against their abusers. We also should receive their stories of traumatic violence as authentic and create a safe space for them to heal – not brushing their stories under a carpet. As a church we need

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<sup>9</sup> McBride, D 2016. *Stations of the Cross then and now*. Hampshire: Redemptorist Publications.

<sup>10</sup> Jones, S 2019. *Trauma and grace. Theology in a Ruptured world*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Louisville, KY: WJK.

to speak out too against any form of violence to anyone. All lives matter to God.

The Psalms can be a helpful tool to help people in their healing process from experiencing violent trauma. According to Calvin (in Jones 2019: 55-63)<sup>11</sup> the Psalms reflect on three kinds of prayers namely:

- Prayers/songs of Deliverance where the Traumatized can feel safe knowing that they can trust the Almighty God and feel safe in His presence.
- Prayers/songs of Lament and Mourning where the Traumatized can be allowed to make their pain, suffering and grief known to God in whatever way they choose. In and through the act of lamenting to God, their memories, which is sometimes hidden in the unconscious mind, can become a conscious reality – helping them “to find a language for and an awareness of the trauma they endured” and a helpful tool to grief (Jones 2019:59<sup>12</sup>; see Warner 2020:167-181<sup>13</sup>)
- Prayers/songs of Thanksgiving where hope overshadows evil, and through the activity of thanksgiving the goodness of God is affirmed and attested.

All of us should be aware of the effects of Violence on our lives and be mindful of the fact that Jesus’ traumatic experience was done on behalf of

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<sup>11</sup> Jones, S 2019. *Trauma and grace. Theology in a Ruptured world*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Louisville, KY: WJK.

<sup>12</sup> Jones, S 2019. *Trauma and grace. Theology in a Ruptured world*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Louisville, KY: WJK.

<sup>13</sup> Warner, M 2020. Teach to your daughters a dirge. Revisiting the practise of lament in the light of trauma theory, in Warner, M & Southgate, C & Grosch-Miller, CA & Ison, H (eds). *Tragedies and Christian Congregations*, 167-181. Oxon: Routledge.

all of us, to save us from the burdens of sin and to set us free. As believers we should always choose love and not violence, peace and not conflict, and hope during any tribulation. God does indeed know suffering! He knows our suffering. He knows of each violent act and or injustice done to **or** by us and to others. May we always speak out for ourselves and for others!

### **Questions to yourself?**

1. Do you agree that the Psalms can be a helpful way of speaking to God especially when circumstances and or experiences makes it difficult to speak?
2. Can you think of a Psalm that reflect your mood/feelings at this moment?

### **Helpful Lament exercise<sup>14</sup>**

“Write a lamentation based on a tragedy with which you are familiar, and which has stirred an emotional response in you. Here is a template, adapted from the structure provided by John Swinton (2007:127-128) *Raging with Compassion* to help Address God –using any names or titles that speak to you or express qualities of God that you want to call upon. You can use many names.

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<sup>14</sup> Conference of Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education, 3-4 November 2021. Grosch-Miller, CA: *Trauma-informed ministry for these times*. Handout.

- Make your complaints – be detailed. (Consider how detailed the Book of Lamentations is.) What has happened? Who is hurting and why? Whose fault, if anyone's, is it? Give God the full blast of your anger, hurt and fear.
- Express trust in or relationship with God. This can be one sentence. See, e.g., Lamentations 3:24 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in God.'
- Make an appeal or petitions...a request for God's intervention and why it is needed.
- Vow your praise (if you are ready). Terrible things have happened, and yet I will praise You. This is optional because a lamentation is an honest articulation and you may not be ready yet to praise. (See, e.g., Ps 88.)"

**Prayer** (McBride 2016 :84)<sup>15</sup>

Lord Jesus,  
 you experienced in person  
 torture and death  
 as a prisoner of conscience.  
 You were beaten and flogged  
 and sentenced to an agonizing death  
 though you had done no wrong.  
 Be now with prisoners of conscience  
 throughout the world.

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<sup>15</sup> McBride, D 2016. *Stations of the Cross then and now*. Hampshire: Redemptorist Publications.



Be with them in their fear and loneliness,  
in the agony of physical and mental torture,  
and in the face of execution and death.

Stretch out your hands in power  
to break their chains.

Be merciful to the oppressor and the torturer,  
and place a new heart within them.

Forgive all injustice in our lives,  
and transform us to be instruments of your peace,  
for by your wounds we are healed.

Amen

