

BRITE DIVINITY SCHOOL

RESURRECTION THROUGH THE VOICES OF WOMEN  
WHO ARE SURVIVORS OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

by

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For all the women who are living a resurrection story. May you continue to thrive.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO ISSUES PERTAINING TO CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE AND PASTORAL CARE

### The Question

Childhood sexual abuse is pervasive and debilitating for the victim. Silence and fear become its hallmark features. Spiritual and religious beliefs are called into question as survivors navigate a recovery process. Trauma specialist, Laura Brown, identifies the depths of damage inflicted on survivors. “Trauma is the great equalizer, the great destroyer of dreams and of beliefs that are the stuff of religious faith and spiritual practice.”<sup>1</sup> In addition, she observes that human beings are “creatures in search of meaning.”<sup>2</sup> I contend that pastors are in a position to offer support to survivors as they engage in questions of meaning, specifically as survivors experience upheaval in their religious beliefs. Women who participated in a focus group for this project conveyed how their faith was lost, crushed, or redefined as they sought clarity about how the abuse they experienced impacted their faith.

One of the motivations for this project comes from the story of Jamie, a survivor of childhood sexual abuse.<sup>3</sup> Jamie was a young mother with a professional career and solid marriage when she had an unexpected phone call from a childhood friend. This phone call triggered gut-wrenching tears, followed by the words, “something terrible has happened and I don’t want to know what it is.” Relentless nightmares followed for weeks

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<sup>1</sup> Laura Brown, *Cultural Competence in Trauma Therapy: Beyond the Flashback* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association: 2008), 228.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>3</sup> Her name has been changed to protect her anonymity.

and her world came crashing down. She needed time off from work, help with her children, and eventually, the marriage crumbled. The root of all of the anguish and turbulence was the result of emerging memories due to the childhood sexual abuse she had buried deep in her psyche. The next few years were extraordinarily difficult, confusing, and life changing. With the support of a trusted pastor, mentor, and a few close friends, Jamie emerged from the nightmare healthier and more resilient than ever.

Through her journey, many faith questions bubbled up to the surface; questions about prayer, ways of interpreting Biblical texts, hell, and resurrection. Conversations with her pastor were among the most helpful ones she had because he was honest, present, caring, and challenging. As she healed and found her footing, she came to embrace resurrection as the most meaningful faith metaphor that spoke to her through the turmoil she endured, and once through brunt of it, to make meaning of her new emerging life. She resonated with the full story of resurrection, one that saw Jesus experience trauma via betrayal and crucifixion, including a descent into hell, after which, Jesus rose again to a new life. The new life was unrecognizable to many initially. Both the wounds and scars of trauma had been witnessed, but it was also a new life filled with hope, potential, and anticipation for the future.

In the course of her journey, Jamie's faith was re-imagined, but also reclaimed. And it is the re-imagining and reclamation dynamic I contend is the place for pastors to have positive supportive role as survivors negotiate their tough healing process. Consequently, I maintain that pastors need to be able to listen to and talk with survivors. We need to hear their stories, learn from them, and journey with them as they search for new paradigms for their evolving faith.

Although there are numerous theological topics survivors may consider during their faith journey, in light of Jamie's story and experience, I am interested in learning more about how the theme of resurrection might play a role in their process. Each of our gospel texts include multiple resurrection stories. For this project I will concentrate on the resurrection story from the Gospel of Mark because of its unique ending. Jesus' resurrection story is told through the eyes of women who are afraid, and in their fear, they are silenced. Furthermore, this gospel ends in mid-sentence, which has the effect of underscoring the fear and silence the women at the tomb experienced. There are no post-resurrection stories as seen in the other gospels. Specifically, in Mark, the Greek text ends with "the women were afraid for..." However, I am struck by the inclusion of their story in our text. It implies at some point the women found their voices, and either overcame their fear or even with their fear, like Jamie, found a way to share their stories. Silence did not prevail.

In my experience as a minister, as one who has sat with any number of women struggling to tell their story of childhood sexual abuse, the parallel to the women at the tomb and the resilience it takes for women to tell their stories is intriguing. The struggle to find their voices and share their stories both for the women at the tomb and those who survive sexual abuse as children, made me want to explore the theological theme of resurrection and how it might be viewed through the voices of women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Is it viewed as a relatable story of new life for one who has overcome violence? Does it matter at all?

## The Issue

The number of young children who are victims of sexual violence before the age of eighteen is startling. Determining exact figures is difficult for an assortment of reasons, but according to Prevent Child Abuse America, the number of women who experience sexual violence prior to the age of eighteen may be in the range of 12-35 % and boys, 4-9 %. Furthermore, they report that 80% of the girls knew the perpetrator and boys 60%.<sup>4</sup> When a trusted person abuses a child, the child experiences a loss of safety, a sense of abandonment, fear, and confusion about what is right in their world.

