



Wednesday Prayer

21st Sunday after Pentecost – Think you know all the answers?

Jesus said to them, "...to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." Mark 10:39-40

We who work to end sexual violence may feel we fully understand both victim/survivor and offender. I abandoned this false premise after speaking to 250 convicted sex offenders at the Minnesota Prison-Based Sex Offender Treatment Program (SOTP) during Victim Impact Week a few years ago. As a survivor of a sexual assault at gunpoint myself, I smugly believed I knew all about these offenders. I wanted to share my miracle story of God saving me from certain death. I could not have been more naïve about my audience!

I was told these men committed sexual assault for many reasons, but the understanding of the causes and origins of sexually abusive behavior remains elusive. All participants are male. Each must admit he did wrong, and each must pledge to help end sexual violence upon release. Not everyone in the two-year program "graduates" and gets released on their first try. Most receive counseling services daily.

I heard the heavy metal prison gates close behind me and soon stood before a very diverse group of men: young and old, from many ethnic groups and backgrounds, all dressed in prison garb but mostly just looking like ordinary guys. My message was the same as always: how life-altering the experience had been of first being sexually violated, and then being revictimized by a broken system of response. But I was humbled by my inaccurate expectations of my audience.

In Mark 10, James and John asked Jesus to let them sit at his right and left hand in heaven, not realizing the magnitude of what they asked. As their friend, they believed Jesus would be just fine granting their request. But they didn't know what they were asking. Jesus made it clear to them, and later to the other disciples who were annoyed at James' and John's hubris, that places of honor before God were set aside "for those for whom they have been prepared".

We as crusaders in the quest to end sexual violence must be realistic about the complex nature of the work we do. Just as James and John overestimated their ability to know Jesus, we must not overestimate our abilities and be open to learning about sexual offenders. One way to increase awareness and facilitate healing communication for those who have been harmed and those causing harm is "Restorative Justice," or RJ. According to the Minnesota Department of Justice website, this innovative process seeks to have the offender acknowledge harm, accept responsibility, and make reasonable amends. The guidance of a trained RJ counselor is essential. To learn more, visit <https://mn.gov/doc/victims/restorative-justice/>.

God of Justice, help us broaden our understanding of sexual offenders so we are able to help victim/survivors in more meaningful ways. Amen.

Written by Meg Corrigan, Christian author, speaker and survivor. Visit www.MegCorrigan.com.