



The news has been full lately of allegations about sexual misconduct. In many of the cases, the statute of limitations – or the period in which a claim can be filed - has run, meaning that the person accused can no longer be prosecuted in a court of law. The court of public opinion, however, has no such statute of limitations.

John the Baptizer testified or witnessed to the one who was to come after him, the one whose sandals he was not worthy to untie. John's witness to the people gave his personal understanding of who Jesus was and what Jesus came to do: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit". John cried out in the wilderness to all who would listen. And many came from Judea to hear him preach and to hear him proclaim – or testify- to the light. The light of the world. The one we know as Jesus the Christ.

John quotes from the prophet Isaiah. "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord.'" John had been anointed by God to be a messenger, a prophet, testifying to what God wants for the people of Israel and for us. We read in Isaiah the mandate that Jesus would later call us to:

...to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;

Echoes of the Beatitudes found in Matthew, chapter 5. It is quite clear what God is calling us to do and to be. To care for one another. To be in relationship with one another. Not to give anyone a pass for wrong behavior though. We are to hold our brothers and sisters accountable even as we acknowledge that God is the judge.

Carey Nieuwhof is a Canadian pastor who writes¹:

¹ <https://careynieuwhof.com/> (December 16, 2017)

Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24; John 1: 6-8, 19-28

I suspect the real mission of the church is relationship. It defines the vertical nature of our faith (love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength) and the horizontal essences of Christianity (love your neighbor as yourself). If anyone can get relationship right, it should be the church. So ask yourself as a church leader: what are you doing to forge the deepest relationships you can forge in this life? Nobody should be able to out-community the local church.

Don't throw unsupported allegations around. The damage of unsupported allegations to the one you accuse and to his or her family can be devastating. At the same time, we are also called to speak out when wrong is done. We do no one any good for turning aside to evil and for thinking that someone else will stand up and call out wrongdoing. God holds us accountable for what we do **and** for what we do not do.

Rather, think carefully about your own witness. Your own testimony. Do your actions, do your words, support the dignity of every human being? Remember before you answer too glibly that John the Baptizer was beheaded for his testimony.

The recent allegations around sexual misconduct basically come down to power. Who has it. Who does not. When is it appropriately used and when is it misused. And where is God in the mix?

Many of us grew up with the belief that God was an old white man with a beard sitting on a throne with a scepter in his hand that he would use to smite us when we did wrong. There was not much love or mercy with this image of God. So when bad things happened to good people, we tended to think that they deserved it. They must have done something wrong for God to permit someone to suffer. I'm hoping most of us have come to question that belief. I'm hoping most of us have come to reconsider those early understandings of God.

Debie Thomas wrote this week about this quandary²:

I no longer need God to be in control in order for him to be good. In fact, a God who wields his power as human beings typically do is not beautiful or appealing to me; he's ugly and sinister. What I need is for God to be powerful enough to remain *present*. To be Emmanuel — God with me. Weeping with me. Laughing with me. Raging with me. What I need is a God who is strong enough to place himself squarely in the hot center of my pain — not as one who remains safely anesthetized, but as one who knows the terrors of vulnerability, uncertainty, and disappointment from the inside out. The longer I live in the world, and the more I see of its suffering, the more in awe I am that the God who reveals himself in Christ has the power to remain present in the midst of so much brokenness. I certainly can't do it; I'm tempted to tune out all the time. One more “#metoo” story, one more mass shooting, one more fatal cancer diagnosis, and I am felled — numb, curled inward, and ready to run. What kind of omnipotence is this that enables our God to hold all of the world's brutality, agony, and sorrow in his heart and not fold into cynicism or despair? What kind of power fuels such amazing stamina, such

² <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/the-eighth-day/current-column?id=1572> (December 03, 2017)

Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24; John 1: 6-8, 19-28

risky hope, such healing, life-giving empathy? I can't pretend to know. All I can do is bend the knee, because *this* is a power I can live with. It's a power that accompanies, sustains, redeems, and resurrects. It's the almighty power to lay down one's life for love, no matter what the cost. All hail this power.

Each of us has power. Some is implied. That is, I have power because I wear a collar signifying ordination in our denomination. I may not like it, but I have it. And it behooves me to be aware of that implied power when talking with someone. I can take off my collar but that doesn't always mean the person I am talking to sees me differently. And thus, I have to be careful at all times to not abuse that implied power. Your power is to call me to account if I misuse that power. I count on you to be in relationship with me and with St. John's and to stand up and call out if something isn't being done that honors God and neighbor.

There is also explicit power. As a parent of a minor child, I have some explicit power. Set a bedtime. Set standards of behavior that if not complied with carry consequences. Probably not as much power as a parent that I might wish, but at least some!

And there are other types of power that relate to our ability to influence behavior and to impose consequences. Jesus has power and authority. But rather than imposing behavior and imposing consequences, Jesus uses parables, sermons and teaching to encourage us to come to believe and to behave in ways that honor God and each other. To be in relationship with the one who created us and who loves us more than we can ever understand.

As you go about your life this week, consider what types of power you have. Consider how you use that power. Do you insist on having your way when what needs to be done can be done differently than you might do it yourself? Do you speak up and call people to account, lovingly, when something isn't appropriate. God expects all of us to testify to the love that God has given us. Are you living up to God's expectations? What would be helpful to you to live that way? St. John's can help you be the person that God created you to be. Ask, and you shall receive. God's love. God's presence. God's healing. Amen.