

**Me Too**  
UU Church of Spokane  
Women's Retreat  
September 30, 2018  
Isabel Call

**Homily**

(About 70 women in attendance, sitting in a circle by age)

This is a big circle. But it's even bigger than the women we see gathered here. I invite you to call into your mind now the women and girls in your life who are not physically present. Where in this circle do they belong? Whose hands are they holding? Take a look around, and in your imagination, invite them in. Do a little warping of time and space to squeeze them into this circle, exactly comfortable, sitting next to their age-mates. And now what about all the women and girls in *their* lives? You don't know them, but invite them into the circle too. And the women and girls in *their* lives. And the girls and women whose hands have woven the clothes you're wearing. The girls and women who have tilled the soil out of which our food was grown. And here, between the youngest and oldest woman in our circle, the many many ancestors whose bodies make up that soil. All the future ancestors whose bodies will grow because the food their mothers eat from this soil.

This is a big circle. A powerful circle.

Before you let go of each other's hands, sit quietly for a moment and reflect on what this circle has offered you this weekend. What did you come here to experience? What did you receive? What are you still longing for? Let these questions and their answers simply *be* for a moment.

Amen.

(Feel free to continue holding hands or not.)

I have a message to share with you today, one that I brought with me from the outside world and have allowed to steep in the community we've created here. The title for my message is: Me Too.

Me too, with an emphasis on solidarity, not the terrible things going on in the world that require our solidarity and ongoing resistance.

Me too: the power of speaking our individual truths and feeling them reverberate through other women's stories. The power of believing ourselves enough to speak the truth, and then believing each other. And being believed.

As we leave the sacred refuge we have created here, we are returning to a world full of hazards. We should not have to put armor on to step back into our lives, into the news cycle. But many of us *do* have to put on armor. Me too. *This* is a liminal moment, where we *may* still be relatively armor-free, willing to be vulnerable, able to speak freely... but out of self-love, we may soon pull back, collect ourselves into the shapes that sustain us in a sometimes hostile world.

I acknowledge this process, and also the courageous work we each do to stay open in our lives, to stay connected to each other, to keep listening, keep celebrating, keep romping around in our fabulosity.

One of the requests I received for this worship service was to bring hope. Now, a little bit of hope is almost always good medicine. In *this* moment in history, it's essential. And *thankfully*, there is an abundance of reasons to hope. The *Me Too* movement is top of my list this week.

Me Too was started by Tarana Burke, an African American woman who had worked for decades with young people. This was before Me Too got its hashtag. It was 2007 and Tarana Burke was living and working in the southern US. Here are her words about it, from an interview on Democracy Now:

As a survivor of sexual violence myself, as a person who was struggling trying to figure out what healing looked like for me, I also saw young people, and particularly young women of color, in the community I worked with, struggling with the same issues and trying to find a succinct way to show empathy... "Me Too" is so powerful, because somebody had said it to me—right?—and it changed the trajectory of my healing process once I heard that.

It changed the trajectory of my healing process when I heard, "Me too."

There are so many places in this world where people who are harmed, women especially, and especially women of color, are not listened to. And so it is a profound act of resistance, of life-giving, to tell a story that touches someone else's painful truth. We give each other life by seeking each other out to hear our stories. By sharing our stories of healing with another woman or girl, we communicate that we trust *her* to tell her story.

It is, of course, no accident that we didn't hear about Me Too in 2007 when Tarana Burke started it. The injustices of racism and classism are layered in there with the injustice of misogyny. But thank Goddess we *did* hear about Me Too. Finally, momentum gathered. We are a movement, and we are moving.

But why now? Why have we waited so long?

There are some answers to this question in the podcast Hidden Brain. In it, we hear the story of Maia Ermansons, a young woman who accused a family friend and famous playwright, Israel Horovitz, of serious sexual misconduct in 2016. Very quickly afterwards, he was disgraced. Theater companies dropped his plays and he had to resign from the board of his own theater company.

But what's shocking is that nothing in Maia Ermansons' story was news. Twenty-four years earlier, a group of women shared very similar stories in a Boston newspaper. *Nothing* happened.

