

## Overwhelmed

From the Bible: Genesis 1: 27 and 31, Philippians 4:8-9

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Maybe we begin here.  
With my saying I feel angry.  
And embarrassed.  
And ashamed.  
Overwhelmed.

By both the words and the cavalier attitude on the recently released video of Donald Trump talking to Billy Bush about women. Besides the uproar it has created in presidential politics, the truth is those few minutes of video also reflect something deeper and more pervasive in our culture which we need to acknowledge and to name and to talk about and to come to grips with. Let me be clear, what I am asking you to think about with me this morning is not about politics. Or, more correctly, it is about much more than politics. It is about what happens everyday at school and in churches and at work and in the grocery store.

In addition to feeling overwhelmed by the video, I was also overwhelmed...  
And angry and embarrassed and ashamed by some of the response to what was seen and said. I feel angry that, too easily, this attitude and this type of language is written off as locker room banter which it is not, but even if it was it would be wrong. I am embarrassed and ashamed by the way the complicated meaning and experience of forgiveness and repentance is being bantered around by fellow clergy and religious leaders who should know better. Their attitudes and comments only add to the long list of reasons so many shake their head and turn their back on a faith and a tradition which means so much to me and shapes so much of who I am and how I try to live.

But mostly, I am overwhelmed by the reality of the circumstances in which women and girls find themselves. And embarrassed and ashamed that while on one hand I realized it, on the other hand I really did not know in that I knew in my head, but not in my gut. Here is what I mean.

- A 2011 article in the [New York Times](#) reported that 1 in 5 women, 20%, have been victims of sexual assault.
- A February 2015 article in [The Huffington Post](#) reported that 1 in 3 women, ages 18-34, have been sexually harassed at work.
- A [United Nations study](#) found that in the United States 83% of girls 12-16 have experienced some form of sexual harassment either in person or online.

And, there is more.

In an NPR report [One Tweet Unleashes A Torrent of Stories of Sexual Assault](#), writer Kelly Oxford shared her story of the first time she was sexually assaulted. She was 12, she said, when a man on a city bus grabbed her genitals and smiled. After she told her story, she invited other women to share their stories, as well. In the two days following, she received more than 13,000 tweets from other women sharing their experiences of sexual abuse or harassment, many of them doing so for the first time.

But it is not just about out there.

On a city bus or captured on a hot mic.

In response to the video and the ensuing whirlwind, on Friday, having never said anything about it before, a clergy colleague of mine shared how she was sexually assaulted at a church event.

And on [her blog](#), Jan Edmiston who is a Presbyterian minister and currently the co-Moderator of the Presbyterian Church's General Assembly, wrote about sexual harassment in the church.

Included in what she wrote was this: *"I've been informally asking young clergywomen if men still make inappropriate comments to them and I hear a resounding yes."*

Overwhelmed.

And, angry and embarrassed and ashamed.

Because, just going by statistics, it has happened to some of you.

And, to your mothers and sisters and wives and daughters.

As the Apostle Paul wrote, *"In the face of all of this, what am I to say..."*

Despite the knot in my stomach and the lump in my throat, here is what I believe.

I believe as human beings

As men

As Christians

As a church

We can be better and can do better.

We must be better and must do better.

Both wondering why this even needs to be said and also knowing why it needs to be said, Jim Wallis, of the Sojourners Community in Washington D.C. [wrote](#):

*"Women are human beings made in the image of God regardless of their relationship to a man. This isn't a woman's issue; it's a human issue. Women don't need protection from men; women need men to stop being predators, enablers and bystanders."*

In response to our email exchange earlier in the week, Megan Hansen wrote this and posted it on our congregation's Facebook page this morning and from it created the graphic for the front of the bulletin. Megan wrote:

*It's Sunday*

*Time to think about what really matters*

*What is true*

*What is good*

*What looks like the Kingdom of God  
But when we leave this place,  
We don't always watch our words so carefully  
They slip out  
As if they don't matter at all  
Because we live in a world  
Where it doesn't seem to matter what we say  
People say whatever they want  
Careless words  
Ugly words  
Jokes that aren't funny  
And it isn't stopped  
It is even defended  
But our words do matter  
They can hurt or they can heal  
They can be true or they can cast lies as truth  
They can build up or tear down  
They can be full of love or full of hate  
As we leave this place  
Let us watch our words  
Let us put more beauty into the world  
To overwhelm the ugly  
The untrue  
The destructive  
More love  
More truth  
More peace  
It's Sunday*

We, you and I, especially those of us who are male, need to stop being bystanders.

As I said when I began, this is not about politics.

It is about what women and girls, our wives and sisters and mothers and daughters, experience each and every day in our culture. And, I am sorry to say, that for far too long the church has been and continues to be complicit in creating and sustaining that culture. We are the ones who need to repent of that and to change our ways. In whatever way we can we are to stand strong on the side of what is honorable and just and faithful. We are to teach and defend and empower both our young women and our young men. And, we are to rebuke the lies and the language and the attitudes and the actions which demean and belittle and destroy.

While it has not always been easy, I have always believed that if you hear it or read it in the headlines in the news, we should be able to talk about it in this space. As I thought about the events of the last week I wondered about the possibility of getting our middle school youth and our high school youth together. Boys in one room. Girls in another. And show them the

videotape and engage them in a conversation. And then to bring them together and to help them talk about expectations and image and respect and what they can do to support and to help and to care for each other. And, it is important for those of you who have children younger than mine to have the same conversation with your sons and your daughters. And, the rest of us, no matter what our age or the age of our children or grandchildren, need to have the very same conversation, as well.

Maybe the video is too much or the language too offensive, but the conversation is crucial. Let us figure out how to have it and what we might do so we can build up rather than tear down. So that our words and our actions and our very presence affirms the humanity and the dignity of each and every human being and we begin to live in ways which overwhelm the ugly, the untrue, the destructive with more love, more truth, more justice and more peace.