

Introduction

For the most part I preach *Lectio Continua*—through entire books of the Bible. This week’s sermon text comes right after last week’s text. Next week’s text comes right after this week’s. This is great because it prevents me from preaching on my hobby horses. It’s also great because it forces me to preach texts and topics that I would never choose.

For example, when we went through 1–2 Timothy a couple years ago I had to preach 1 Timothy 5 in which Paul writes about money and compensation for elders who are set apart for preaching and teaching. I dreaded that sermon. It was really hard to not feel as though I were the application! I really don’t like preaching about money and giving. However! I would much rather preach that text again than have to deal with today’s text, and today’s text on this, Mother’s Day, of all days.

By God’s providence Judges 19 comes right after Judges 18 and so here we are, in an extremely dark text—the darkest of the entire book. I’ve pointed out along the way that rather than a chronology, the author offers a trajectory. He began with Othniel, who was not physically descended from Abraham yet defeated the greatest military power Israel would face in the book of Judges. Despite being an ethnic *Canaanite*, he is presented as a faithful Israelite. The author ends with Samson, who, despite being an ethnic Israelite, was the most pagan judge of all. Thus he illustrates a downward trajectory of leaders in Israel.

Then the author moves to stories of a couple Levites. These were men set apart to serve the Lord and the entire nation by supporting the work of the priests and by teaching all Israel to keep the law of Moses. The first Levite was Jonathan, the grandson of Moses himself, who helped usher in incredibly wicked worship practices in the far north of the land. By structuring the book in this way the author shows how wicked the people of Israel were, despite their beginning, despite God’s favor, despite God’s miracles shown them over and over again.

In an intentional rhetorical move, the author saves the worst for last. We come to the darkest moment of the book—a book filled with dark moments of depravity and wickedness and evil. We have the promise in the opening verses of the Gospel of John, however: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” It *cannot*. Even in this, the utter darkness of human depravity, the abyss of suffering and abuse, we will see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. We’re in Judges 19.

¹ Kgs 19:1 In those days, when there was no king in Israel, a certain Levite was sojourning in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, who took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah. ² And his concubine was unfaithful to him, and she went away from him to her father’s house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there some four months. ³ Then her husband arose and went after her, to speak kindly to her and bring her back. He had with him his servant and a couple of donkeys. And she brought him into her father’s house. And when the

girl's father saw him, he came with joy to meet him. ⁴ And his father-in-law, the girl's father, made him stay, and he remained with him three days. So they ate and drank and spent the night there. ⁵ And on the fourth day they arose early in the morning, and he prepared to go, but the girl's father said to his son-in-law, "Strengthen your heart with a morsel of bread, and after that you may go." ⁶ So the two of them sat and ate and drank together. And the girl's father said to the man, "Be pleased to spend the night, and let your heart be merry." ⁷ And when the man rose up to go, his father-in-law pressed him, till he spent the night there again. ⁸ And on the fifth day he arose early in the morning to depart. And the girl's father said, "Strengthen your heart and wait until the day declines." So they ate, both of them. ⁹ And when the man and his concubine and his servant rose up to depart, his father-in-law, the girl's father, said to him, "Behold, now the day has waned toward evening. Please, spend the night. Behold, the day draws to its close. Lodge here and let your heart be merry, and tomorrow you shall arise early in the morning for your journey, and go home."

¹⁰ But the man would not spend the night. He rose up and departed and arrived opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). He had with him a couple of saddled donkeys, and his concubine was with him. ¹¹ When they were near Jebus, the day was nearly over, and the servant said to his master, "Come now, let us turn aside to this city of the Jebusites and spend the night in it." ¹² And his master said to him, "We will not turn aside into the city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel, but we will pass on to Gibeah." ¹³ And he said to his young man, "Come and let us draw near to one of these places and spend the night at Gibeah or at Ramah." ¹⁴ So they passed on and went their way. And the sun went down on them near Gibeah, which belongs to Benjamin, ¹⁵ and they turned aside there, to go in and spend the night at Gibeah. And he went in and sat down in the open square of the city, for no one took them into his house to spend the night.