These numbers alone suggest every church has survivors of childhood sexual abuse as part of the congregation. Theologian and sexual assault survivor, Monica Coleman, notes there is little in the way of institutional church response to sexual violence. She offers a few ideas as to why this is the case; ignorance of the nature of sexual violence, the perception that it is a “female” problem, and the view that sexual violence belongs to the realm of social services or other agencies that are not the church.<sup>5</sup> Pastors are in a position to promote changes in the way the church listens to the voices of survivors and the way we offer them support.

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<sup>4</sup> Prevent Child Abuse America, <http://preventchildabuse.org/resource/preventing-child-sexual-abuse/>, accessed October 12, 2016. (These statistics may vary depending on the source. I chose this resource due to the long-term studies cited. When I looked at other references, their footnotes did not always corroborate their stated statistics. This suggests to me that these numbers can be fluid potentially based on how they are gathered.)

<sup>5</sup> Monica Coleman, *The Dinah Project: A Handbook for Congregational Response to Sexual Violence* (Eugene: Oregon: WIPF & STOCK, 2004), 4.

Pastoral ethics expert, Marie Fortune begins her text, *Sexual Violence*, with the simple sentence, “Sexual violence is sin.”<sup>6</sup> She continues to write that silence is one of our greatest challenges in overcoming the damage wrought by sexual violence because silence leads to denial, which in turn leads to injustice. The framing of sexual violence by Fortune, Coleman, and others, suggests that the church has work to do and that there is a spiritual component to the healing process related to sexual violence. Although I will not focus on how sexual violence is sin per se in this project, Fortune’s perspective is important because she claims that her thesis means sexual violence is a religious issue. Furthermore, she states, “we can and must address it theologically, ethically, and pastorally.”<sup>7</sup> This project highlights the intersection of pastoral care and theology for childhood sexual abuse.

Family violence specialist, MJ Barrett, advocates in “Healing from trauma: The quest for spirituality” the value of incorporating spiritual meaning into the treatment of trauma survivors. Trauma therapist, Christine Courtois agrees and adds, “Because most trauma involves an assault on the victim’s spirit, identity, and self-worth, healing from trauma is fundamentally a spiritual process or a quest for spirituality involving a deep need for meaning and value.”<sup>8</sup> And although the point of Courtois’ observation is to direct psychotherapists to consider the role a client’s spirituality may play in their

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<sup>6</sup> Marie Fortune, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Christine Courtois, “First, Do No More Harm: Ethics of Attending to Spiritual Issues in Trauma Treatment” in *Spiritually Oriented Psychotherapy for Trauma*, eds. Donald F. Walker, Christine Courtois, and Jamie D. Aten. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2015), 55.

treatment, it also points out a need for a study such as this project that focuses on a particular spiritually based idea like resurrection. This qualitative research project adds to the resources to pastoral care providers as they work with the evolving spirituality of survivors through their healing process.

It has been my experience that people seek out a pastor for different reasons than they seek out a therapist. Walker and colleagues explain,

“Trauma affects the individual and his or her beliefs in the divine and the sacred in ways that may interrupt or sever these beliefs or, simultaneously or alternatively, in ways that strengthen them. As a result, we believe that trauma work is inherently spiritual and must include a focus on the client’s belief system... survivors of child abuse and other traumatic events often experience spiritual struggles in the course of healing.”<sup>9</sup>

Although a therapist may be willing and quite capable of addressing spiritual concerns, the role of a pastor is still substantively different. As a one who navigates the caring communities in both pastoral care and social work through his role as a former professor of pastoral care and counseling and now, currently a professor in the field of social work, Allan Cole suggests, “Its appreciation for and focus on souls – their care and cure – distinguishes pastoral care from other types of care.”<sup>10</sup>

Pastors are typically not trained psychotherapists, but we are trained to think, talk, and listen theologically. “We may assume, therefore that someone seeking out a minister believes, on some level, that the minister will not only be helpful but that this help will

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<sup>9</sup> Donald F. Walker, Christine Courtois, and Jamie D. Aten, “Introduction” in *Spiritually Oriented Psychotherapy for Trauma*, eds. Donald F. Walker, Christine Courtois, and Jamie D. Aten. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2015), 4-5.

