

Hear me loud and clear – Lent 5 Merimbula

Readings: Hebrews 5:5-10; *A Thousand, a million, a trillion Tongues* by Walter Brueggemann; John 12:20-33

The problem with travel is the baggage – especially pilgrim travel. How can you expect new insights when you are weighed down lugging the past with you?

Regrets, grief and promises broken. Anger, resentment, disappointment and there's more. Pretty soon you can look at pilgrims (especially those on the Compostela) like oxen dragging wagons of bales behind them. It shows on their faces. It shows on *our* faces.

Not all promises are made aloud like in these passages. Not all scars are visible and not all outcomes are as predictable.

I had mixed feelings about the women's march last week. I felt I needed to be there but I was too far away and I was angry and sad that after 50 years – we still haven't been able to claim our own bodies or protect our daughters and now, granddaughters. If I had been there, I would have been crying. I should not have been surprised. It took 50 years to get women the right to vote in the US.

For 50 years I've been showing up at one Parliament House or another. I am angry at Scott Morrison's paternalistic tin ear. After all, boys will be boys. But it's not about some macho, protective Dad Squad...it's more than that. It's about human rights. I don't want protecting – I want freedom to live on this earth.

Rev John Squires marched in support of the women and I am confident that I stand in a room full of men who probably would have done the same.

Still, you might be shocked that statistics tell me there is probably *not* a woman in the room who at sometime wasn't harassed, molested or insulted at work because of her gender.

Many have invisible scars and the pain goes much deeper than the insult.

I had a boyfriend when I was little. He was the brother of our doctor and our neighbour. I loved him to bits and would him write love letters long before I could write. He ran a children's clothing and toy store and my mother would let me run into the shop to see him and have a cuddle. It was a small town. We saw him regularly at social occasions. I was about 3 when I fell in love.

You could say, I grew up with him as part of our life and when I was 14, he attacked me. It wasn't violent. I wasn't harmed. It was inappropriate and I was ashamed and embarrassed. I felt guilty because – after all, I loved him. By this time, he was running a children's amusement parlour. (oh yes, now adays, we would have heard the warning bells but it was an innocent time) I probably wouldn't have told anyone but when I ran out of the arcade in tears, my best friend said it had happened to her.

So I went to my father – the other man I had loved all my life.

And he didn't believe me.

You see, the man was an upstanding member of the community and my friend was untrustworthy.

And even if it was true, the man was the father of young children and a neighbour. It was best to just keep it quiet. Perhaps my father was protecting my reputation. The man died of a heart attack before any conversation took place. The men were all relieved. It was all fixed. Story over.

It wasn't the molesting that left a mark. (I guess most women and girls get used to that) It was the betrayal. That was devastating. First the man, my childhood friend, was not whom I thought. Trust was no longer a real thing. And then, my father, the man who made all things right, who loved me unconditionally... for the first time in my life – did not believe me. Looked for a quiet way to make it all disappear.

I didn't know at the time, something forever broke: Safety, home, family.

A year later, I went off to boarding school and never returned to live with my family.

When I was in my 40s, it came up in conversation with my sisters that the same man had done the same thing to them: Each as they reached puberty. This was the first time it was discussed. They did not warn the next sister down and they never told Dad.

When I was in my 60s, I realised my whole life had changed direction from that one moment onwards. Two betrayals altered my whole world view of love, friendship, home and trust.

Jesus said, believe me. Is it really so hard? When Jesus cried out to God in tears and supplications – he knew God would not take the snakes away; he would not prevent his death but he wanted it to mean something.

The crime to Ms Higgins from the assault is recoverable. It is awful and frightening but the body heals. The damage against her was perpetrated by the fixers, the

sweep-it-under-the-carpet crew, the doubt, the insult to her integrity – that is not recoverable. And it enables the next and the next and the next to happen.

Domestic violence is no longer a private matter. Cohesive behaviour is not OK but it is never discussed. And no one calls it out.

Well, the Greeks have come to Canberra. The word has spread.

Women are screaming now to be heard. Everyone has a responsibility in civil society. It is not about *protection* –

it is a society where all genders are free to walk safety home; debate publicly without their opponents using their gender as ammunition and grow to be fully human and alive as God intended. Do men really understand what it is like to live a life with one eye on our safety – *all the time?*

This is not about women's rights. It is about *Human Rights*.

John Squire says, "As people of faith, we rightly belong in the movement that is advocating and agitating, marching and calling for change, to remove ingrained injustices and show that we value women equally in every way. As we do this, we are bearing witness to the Gospel and live out its values in our lives."

And Brueggemann says "O for a thousand tongues to sing

Our great redeemer's name;

To sing beyond ourselves, extravagantly,

With abandonment,

Beyond all possibilities,

And all our fears,

And all our hopes...

We need our voices to be loud and clear. We have to make it thunder and just as Jesus said, because 'the voice had come for your sake, not for mine.' There has to be a thunder of protest that forces change. We can't march into the new Kingdom dragging all this baggage.

In today's readings Jesus is facing the truth of his destiny and is not attempting to bypass the suffering. He wants to be fully engaged in the finality of human existence. He does not turn away but asks us one thing – to believe. To believe it is worth it. To believe in Him.

You can do that!