¹⁶ And behold, an old man was coming from his work in the field at evening. The man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was sojourning in Gibeah. The men of the place were Benjaminites. ¹⁷ And he lifted up his eyes and saw the traveler in the open square of the city. And the old man said, "Where are you going? And where do you come from?" ¹⁸ And he said to him, "We are passing from Bethlehem in Judah to the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, from which I come. I went to Bethlehem in Judah, and I am going to the house of the LORD, but no one has taken me into his house. ¹⁹ We have straw and feed for our donkeys, with bread and wine for me and your female servant and the young man with your servants. There is no lack of anything." ²⁰ And the old man said, "Peace be to you; I will care for all your wants. Only, do not spend the night in the square." ²¹ So he brought him into his house and gave the donkeys feed. And they washed their feet, and ate and drank.

²² As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, worthless fellows, surrounded the house, beating on the door. And they said to the old man, the master of the house, "Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him." ²³ And the man, the master of the house, went

out to them and said to them, “No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly; since this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing.”²⁴ Behold, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine. Let me bring them out now. Violate them and do with them what seems good to you, but against this man do not do this outrageous thing.”²⁵ But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine and made her go out to them. And they knew her and abused her all night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go.²⁶ And as morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man’s house where her master was, until it was light.

²⁷ And her master rose up in the morning, and when he opened the doors of the house and went out to go on his way, behold, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold.²⁸ He said to her, “Get up, let us be going.” But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey, and the man rose up and went away to his home.²⁹ And when he entered his house, he took a knife, and taking hold of his concubine he divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel.³⁰ And all who saw it said, “Such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day; consider it, take counsel, and speak.”

Judges 19:1–30

Social Breakdown

While the depth of depravity on display in the book of Judges is shocking, perhaps the most shocking thing is how quickly the depravity permeated every part of Israelite society. We tend to think Israel started out generally good, with rocky moments, particularly in the wilderness, and then over a few centuries progressively fell away from the Lord. That is not how it happened. The people never really seemed to be *with* the Lord in order to fall *away* from him!

Under Moses there seemed to be a general national righteousness. That is, for the most part, the people seemed to follow the Lord and obey him. *-ish*. We’ve seen in the story of Jonathan the grandson of Moses this is not the case. Our text this morning, despite being chapter 19, takes place in that first generation in the land, the one right after Joshua.

Moses’ generation died in the wilderness. The generation after them entered the land and later died. The very next generation, the first generation in the land, did not know the Lord and abandoned him and worshiped and served the gods of the Canaanites—the very gods they were supposed to root out of the land. We see this in their direct worship of these gods, in bowing down to idols. We see it in the social breakdown among the people as well.

Verse 1 says in those days—that first generation of people in the land—a certain Levite was sojourning in the hill country of Ephraim. He traveled to Bethlehem in Judah to find a concubine. A concubine is a secondary wife—greater than a slave but less than a full wife. Thus we see even the Levites, the men who were supposed to teach the people about YHWH God of Israel were corrupt.

One day his concubine leaves him. The ESV renders this as “was unfaithful to him”, but this does not mean she was unfaithful in *that* sense. A few scholars point out that in the

law of Moses there is no category for a wife divorcing her husband so the author uses the language of unfaithfulness to describe her leaving her husband.

Interestingly the man pursued her. In verse 3 he traveled to her father's home "to speak kindly to her". Given his contempt for her and utter disregard for her later in the story, he is not a lovesick puppy who misses having her around for the butterflies he gets in his belly. He's almost certainly abusive to her, likely in multiple ways, and like many abusers he will say whatever he has to say to get her to come home.

Her father entices the man to stay for four days, eating and drinking and having a great time. Does he have any real concern for his daughter? Or is he worried the man might divorce her and he would have to return the bride price for her? We can't know! Everything that should be is already so out of wack there's simply no way we can accurately measure motivations in this horrendous story.

As with Gideon and Abimelech and Jephthah and Samson and Moses' grandson Jonathan, the social breakdown of Israel is staggering. Even basic standards regarding marriage are overturned and ignored.