<sup>10</sup> Allan H. Cole Jr., *Converging Horizons: Essays in Religion, Psychology, and Caregiving* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2015), 21.

grow out of her vocation as minister of the gospel.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, I believe it is important for ministers to listen to the voices of the women in their care when they share stories of abuse and hear their theological reflections born out of their recovery process.

Consequently, as a pastor, I am interested in exploring the spiritual side of abuse recovery for adults who have experienced sexual trauma as children. As noted earlier, I am interested in learning about how the idea of resurrection functions in the process to make meaning from such experiences. When we preach and teach about resurrection, is it an abstract concept unrelated to our own life experiences? Is it merely a story about Jesus some two thousand years ago with no particular application to our lives, i.e. when we experience death via trauma, do we also experience resurrection? If so, how?

In order to hear how some women view the theme of resurrection in light of abuse they experienced as young girls, a focus group was convened and the women were invited to reflect on the implications of their experiences. They were specifically asked to reflect the concept of resurrection and whether it has significance for them, and if so, how this concept either assists them, or not, in their ongoing healing. Their responses have value for other survivors, but also those offering pastoral care to survivors. Understanding a theology of resurrection from survivors that they find beneficial, healing, and meaning-making will inform the pastoral care we are able to provide to others in similar situations.

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<sup>11</sup> Cole, *Converging Horizons*, 25.

### The Context

Like many congregations, on Easter morning my congregation has exchanged the greeting, “Christ is risen!” along with the reply, “He is risen, indeed!” We have sung the familiar lyrics:

“Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!  
 All creation, join to say, Alleluia!  
 Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!  
 Sing, O heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!”<sup>12</sup>

We have decorated a chicken wire cross with multi-colored wildflowers. The transformation is always amazing as the cross moves from barrenness to brilliancy. Our attendance that morning is typically the highest Sunday morning worship attendance of the year. There is something about Easter that brings people to church.

Even in death, a brutal death no less, there is a sense of victory. Worship services around the globe on Easter morning celebrate the resurrection of Jesus as an event that brings great joy to a time of loss, brings hope to people who may feel defeated, and brings redeeming love to the most difficult of situations. However, in the midst of celebration it is easy to overlook the pain from which it is born. After all, resurrection is necessarily preceded by crucifixion. I am sure I am not alone in noticing that Good Friday services, where we sit with the reality of crucifixion, do not match the attendance of Easter morning services.

Several years ago as I sat at my desk in the church office on a Good Friday afternoon, I received a cold call from a woman in great distress. It did not take long

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Wesley, “Christ the Lord is Risen Today” (No. 216) in *Chalice Hymnal* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001).

before I begrudgingly realized I needed to go see her in person. My focus on the upcoming service that evening was simply going to have to wait. As we talked in person, she told me she wanted to come to the Good Friday service. Given her situation, I was concerned that it might not be a good idea. I thought she might need something a little more “uplifting” than a Good Friday service. My mistake. It was exactly what she needed. She could not experience resurrection or the Sunday Easter service without knowing that there were people and a Christ that would sit with her in her moment of sorrow.

We, as Christians, celebrate resurrection as an event in which life overcomes death, but it is easy to overlook that the first Easter morning in our gospel texts begin with uncertainty and fear. As the ending of the Gospel of Mark highlights, the women fled the tomb in great fear, terrified, and said nothing to no one. That is hardly the jubilation we celebrate in our churches on Easter morning.

There seems to be a disconnect between the fears and silence of the women at the tomb compared to the joyous celebrations of Easter today. As I think about women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse, I see a parallel. They are often afraid, often silenced, and bear the scars of their abuse, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Consequently, the focus of my project is to explore how resurrection functions for women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse because the feelings of death and despair are often present companions as they wade through their particular situations.

Furthermore, given the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse, it is clear to me that every pastor has several if not dozens of women in their congregations who identify as survivors of childhood sexual trauma. Therefore, as I explore the meaning of resurrection

with women who are survivors, I have in mind that the readers of my final project will be other pastors. As we listen to the stories of survivors and bear witness to their restorative process, we are in a position to learn from them and engage with them as they share their spiritual insights, struggles, and questions.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

First, I want to offer a definition of resurrection. When thinking about the meaning of resurrection, it useful to start with the Greek term ἀνίστημι (anistemi), from which the word resurrection, ἀνάστασις (anastasis), is derived. Strong's Greek Dictionary of the Bible offers these interpretations of ἀνάστασις; arise, lift up, raise up (again), rise up (again) or stand up(-right). Simply stated then, resurrection is rising up again. Primarily, I am thinking about this metaphorically, as in the way we rise again after traumatic events. However, there is also a physical component to the definition. It will be informative to note the body language of the women during the focus group as they talk about resurrection. When someone has been abused it is not uncommon to try to hide their bodies, curl up, or make themselves small. So, a literal "rising up" might be an observable phenomenon as the women share their thoughts.

