

**AACC 9TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY - MAPUTO
MORNING WORSHIP EXPOSITION – TUESDAY, 9TH
DECEMBER, 2008**

**THEME: CELEBRATING THE WOMEN OF AFRICA
(TAMAR – GENDER BASED VIOLENCE)**

TEXT: JUDGES 19:14 – 29

Appreciation

I first wish to thank the worship committee for asking me to participate in this worship service sharing a word on Judges 19: 14 – 29 in relation to our theme, “Celebrating the Women of Africa” in the midst of Gender Based Violence.

Introduction

There are many reasons for which the life of the African woman calls for celebration. In fact, in many African contexts, a home without a woman is considered to be a misfortune. With the woman in the African home, the family never goes hungry. With the woman in the home, decency is assured. With the mother in the home, a listening ear in times of trouble and confusion is assured. With the mother in the home, orderliness is expected; and with the mother in the home, children are assured of a future because their mother would seek for the best for her children.

The African woman can be celebrated for being industrious, for holding the family together in times of war and conflict, for caring for the sick, for seeking for peace in the midst of turmoil, and for keeping the Church alive despite the many challenges that the Church faces today.

African women can be celebrated for their achievements in the fields of agriculture, politics, peace building, economic development, health delivery, preservation of culture, and theological scholarship, just to mention some. Africa can boast and celebrate the life of a woman head of state, the lives of women members of parliament, some of whom are in our midst, the lives of women peace keepers, medical practitioners, high court judges, perfect home makers, CEOs, seasoned women pastors, and many more.

Yet, it is unfortunate to note that this same African woman whose life calls for so much celebration can be identified in the passage read to us from the

book of judges as being the main victim of sexual selfishness and sexual violence by virtue of her being a woman. Indeed, Judges 19 portrays an incidence of gender based violence in which the fundamental rights of two women are violated because they are women.

In the first place, the Levite who is supposed to be the bearer of the holy items in the temple enters a sexual union with a woman who becomes her concubine. It is said that while this practice was common among the nations of the ancient world, and was allowed in Israel, Levites were not expected to be involved in such practices.

(Refer to Leviticus 21:7 and 13:15) For some reason, the woman separates herself from the Levite, but he goes after her and gets her back.

On their way back home, they spend the night with an old man in a town against the woman's earlier suggestions. While they were with their host, a group of "militant homosexuals" approach the old man for sex with his guest, the Levite.

The old man condemns the proposed act, but readily offers two innocent women, his guest's concubine and his own daughter as substitutes, with the words "do with them whatever you want".

The Levite's concubine is subjected to unrestrained gang rape and abuse while her partner and host relax at home.

The concubine returns, and unable to enter the house, she passes out and dies at the doorstep of her host and partner. The Levite who was actually about to leave for home, gets out and finds her dead, cuts her body up into 12 pieces and distributes them among the 12 tribes of Israel, maybe to arouse the anger of his people against the perpetrators in order to cover up the role he played or to conceal the evidence of what really happened to her.

My sisters and brothers, this passage raises a number of thoughts that get in the way while we attempt to celebrate the lives of women of Africa.

The passage clearly states the idea that it is ok for women to be sexually violated than for men to be violated. This brings our minds to situations in which women seem to be considered as being of less value when compared to men in some societies. Sometimes, women seem to be considered more as property than human beings made in the image of God.

Though gender sensitive governments and organizations are trying hard to eradicate this idea, there are still many Africans who still hold on to such mentality. Thus, for some, it is preferable to send the boy child to school than to send the girl. For some, it is preferable to put a man in certain positions even if a woman is more qualified. As we celebrate the lives of African women, let us also realize that the African Church is being called upon to help people understand that the woman is a complete human being made in the image of God, just as the man is.

The women in the passage were voiceless and powerless. They had no say regarding the situation in which they found themselves. The men took the decisions that grossly affected their lives and they had to comply. This kind of scenario occurs in many forms in our African societies, whereby women find themselves in situations where they are voiceless and no one speaks for them. Consider the lives of widows who are subjected to dehumanizing widowhood rites. Consider the lives of women who are robbed of their rightful inheritance and yet have no one to speak for them.

The Church is being called to play the advocacy role, and be the voice of the voiceless woman whose life is controlled by others without her consent as if she is not good enough to make decisions regarding her own life. This occurs in marital relationships, family relationships, at work places, in churches, and during national policy making processes

The host who was a man had authority over the women in the narrative, even though he had no relationship with the Levite's concubine. This is another pertinent thought that adversely affects the integrity of the existence of men and women as part of God's creation- whereby, in people's worldview, once a person is a man, it means he has authority over every woman; and the sad part of this is that a good number of women think that this is how it should be. Thus they bring up their children and instill in them that mindset. The Church has a role to play in ensuring that the rightful place of women in God's creation is clearly understood.

Clearly, there seemed not to be any proper structures of justice to deal with what the Levite and his host did to the woman who apparently is given no name and no description. Thus they allowed this gross injustice to take place without any fear of getting into the hands of the law. How many situations in our communities cannot be compared to this one? Women are raped and

perpetrators go scot-free. Children are defiled and parents decide to keep quiet over it as a way of avoiding shame to the detriment of the victim. People in Church leadership sexually harass members and we turn a blind eye to such things because we do not want our church's name to be drawn in the mud. As the Church of Africa with a prophetic voice, we should be interested in calling for the institution of proper structures that will deal with such gender based violence meted out to people and to women in particular.

The Levite who should have been playing the healing role was rather the selfish perpetrator of gender based sexual violence. This is how the Church looks like sometimes. There are times when people and women in particular turn to the Church for guidance, for hope, for solace, for care, and for solutions to their problem. But like the Levite in the narrative, we take advantage of these already troubled people and wound them the more.

Going back to the narrative, this same Levite acts indifferently and is not bothered about what happens to his concubine. So does the Church behave sometimes. We hear about the injustices meted against the humanity of women in the name of culture, in times of war, and in daily social life. We see the various forms of oppression that they experience as a result of ignorance about their rights, and yet we of the church remain silent and indifferent as if all were well.

In our attempt to celebrate the women of Africa, we are also being called to repent of the ways in which we have betrayed the African woman. We are being called to repent of the ways in which we have contributed to making the woman become an incomplete creation of God through our wrong interpretation of scripture. We are being called to repent of the ways in which we have given away the woman spines to be abused by negative cultural practices, unfavorable economic policies and inappropriate church doctrines.

As the Church of Africa, we are being called to repent of the ways in which we have kept silent and allowed mother Africa to be "raped" and robbed of her dignity and wealth by greedy politicians.

We are being called to repent of ways in which we have allowed mother Africa to be "raped" by HIV AIDS just because we as the Church were busy stigmatizing against those who were infected and affected instead of finding solutions to the problem.

The Church of Africa is being called to repent of ways in which we have been silent and indifferent and have allowed hungry war lords to have their way and ripped Mother Africa of her peace, resources and beauty.

We are being called to repentance, and we can only do this by stepping forth in faith to be confronted by the truth with the hope that God, who seeks our good will forgive us, cleanse us by the power of the Holy Spirit, and restore us to the state where God requires for us to be.

Sisters and brothers, our celebration can only be complete if we truly repent as the church of Africa. Let us, therefore, step forth in faith before the throne of grace, repent, and be prepared to be used as God's instruments of justice, peace and reconciliation of God's creation in order to put the woman, and for that matter, Mother Africa, in her rightful place as God requires.

Amen!