Observations

Rather than walk through this sordid tale step by step, I want to make some observations about the story. The man and his concubine left late in the day. They found themselves near Jerusalem—a non-Israelite city at that time—and while they needed shelter he refused to go there, not wanting to stay "in a city of foreigners". Ancient Near Eastern hospitality likely would have kept them safe there, mind you, for the cultural expectation was that you would allow no harm to guests. Instead of seeking shelter among non-Israelites, they move on.

In verse 14 the author says, "And the sun went down on them". That is, darkness descended—both literally and metaphorically. They found themselves near Gibeah, which was a city in the territory of Benjamin. The city square should have been a safe place for them. Since it had a city square it would have been a larger city and larger cities usually had walls and a gate that would be closed at night. They should have been safe in an Israelite city square. A farmer who lived there knew otherwise. Verse 15 indicates the depth of the problem: "no one took them into his house to spend the night". They were even going against their own *cultural* norms!

The author indicated in verse 14 that Gibeah "belongs to Benjamin". It is a Benjamite town, belonging to the tribe of Benjamin. In verse 16 he doubles down: "The men of the place were Benjamites". They are Israelites from the tribe of Benjamin. *They are God's people.*

The farmer invited the Levite and his concubine and servant to spend the night with him. In verse 22 they were having a great time, laughing and drinking and swapping stories. Then "men of the city, worthless fellows" showed up. The expression "worthless fellows" is staggering, considering who these men are: they are Israelites from the tribe of Benjamin. One scholar said the expression means "those who were so irredeemably wicked that they are kin to the realm of death and decay". *These are God's people.*

When these men demand the farmer send out the Levite, they aren't filled with lust. We tend to read that into the text as their primary motivation. Instead, as with most assaults

of this nature, they are filled with violence. They want to violate and they want to shame and they want to oppress. They're filled with another kind of lust, a lust for perpetrating pure evil on others.

Being an Ancient Near Eastern man, the farmer knows he cannot allow his guests—er, *guest*—to be harmed. By taking him into his home he was assuming responsibility for him. He was right to refuse. Well, almost right. Instead of the man he offered his own daughter and the man's wife. When he says, "do what seems good to you", we hear echoes of "every man did that which was right in his own eyes". Sadly, this often means great evil and wickedness, as it does in this case.

The men won't accept the alternative offered by the farmer so the Levite grabbed his concubine and pushed her out the door. He and the farmer then returned to their eating and drinking and story-swapping. The violence perpetrated by the men of Gibeah is shockingly brutal. The violence perpetrated *by the Levite* is shockingly brutal in its cold-hearted callousness. This is the same man who pursued her to her father's house, who endeavored *to speak kindly to her*. It was all a lie, of course.

Broken and beaten the woman tried to return to the safest place she could reach, a place that was not safe at all. She collapsed on the doorstep with her arms outreached, not even having the strength to knock, having endured hell for an entire night. Without any regard for her welfare whatsoever, the man got up in the morning and prepared to leave. The author says in verse 27, "her master rose up in the morning". Her master? Doesn't he mean her husband, the one who would speak kindly to her? No; to the Levite she was but a servant, one who existed to do his will.

In a truly craven display he stepped over her body and simply said, "Get up; it's time to go". Realizing she was dead he took her body back home with him. The man was a Levite. He was headed to the tabernacle to assist the priests in their work. Part of this assistance was in butchering animals for sacrifice. Only priests could *offer* the sacrifice but being a Levite the man would have been skilled in separating a carcass with a knife.

The man used this skill to dismember the body and then sent parts all over Israel—one part to each tribe. Even in death he utterly disregarded this woman who was his wife. The purpose of sending the parts all over is not directly stated but in the Ancient Near East this was often a call to arms. We see this in 1 Samuel 11. There, Saul is king when an Israelite city is attacked. To muster an army to fight against the Ammonites, Saul butchers two oxen and sends pieces to each of the twelve tribes with a message that said, "Come fight for me or this will be your oxen".