Second, it is important to have an idea of what trauma means. According to Judith Herman, one of the first systematic trauma theorist, "trauma is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is render helpless by overwhelming force. ...Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a

sense of control, connection, and meaning.”<sup>13</sup> As applied to childhood sexual abuse it seems clear to me that the child is in a position of powerlessness and then later, as an adult, is confronted with the difficult process of making meaning out of the experience.

Shelly Rambo, a theologian who focuses on trauma, offers this insight, “The central problem of trauma is a temporal one. The past does not stay, so to speak, in the past. Instead it invades the present, returning in such a way that the present becomes not only an enactment of the past, but an enactment about what was not fully known or grasped.”<sup>14</sup> For women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse, the invasion of the abuse into their present adult lives can occur in multiple ways; in times of sexual intimacy, in parenting their own children, in depression and anger, etc. Again, from Rambo, “Trauma is what is not integrated in time; it is the difference between a closed and an open wound.”<sup>15</sup> An open wound debilitates. Processing abusive experiences from childhood allows women to close this open wound, from the inside out in a healthy way, albeit with scars. For me, this is resurrection because the wound no longer inhibits the ability of the women to rise up and search unburdened for meaning in their new lives.

This process is important because, according to noted Vietnam veteran trauma specialist, psychiatrist Jonathan Shay, “severe prolonged traumatization can bring wholesale destruction of desire, of the will to exist and to have a future. Betrayal of

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<sup>13</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 33.

<sup>14</sup> Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 19.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

‘what’s right’ is particularly destructive to a sense of continuity of value in ideals, ambitions, things, and activities.”<sup>16</sup> Shay’s work has been primarily with U.S. military veterans, but clearly, survivors of childhood sexual abuse also have an experience of feeling betrayed by “what’s right.” Shay and others have called this betrayal, moral injury. More specifically, Shay defines moral injury as “the betrayal of ‘what’s right’ in a high stakes situation by someone who holds power.”<sup>17</sup>

Clearly what is at stake for combat veterans is different than for children who are not in a combat zone. But, when safe places such as their homes or schools or churches become unsafe and when children are sexually abused by adults, they too suffer moral injury. The abuse and abuser shatter “what’s right” in their world as the survivor experiences someone in power who has betrayed their trust. Understanding the relationship between moral injury and childhood sexual abuse is an emerging application of the term and hence, a significant area of exploration that will continue in subsequent chapters of this paper.

Another term used to explain the phenomenon of betrayal and disruption of safety as it pertains to childhood sexual abuse is betrayal trauma. Jennifer Freyd, a leading researcher in the field of trauma, explains betrayal trauma occurs “when people or institutions on which a person depends on survival significantly violate that person’s trust or well-being: Childhood physical, emotional, or sexual abuse perpetrated by a caregiver

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<sup>16</sup>Jonathon Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Scribner, 1994), 178.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Shay. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, Vol 31(2), Apr 2014, 182-191. <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/pap/31/2/182/> (accessed February 1, 2016)

are examples of betrayal trauma.”<sup>18</sup> Betrayal trauma and moral injury are examining the same experience, but are two different terms that have emerged from different contexts and therefore, have subtle differences. Specifically, moral injury names the damage caused by betrayal.

The last term I want to make sure to cover here is post-traumatic stress because it is different from moral injury. According to the American Psychological Association,

“**PTSD**, or post-traumatic stress disorder, is an anxiety problem that develops in some people after extremely traumatic events, such as combat, crime, an accident or natural disaster. People with PTSD may relive the event via intrusive memories, flashbacks and nightmares; avoid anything that reminds them of the trauma; and have anxious feelings they didn’t have before that are so intense their lives are disrupted.”<sup>19</sup>

As awful as post-traumatic stress might be, in and of itself, post-traumatic stress does not necessarily cause one to question what is right in the world. For instance, someone who has escaped a house fire may have recurring nightmares and anxiety about the fire, but the fire itself does not cause moral injury. Nightmares and other disruption of daily life fit the definition of PTSD. This is different than moral injury. Moral injury may occur if the cause of the fire, injuries sustained in the fire, or life altering events related to it could have been prevented or were the result of intentional harm. Was there any betrayal of trust involved?