Actually, not nothing. A "whisper network" came into being. Word of mouth, woman-to-woman: Don't take that job. Don't be alone with him. But years had gone by, and women speaking out had been shut down over and over again. In the words of Hidden Brain host Shankar Vedantam, "The whisper network had turned thready and faint." After Maia Ermansons' experience with Israel Horovitz, after she seethed with rage and punched a hole in her wall, she called her friends. And she called her mother. Her mother dug up the old news stories. It was in reading them, seeing her own story in the words of other women, that Maia says, "something changed inside me." The trajectory of her healing process changed.

And then one day, [these are Maia's words] I saw on Instagram... a post of Israel in rehearsal, on stage for the play they were working on. And it was captioned The Man at Work, with a bunch of hashtags like #genius, #lovethetheater. I got so livid. I couldn't *believe* it.

That's when she posted her account of what happened to her on Facebook. But she wasn't ready to name Israel Horovitz. Until... news broke about then-candidate Trump's bragging about sexual assault. And then, as we know, he won the election. On November 9, 2016, Maia went back to her Facebook post and put a name to her assaulter. The whisper network, revived, but this time on "high octane."

Maia also called the *New York Times*. And in so doing, she took him down.

Why now? Are we empowered because of Trump? Hell no. This fire in my belly is not gratitude. Certainly not gratitude toward Trump. No, this is a steady confidence in women and empathy. This is a fierce intuition that the men who *dare* to harm women, people who dare to harm the vulnerable... their time has come. We who have been waiting have *not* been waiting passively and *will* not relax our hold on truth. We who have been harmed are finding each other, and no power can interrupt the momentum of solidarity.

The women who risked their careers and reputations to unmask Israel Horovitz in the 1990s did not fail. Their long-awaited victory emerged through Maia. And through the countless other women who have heard Maia's story and decided they, too, could do something about the menacing men in their lives. Our resistant foremothers didn't fail. They laid the path for us to

decide that we, too, could resist. We, too, can unmask our aggressors, assaulters, harassers, oppressors. In our own time, in our own gentle careful brave way, we too can find a trustworthy person, or several, or several hundred, to tell our story.

Me too.

This past week was a hearing in which Christine Blasey Ford, literally shaking but nonetheless standing deeply in her truth, unmasked Brett Kavanaugh. She told her story in an inhospitable setting and she's using a clunky oppressive bullshit tool in order to create justice, namely our federal government. Audre Lorde tells us that the tools that built the master's house cannot be used to dismantle it. I would not dare disagree with Audre Lorde. And yet it is a conundrum, when the words we speak were coined by men, the land we stand on stolen by men, even the shapes we hold in our bodies conditioned by the needs of generations of men, controlling the actions of women. Sometimes it feels like every tool in the toolbox is the master's tool.

But what I see embodied in the presence of Christine Blasey Ford in front of our judges and senators, and what I hope for, is that we are using the master's tools to build new tools, better tools. Better yet, we are reclaiming *our* tools, the tools of our foremothers, wrought from their struggle to bring life to the world, tools stolen from these fierce able women over the course of history. We are removing them from the hands of our oppressors. We are transforming them from the weapons they've become, into instruments of love.

The recent hubbub in Washington, D.C., has been called a circus. But it's a *hearing*, and we're listening. We don't know the end of the story for *this* news cycle, but we have the power to listen, and in listening, we claim our place the circle of women who hold each other's truths.

We hold each other's truths.

We are returning to a world full of hazards. But as we leave this place of refuge, we are not leaving this circle. As we close, I invite you to make eye contact with a woman across the circle from you. (Raise your hand if you haven't found someone's eyes.) Holding her gaze, find the hands of the women sitting next to you. This woman across from you is of a different generation. She has wisdom for you, wrought from her own life. Perhaps she has lived longer than you, seen history you've only read about. Perhaps she is younger than you, tuned into a high-octane whisper network you don't know enough about. With your eyes, without the bother of words, tell her your truth. If you don't know exactly what that is yet, tell her about your search. With your hands, feel and hold her truth coming to you, through the bodies of so many truth-tellers and truth holders.

This is what we were made for.

Amen, blessed be, ah-salaam aleykum, ashay, shalom.

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## References

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