This seems to be the Levite's purpose as we will see next week. His regard, however, is not for his wife. It has never been. It was always and only for himself. He lost something. Something—a mere *thing*—was taken from him and for that he will have vengeance, and the irony is it wasn't actually taken: he shoved "it" out the door. He bears all the guilt the men of the town bear.

Abuse

This is the story the book of Judges ends with, a story of a man's utter disregard for his wife, of society's utter disregard for women in general and for all those without power. In chapter 20 Israel goes to war with itself over these events. In chapter 21 Israel continues to

deal with the fall-out of that war over these events. It's not surprising that the book ends with the words, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes". This is what we're seeing in lurid detail.

Human history shows that when restraint is lifted, when custom and propriety and any sense of responsibility toward others is lifted, people suffer—especially women. The author shows this downward spiral. In the opening pages of this book Achsah, Caleb's daughter, is held up as a wise and prudent woman in Israel. Deborah is presented as a willing and capable leader among her people. Jael is the real hero of the story, who uses her feminine strengths to bring victory to God's people.

As Israel spirals downward we see Jephthah's daughter sacrificed on the altar of her father's ambition. We see this morning's text with its utter disregard for real suffering and real harm brought against women, both by strangers and by their own husbands.

When men are men and at their best, they *protect* women. They protect the poor, the needy, the vulnerable, the outcast, the hurting. When men are at their worst they are selfish and abusive. This story is the great shame of Israel, and it happened in that first generation. In fact, centuries later the prophet Hosea denounced this very event.

Hos 9:9 They have deeply corrupted themselves as in the days of Gibeah: he will remember their iniquity; he will punish their sins.

(and again)

Hos 10:9 From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel; there they have continued. ~~Shall not the war against the unjust overtake them in Gibeah?~~

Hosea 9:10; 10:9a

God hated what happened at Gibeah so much that when he warned Israel they would be taken into exile for their sins, he pointed them back to *this incident*, though it happened centuries earlier. Church, *God hates abuse*. God hates power being corrupted into a thing that brings harm rather than flourishing. When all Israel bowed down to idols and worshiped false gods, the Lord, the God of Israel told them they had been sinning in this way *since Gibeah*—since the men of that town harmed a woman during that very first generation in the land.

Because God hates abuse we will not tolerate it. If, *God forbid!*, if it were to happen here we would not cover it up or seek to downplay it. If we were to do that, we would find ourselves standing opposed to God himself, and that is not a battle we want to fight. We want to be on the Lord's side, and—hear me!—God *hates* abuse! And so must we. When churches and entire denominations cover up abuse, those churches are standing toe-to-toe with God, directly opposing him. They cannot win.

Sex was designed by God to be a pure and holy expression of intimacy between a husband and wife. This is what makes marriage distinct from all other relationships. What makes marriage unique isn't love or fidelity or commitment, for surely parents and children and siblings and friends can love one another and be committed to one another. What makes marriage unique is it is the only relationship designed by God to be sexual.

When we read a story like this we can't help but be horrified and repulsed that something created by God to be holy and pure can be twisted and distorted in such a way that it is evil. This is why certain sins, and especially sexual sins, can illuminate the darkness of sin in a way that check fraud or gossip cannot.

The sort of abuse we see in our text is a direct assault on the image of God in humans. These true stories of human depravity provide the opportunity to see what God is rescuing us from. When we read in chapter 2 that the generation that followed Joshua did not know the Lord and abandoned him to worship other gods, it's easy for us to assume this simply means they chose the wrong religion. They didn't merely choose the wrong religion. By rejecting the Creator they rejected his *created order*. Rather than receive what he had given, they immediately began grasping for what they wanted, and so "every man did what was right in his own eyes", and others suffered for it.

This ugly story puts into perspective the ugliness, the brutality, the wicked desecration that sin brings. It's not that certain sins are much more heinous than others. It's that certain sins reveal the true heinousness of sin. Cheating on your taxes and passing on a bit of gossip doesn't quite grip us in our *sin-o-meter* so we come to a text like ours this morning and we see just how evil sins such as gossip really are.