To summarize, PTSD and moral injury are two different by-products of trauma. One may occur without the other or both may be appear depending on the nature of the

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<sup>18</sup> Jennifer Freyd, <http://pages.uoregon.edu/dynamic/jjf/articles/freyd2008bt.pdf> (accessed November, 10, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> American Psychological Association <http://www.apa.org/topics/ptsd/> (accessed November 10, 2016).

circumstances around a particular traumatic event. In short, PTSD is a reaction to external stimuli, while moral injury is an internal reaction to trauma prompting profound questions of one's moral code and expected moral framework. We will delve into these concepts further in chapter three.

This project, in many ways, wrestles with concepts of recovery, which is significant in the literature of trauma, including moral injury. Shay cautiously posits, "Recovery is possible in many areas of life, perhaps in the most important ones for a fulfilling existence."<sup>20</sup> I believe that resurrection, as a theological concept has the capacity to take in both the experience of death inflicted by the trauma and the hope for healing, which leads to the new life the empty tomb represents.

### **Chapter Organization**

This written project will unfold in the following ways. Chapter two explains the methodology that guided the gathering of material and resources for the project, along with particulars of the how the focus group was formed and the format for the discussion that ensued. Also included in chapter two is a brief review of the theological perspective that shapes my approach to understanding the open-ended possibilities present in the Gospel of Mark. I view resurrection as a process and one that has a future to be determined by those who are survivors of traumatic experiences. Hence, in this chapter, I will share a few ideas on how viewing resurrection through a process theology lens influences the project.

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<sup>20</sup> Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 186.

Chapter three is a literature overview, consequently it is not intended to be an exhaustive guide to understanding all forms of trauma, but rather an introduction to trauma theory that informs our understanding of trauma related to childhood sexual abuse. Judith Herman's format of "safety, remembrance and mourning; reconnection" will be used as the overlay for the conversation. Other trauma theorists will be included in this discussion, e.g. Laura Brown, Bessel Van der Kolk, and Jonathan Shay. Although they overlap in many ways, each one offers helpful ways of thinking about trauma and moral injury. Moral injury is discussed in this chapter, as a reaction to and consequence of traumatic experiences, while also differentiating it from post-traumatic stress.

Chapter four highlights the voices of the women who participated in the focus group on June 5, 2019. First, I have included a synopsis of the evening's results that was sent to all the participants, inviting their feedback on what I had written. After that, I expanded the content of the chapter to give a thickened description of their stories and perspectives, including observations about where moral injury and signs of trauma were evident. But, ultimately, the crucial component of this chapter is to hear what these women have to say about their recovery process and what brings meaning to their lives today. The women were incredibly open with their thoughts and have valuable insight to bring to pastors willing to listen to their stories. They were readily engaged in sharing thoughts about the topic of resurrection in ways they had not previously considered prior to the evening's gathering. Last, but not least, they supported one another wholeheartedly and it was inspiring to see, hear, and witness their encouraging voices.

The goal of chapter five is to present a trauma informed pastoral theology of resurrection using the voices of the women in the focus group, the voices of the women at

the tomb in the Gospel of Mark, and the voices of feminist theologians whose writing include thoughts on trauma and resurrection. Given the primacy of the women in the focus group for this project, their perspectives both shape and critique the theology of trauma proposed in the chapter. Essentially, their voices have served as a poignant reminder that there is no “clean” theology. Theology is contextual and even a topic like resurrection, which is undeniably a focal point of Christian beliefs, does not escape the context of its time nor of those who respond to it today.

Chapter six explores what contributions this study makes for pastoral care by integrating an understanding of resurrection through the voices of childhood sexual abuse survivors. What have they taught us? What was unexpected? How will we be challenged by their contributions? Of course, this study does not answer every potential question about the how resurrection might be useful to childhood sexual abuse survivors. Focusing on a different gospel, changing the methodology of the study, or talking to a different group of women for the focus group could all enhance the proposals emerging from this study and would be a worthy endeavor beyond this project.

I would be remiss if I did not include a word about self-care and the vulnerability pastors have from listening attentively to stories about trauma. The task can be a heavy load, but if the pastor is going to be able to engage in the conversations with survivors of abuse, then the pastor needs to be aware of their own reactions and the need for their own self-care. Last, but not least, in the closing remarks for chapter six, I would like to offer a call to action for ministers and suggestions for how we offer pastoral care to survivors.

## **Conclusion**

While enduring the trauma of childhood sexual abuse, survivors experience fear and are routinely intimidated into silence. Allowing space and offering opportunities for them to share their stories in order for their voices to be heard is essential if ministers are going to be able to show up in meaningful ways for these women. This project is one step of that journey.

Turning now to chapter 2, we move from introducing the motivation for delving into this project to delineating the building blocks needed to organize the relevant research essential for organizing a cohesive pastoral care resource. Questions addressed in chapter two include the following. How were the focus group participants chosen? What are the theological underpinnings for the project? And, what research is required to coalesce information which is instructive to pastors who will be offering pastoral care to survivors of childhood sexual abuse?

