

There is, I believe, a significant shift happening in American culture. The change that I have been thinking of is predicated by the so called, “Me Too” movement. Since last October, mostly women have been coming forward to speak of inappropriate sexual advances, up to and including rape being made to them by men who had power over them in the work place.

We all know the names of some very rich and powerful and famous men who have been brought down by this movement. The behaviors of these predators when made public make me sick, and I know I am not alone in this.

I have asked many of the women in my life about their experiences and most of them confirmed that it has happened to them. One woman that I spoke to had a famous baseball player sexually assault her. She reported it to the major-league team that he played for. This was many years ago and the team said things like, ‘what were you wearing? Were you drinking? And you do not want to pursue this, our lawyers will pick you apart.’ That is a reason women were reluctant to report this behavior. The culture was that women brought this on themselves.

Even now that the movement has taken hold, perpetrators issue blanket denials and talk about ‘mere allegations’ and due process. When you look at the numbers of women that have come forward in some of these cases of famous men, denials become hollow and due process becomes completely unnecessary.

It looks like the ‘me too movement’ has moved the culture beyond that Neanderthal thinking. One would hope that perpetrators of this sort of thing that are not rich and famous but have some power, say a male boss with female subordinates, will make changes and stop the behavior.

It begs the question, ‘Why does someone do this sort of thing?’ I believe it is more about power than about sex. John Dahlberg, also known as Lord Acton, wrote “Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely. Most great men are bad men.” He was speaking specifically of Napoleon Bonaparte. The temptations that power brings can corrupt people into immoral and even abusive behavior. Here we are back at temptation again.

This sort of corruption of power was evident to Dahlberg in Napoleon but it has been around a lot longer than that. Our passage from Second Samuel about King David and Bathsheba is a classic example. It should be said that King David is the David of David and Goliath fame. Moses is considered the greatest of the Hebrew leaders,

but David is considered to be the greatest of the Hebrew kings. This story shows that David was a great but flawed man.

It is a classic case. A man of great power knowingly bedded a married woman. Then basically had her husband killed so he could take her as his wife. So, we see that this sort of abuse of power that somehow connects to sex has been part of the human condition for a long, long, time. As the estimable Ron Putt said in Bible study recently, "There's nothing new here."

A prayer here is that now that women are being treated credibly in the 'me too movement,' men who are inclined to this behavior might realize it is their career that will be threatened and will stop. I hope all thinking men and women who do have a moral compass will do an inventory of their lives and reflect on what they may have said or done. I know I have.

We can again turn to our Jewish brethren for guidance. The period between Roshashona and Yom Kippur is a time for the 'book to be open.' That is, they go to the people in their world to ask for forgiveness for any trespasses they might have done in the last year. Then, on Yom Kippur they fast all day, go to Temple and ask for atonement from God. Atonement is something that is being missed in this situation.

Even on the rare occasion of someone saying they are sorry, it appears hollow. Atonement involves being truly sorry and resolving never to do the trespass again. Contriteness is part of atonement. This 'Me too' situation is missing atonement.

One thing that needs to happen is that we need to get a better understanding of the seductiveness of power. The reality of the world is that people rise to positions of power. This is true in government, business, and the church. We need to find ways of using power for the good and not abusing the power.

Abuse of power is not restricted to sexual abuse. There is a talk show on WBUR from 10AM to noon called, 'On Point.' It is an intellectual show with interviews with authors and such. Last December, the host Tom Ashcroft, was suspended by the radio station pending an investigation. The investigation was recently completed and he was let go. People assumed it was part of the 'me too' thing. The investigation showed that it was not. Ashcroft, in striving for excellence in the show bullied and berated subordinates. He thought he was doing what was best for the show but was making subordinates feel threatened. Power can be abused in a variety of ways.

Also, it bears noting that some women have lost their jobs of power as well. The numbers are hugely skewed toward men, but some women have been guilty, as well.

The story that we worked on a few weeks ago (the first Sunday in Lent) has Jesus resisting temptation. Do you remember the third temptation? It is when Satan brings Jesus to the highest mountain and tells him that Jesus can have the whole world if he worships Satan. Jesus among other things, rejects the seduction of power. He also knows that the world is not Satan's to give.

But Jesus knows a lot about power. He knows the power of words. He knows the power of love. He knows the power of forgiveness. Jesus knows the power of kindness. He knows the power of righteousness. He knows the power of faith. He knows the power of grace.

If we are to truly follow Jesus, we must resist worldly seductions and embrace his Godly powers. I am not saying that we should resist acquiring worldly power and influence. The world is what it is and works the way it works. That means that some individuals have more worldly power than others. That in and of itself is not a bad thing.

If we are to move forward as civilized people, we need to embrace power in such a way that it does not turn us into agents of evil, but agents of good. We do that by keeping God in our sights and in our hearts. AMEN