The True Husband

We don't like to look our sin in the eye. It's ugly and grotesque. Texts like this one force us to look it in the eye. The problem is if we don't look sin in the eye, if we don't acknowledge it for what it is, we will miss the beauty of the cross. We will miss what washes us cleaner than snow. We will miss the true Bridegroom, the true Husband. We will miss the gospel in this text!

When the men of Gibeah reject the farmer's depraved offer, the Levite man realizes he's in danger. Rather than act according to his God-ordained role in this world, that of protecting others, he cast his own wife to the wolves. To save himself he offered his own wife into the hands of lawless men. Church, hear the gospel: when Jesus was facing the hands of lawless men, he offered himself up to them. He did not throw his bride to the wolves; he allowed wicked and evil men to lay their hands on him and kill him. This is what the apostle Peter meant on the day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Acts 2:23

Rather than throw his sinful, idolatrous bride to the wolves, Jesus handed himself over to them. Rather than make her suffer, Jesus took her suffering. This is what the prophet Isaiah said would happen, that he would bear *our* griefs, and would carry *our* sorrows. He was crushed for *our* iniquities and with his wounds *we* are healed.

We must understand that in this scenario, we are not innocent bystanders caught up in the wickedness and depravity of other people. We are the perpetrators. We may not commit crimes like those in our text, but those in our text reveal the true ugliness of pride and envy and laziness and gossip and greed. This text shows us the depth of our own sin when we act like Israelites, like those who do what is right in their own eyes.

The truth of the gospel shines into this darkness, however, and offers us hope. The judges were supposed to represent the coming King, the one who would rescue God's people from sin and death, and as we've seen, they were but shadows of the King. Still, we see the

King's shadow. We see that God is at work among his people, in the midst of their profound depravity. In their day the King had not yet come. God must sustain his people until that day would come.

He has come. God took on human form and lived among us, living the life we were supposed to live. He then gave himself over to the hands of lawless men. They didn't force anything on him! He *gave himself over to them!* After Peter cut off the ear of the high priest's servant and Jesus healed the man, he said to his disciples, "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?"

Think about that. In 2 Kings 19 a single angel struck down 185,000 Assyrian troops in a single night. What would more than 72,000 angels do to this group of men come to arrest Jesus? At no point were things outside Jesus' control and completely out of his hands. *He gave himself up for us.* He did not send us to die; he died in our place. This is the gospel! This is good news! And hear this: it is good news *for today!* The gospel is not some pie-in-the-sky promise for the future, for eternal life begins *now*. The gospel is good news *right now*.

When the Philistines captured David in the city of Gath, David composed Psalm 56. It begins this way:

Ps 56:1 Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me...

Psalm 56:1

David is captured and cries out to God for grace. He is being attacked and harmed and oppressed by evil men and David looks to the Lord. He goes on to say this:

Ps 56:8 You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? ⁹ Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me. ¹⁰ In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise, ¹¹ in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?

Psalm 56:8–11

David says God has tracked him as he has wandered, hiding from his enemies. Even more, God has put David's tears in his bottle. God has recorded each and every one of them! Every moment of his suffering, every cry he utters, every tear he sheds, every moment of ache and pain David endures, God knows. God tracks. David understands here that there will be justice. His suffering is not overlooked. It is not forgotten. Why God allows it we cannot know, but like David, it is in the Lord we trust. Like David we can know God has never harmed him. God has never wronged him. God has never sinned against him. And through it all God remains trustworthy.

Application

Here's the promise in the midst of such an ugly episode in Judges: suffering will end. I cannot tell you how many times I've cited the following text from Revelation in a sermon, but it's such a significant and hope-filled promise our church is named from it! The apostle John saw the outcome of this world and our salvation.

Rev 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

Revelation 21:1–4

It is so easy to miss the imagery. When the Lord Jesus returns he will recreate the heavens and the earth. They will be new in *quality*, not *quantity*. That is, it will be *this earth*, but remade, not another earth that replaces this one. Then the new city, the new Jerusalem, the place where God himself dwells, will come down to the new earth and John sees God’s people “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband”.