## CHAPTER TWO: PASTORAL THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to lay out the project design, to explain the theological influences for my pastoral care approach, and to delineate how the women in the focus group were convened.

### **Project Design**

The research that weaves this project together is four-fold. First, the work of those who address trauma theories relevant to childhood sexual abuse is essential to this project. Several authors have informed my understanding of these topics, but Judith Herman and Laura Brown built the foundation. Herman has written the well-respected classic, *Trauma and Recovery*.<sup>21</sup> Virtually every book written on trauma starts with this text and quotes from it. Herman's ground-breaking proposal was simple, yet powerful; believe the women who told stories of abuse. The history of psychiatry and psychology from Freud onward diminished, disbelieved, and distorted the stories of abuse shared by many women. Herman's work transformed the conversation.

Herman also lays out a common path to recovery; safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnecting. Since *Trauma and Recovery* was first published in 1992, many psychiatrists and psychotherapists have followed her lead. However, these three stepping-stones should not be taken to be a linear process nor are they without critiques. For instance, Brown notes that safety is not always as attainable as Herman suggests,

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<sup>21</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

even if it is desirable.<sup>22</sup> Drawing on trauma theory, especially as articulated by theorists and practitioners who work with survivors, grounds a significant part of the research method in this project.

The second research component of this project is an exegetical study of the resurrection story in the Gospel of Mark, which is found in Mark 16:1-8, the last chapter of Mark. The intent is to use these verses as a heuristic device in which to frame the focus group process. My interest in the Markan story arises from the last verse which indicates the women fled the tomb trembling with fear in a trance like state in which “they said nothing to no one, they were afraid for...”

The silence, the fear, and the open-ended nature or unclear ending of the story invites parallels to other stories of trauma, include those that occurred due to childhood sexual abuse. Rambo has proposed that resurrection starts from a desperate place.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the question then becomes how women might identify with this starting point. Do they identify their recovery as a resurrection experience? And can this story be used as a heuristic device, offer an opportunity to explore, discover, or open up a door to think about resurrection in new ways? These questions lend themselves toward the integrative nature of pastoral theology and assist in the overall work of this project by giving insight to pastors as to how the theme of resurrection can be utilized in pastoral care with survivors.

A third, and quite significant part of the method of this project rests on actual conversations with women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse. In particular, the

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<sup>22</sup> Brown, *Cultural Competence in Trauma Therapy*, 73.

<sup>23</sup> Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 78.

insights offered by the women who participated in a focus group convened for this project are highlighted in subsequent chapters. Their voices are essential to identifying how (or if) resurrection is a meaningful theological concept in light of their abuse history.

And finally, a fourth aspect of the project is my own pastoral reflection following the focus group. What do their responses tell us about theology from a survivor's perspective? What do they tell us about pastoral care? And how does resurrection fit into a pastoral theological response to working with survivors? In order to arrive at an integrative pastoral care approach, it is important to take a cursory look at each of the three research components that go into this project.

Listening to the voices of women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse is a fundamental component of this project. However, when engaging in research such as this project, anyone who is a survivor of sexual abuse is considered to be part of a vulnerable population. As such, great care for their well-being is given and has been given a high priority. A theology that places a priority on listening to their voices and affirming the right of the survivor to be the expert in telling her story is essential for developing a pastoral care methodology that is attentive to those who have experienced sexual abuse.

### **Pastoral Theological Approach**

The heart of this project is the intersection of pastoral theology, pastoral care, and theological conversations about trauma. The story of Anton Boisen, the recognized early proponent of Clinical Pastoral Education, is helpful to consider here. "On 9 October, 1920 Boisen suffered an acute psychotic disturbance... He reflected upon his own illness

and determined that out of the horrors of the experience, good might come.”<sup>24</sup> Boisen claimed the right to interpret his own experience for himself and similarly, I believe the survivors of childhood sexual abuse have a right to interpret their experiences. As practicing ministers, we walk with people through these times of distress, listening and engaging theologically, but with an end goal to provide care that is theologically grounded. In particular, “In today’s world, practices of care and healing at their best hold promises for transformation and for liberation, both personal and social.”<sup>25</sup>

Several perspectives form the basic theological understandings out of which this project grows. While it is not my goal to explore each perspective separately or as independent topics, I draw upon process, feminist, and liberation theologies. The goal here is to utilize these perspectives in ways that provide a language and interpretive lens for this study. Process thought is appealing to this project because, as a pastor, I find a ministry of presence to be one of the most caring things I do. In process thought, God’s power is in God’s presence, to participate together in creation, community, and struggle. Consequently, there is an emphasis on relationality whereby God and creation have an effect on one another and anticipate a future based on the impact of the mutually connected relationship. This means everything is in “process,” which suggests change and creativity are ongoing, and since God and creation are in a relationship, thereby affecting change to one another, the future is open to the creativity of the relationship.