It is so easy to miss the imagery. In Ephesians Paul says God created marriage to be a picture of Christ and the church. The one-flesh intimacy shared by a husband and wife illustrates for us the intimacy God desires of us. On the new earth the physical act of marriage will be gone but the intimacy it reveals will be there forever, God with us and us with God. Our union with Christ will be complete.

John says the people of God wait with anticipation. We long for this union. We await the fullness of our salvation like a bride awaits her husband, filled with longing and desire, ready to give herself to him fully and completely. This is why the act of marriage is so holy and so pure! It points us to a precious reality and we must not mess with the picture!

See the outcome of this union with Christ: one day God himself will wipe away every tear from every eye. He doesn’t wipe them away in the sense that we will completely forget the reason for those tears. Instead, he will purify them, he will redeem them, he will rescue those tears—the very tears he has been collecting and cataloging, that there might be true justice for them.

In John 8 there is that story of a woman who was caught in adultery. I’m not suggesting in any way she is similar to the woman in our text; I’m emphasizing the Savior here. This particular woman was making a mockery of the picture that marriage represents. She was brought out in public to be stoned for it. The thing is, you cannot commit adultery by yourself. It is impossible. Once again we see that when men go bad, it is usually women who suffer.

What did Jesus say to the people who wanted to stone her? “Let him who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Church, there was a man there who was without sin! There was a man present, a holy man, one who is truly righteous and holy, one who was in all ways *without sin*, yet what did Jesus do? He didn’t pick up a stone! Instead of condemning her, Jesus speaks softly and tenderly to her and pours out mercy and grace on her when he says to her, “From now on, sin no more”. He calls her to holiness! But he does so with incredible mercy.

Do you see the tender mercy of God? If you have been harmed in any way, I am sorry. Whether a man or a woman, whether yourself or someone close and dear to you, I am truly

sorry for what you have suffered. God has collected every tear. He has cataloged them. There will be justice for each and every tear when he wipes them all away. On that day even the shame we bear, whether for things done to us or for things done by us, our shame will be forever wiped away. One day there will be no more mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

God will not simply sweep them under the rug and say, “Let’s let bygones be bygones”. The truth is this is what the Lord Jesus was bearing on the cross. He suffered our shame as he hung there naked and exposed, with his flesh torn, his feet and wrists penetrated by iron nails, appearing to hold him in place with violent ferocity—only, it wasn’t the nails holding him there. It was love.

Reading through this text, we need to understand that this unnamed Levite represents the entire tribe. Not only did one man act like this but God is showing the reader the entire tribe of Levi is corrupt. This tribe whose sole duty was to be caretakers of the tabernacle and be priests for the entire people of God, to act as mediators between God and man, to offer acceptable sacrifices on behalf of Israel to God, was corrupt.

It’s too easy to be focused solely on the horrific sin and evil perpetrated in this passage. The problem is if we do that, we will miss the need for Jesus as the True Priest who offers himself to a vile and violent end at the hands of *worthless fellows*. He doesn’t just offer a sacrifice; he becomes one! We often side with the victim in the story. This is good. This is empathy. Empathy is good, actually.

We forget that we are also the “worthless fellows” in the story. It’s our sinful rebellion perpetrated on the innocent Jesus that reveals our need for a Savior. We don’t want to think of that, but that is what makes the rescue so beautiful and breathtaking! Instead of calling to be rescued and instead of throwing out his bride, Jesus purposefully and intentionally rescued us at the cross. He didn’t reach for safety at the door frame; he had to be carried into his tomb—but he didn’t need help walking out of it. His resurrection shows us his death isn’t a call to arms. It’s a call to life eternal to all the people of God!

No, this is not a traditional Mother’s Day sermon. We’ve never done that. We do not observe cultural holidays in our gathered assembly, but in a text where it is a woman the world has overlooked, abandoned and treated shamefully, we see God didn’t forget her suffering; he remembers. We see God didn’t abandon her to her misery; he provided a way out of death. We see God did not treat her shamelessly; he gave her honor by covering her shame with his righteousness at the cross. This is the hope we have in Christ.