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<sup>24</sup> Elaine Graham, Heather Walton and Frances Ward, editors. *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 33.

<sup>25</sup> Barbara McClure. “Pastoral Care.” In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, edited by Bonnie Miller-McLemore, 269-278. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.), 2012.

And yet, the past is not left behind. Process theologian, Majorie Hewitt Suchocki, offers this reflection that I believe is pertinent to this project, “God’s creativity is the power of transformation, of hope, of a new future. God’s influence toward the future takes account of the past that affects us, offering a way of dealing with that past.”<sup>26</sup> Bringing the past and the present together in a consistent wholistic picture is part of the process of working through traumatic experiences.

Pastoral theologian, Barbara McClure, adds a valuable perspective as she comments on the power of process thought: “One of the most attractive features of process thought for pastoral care and counseling, then, is that it recognizes and imbues with “everlastingness” the elusive, intangible ways in which ordinary people in ordinary experience generate such values as love, care, truth, and justice.”<sup>27</sup> Out of trauma, moral injury, and abuse, generating love, care, truth, and justice are especially desirable because those ideals are harmed immeasurably by childhood sexual abuse. Love is distorted, care is lacking, truth is absent, and justice is skewed.

In addition to process theology, and in concert with it, many feminist thinkers have helped shape my own theology. For the purposes of this project, feminist theology points to the reality that the theological voices of women matter in our conversations and in shaping our pastoral theological responses. For practical purposes related to this

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<sup>26</sup> Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *What Is Process Theology? A Conversation with Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki*, <https://processandfaith.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/what-is-process-theology.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Barbara J. McClure, *Moving Beyond Individualism in Pastoral Care and Counseling: Reflections on Theory, Theology, and Practice* (Eugene: Cascade Books), Kindle Edition Locations 4229-4231.

project, having this pastoral theological perspective means acknowledging women are in the best position to speak to their own experiences. In addition, it also means recognizing women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse have informative and normative theological insights to share that have grown out their trauma recovery.

In her work, *Spirit and Trauma*, Rambo approaches resurrection from the perspective that it is born out of trauma. She recognizes that “The picture of resurrection is a beginning out of death...Our beginning is the radically disorienting space of death and hell.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, I think she accurately describes the experiences of women facing childhood trauma with this perspective. “This is the image of resurrection. It is not the victorious image of new life. It is a desperate image, in which the impossibility of a beginning becomes its starting point.”<sup>29</sup> To me, this understanding of resurrection is both consistent with the ending of the Gospel of Mark – “the women said nothing to no one because they were afraid for...” and the experience of women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

This project probes a relevant idea for pastoral theology, care, and those who have experienced trauma: What does resurrection look like for women who as young girls experienced this type of fear and silence? How did they forge a new life, their resurrection story, out of the trauma they suffered? I believe we have something to learn about both abuse and resurrection if we make space for their voices to be heard. After all, the women in Mark eventually said something to somebody because we have their story.

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<sup>28</sup> Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 77.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

The women in the focus group also have a story to tell and the manner in which these women were brought together was designed to respect their potential vulnerability and to respect their decisions regarding how much or how little they wanted to share. The process of gathering the women is designed to be consistent with the theological pastoral method articulated above.

### **Method of Collecting Wisdom from the Voices of Women Survivors**

Because listening to the voices of women survivors is central to the research method, a focus group was held on Wednesday evening, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019. The goal of this conversation was to have approximately six to eight women participate in the group, all of whom self-identify as survivors of childhood sexual abuse. On the night the group gathered, there were seven women who were able to take time out of their schedules to share their perspectives. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, a focus group of this size is more appropriate than attempting to gather a larger group. The more people in the group, the higher the potential for triggering conversations and it is my goal to mitigate that potential as much as possible. As a precaution, a therapist was present during the focus group in order to assist any of the women who may have been triggered in an adverse manner.

There are a few reasons for using a focus group as a way to access the information I would like to gather. First, the focus group method fits well with the number of women I want to engage, six to eight. Second, the women in the group have a shared attribute, survivorship, which coalesces the group. Third, since I want the women to respond to the same prompt, the focus group provided a method in which to do that in a consistent

manner. (See Appendix E for a detailed description of the focus group blueprint that guided the evening conversation.)

Even though a group of seven participants may seem like a small number, there was some diversity within the group – age, ethnicity, economic status, and religious traditions. In addition, since the majority of sexual abuse is not reported to law enforcement agencies and many issues related to the childhood sexual trauma are not addressed until the women reach adulthood, it is not surprising that these women did not receive any real support at the time their abuse episodes occurred, much less receiving any professional therapeutic support at the time. However, one of the criteria for participating in the focus group included professional counseling to process and reflect on their experiences as adults.

#### *Evaluation & Protocol for the Focus Group*

A pre-screen instrument was used to determine whether participants matched the desired criteria for this study; women who identify themselves as survivors of childhood sexual abuse and who have had at least a minimal relationship with a Christian faith community or church. (Appendix C)

The group was comprised of adult women who experienced childhood sexual abuse while they were minors. The group did not include men, not because men do not experience childhood sexual abuse, but because this particular study was designed to focus on women's experiences. Including multiple genders would have added additional dynamics and would have potentially created unnecessary complications for an already

vulnerable group. All of the women in the group were required to be over 18 years of age. When the focus group convened, the women's ages ranged from 39 to 64.

Because of the heightened concerns about emotional safety for these women, the screening criteria required participants to have spent time working with a professional therapist to address their abuse history as an adult. Although "healing" from their experiences may not be quite the right word, it is important that the women have processed their experiences intentionally with a therapist or counselor at some point during their adult life. This intentional processing indicates that they have worked on some of the deeper issues that arise from their experiences and will help reduce the risk that this conversation may cause undue harm to them.

In addition, because this project seeks to examine a theological concept and its relationship to the lives of these women, the participants were expected to have a minimal connection with the church (a minimum of two years in the past or present in which the participant has attended worship services at least six times per year). The requirement of connection to church was designed to ensure the women had some familiarity with the concept of resurrection from a Christian tradition.

Persons not eligible for participation in this study include minors, men, or persons who have not had some formal way to engage their childhood experiences. In addition, no one currently from my congregation was considered as a participant for the focus group. This exclusion allowed me to preserve my pastoral relationship with my congregants and to prevent compromising my role in their lives by being their researcher instead of their pastor.

*Participation in Focus Group – Recruitment and other Procedures*

In order to recruit people to this study, I was able to draw upon the network of pastors I know in Austin and in the surrounding area. Pastors were sent an initial email (Appendix A), sharing with them information about the project. Attached to the email was a flier they could display on a bulletin board in their church or offer to people directly (Appendix B). Personal friends and acquaintances also approached me about volunteering for the project. Anyone who expressed interest in participating in the focus group was sent information about how to access the pre-screening instrument.

Since pastors sometimes influence persons in ways they are unaware, it was left up to the individual women to contact me, allowing the women to retain agency as an individual and to mitigate against any undue influence from the pastor.

The initial flier asked potential participants to contact me for information about how to access a pre-screening survey via SurveyMonkey (Appendix C). Provisions were available for those who may not have had access to a computer or who were uncomfortable with the SurveyMonkey instrument. Ultimately, no alternative method was utilized because all the women who contacted me regarding their interest in the focus group utilized the SurveyMonkey tool. The pre-screening survey asked them to confirm that they are a woman over 18, that they are a survivor of childhood sexual abuse as a girl, that they have intentionally worked on their experiences with a counselor or spiritual advisor, and that they have been a participant in Christian worship for at least two years (six times per year) during their adult life. By doing the pre-screening through a less personal method (online), participants were afforded a greater degree of agency on their

decision as to whether or not they wanted to follow through with the study should they find it too uncomfortable or threatening.

Once the responses were received from the SurveyMonkey, a consent document (Appendix D) was be sent to them electronically or via email. I was available to answer any questions any of the women had about the project, including any questions they may have had about the consent form. Six women who responded to the survey either chose not to participate or were excluded due to the criteria from the survey. I did not try to count other women who expressed interest, but who did not follow through with the survey request. Once the participant acknowledged the consent form, they were invited to share their availability with me. Eventually, I was able to coordinate times for all interested parties. At that point I sent details about the focus group meeting time and its location. All of the women chose to bring me hard copies of their consent forms on the night of the focus group gathering as opposed to emailing them in advance.

The consent form clearly notes that participation in this project is completely voluntary. A participant could withdraw at any time by simply informing me verbally, via email, or by text that she wished to withdraw. None of the seven women who came to the focus group chose to withdraw. However, in the event that someone would have withdrawn from the project, their pre-survey responses would have been immediately deleted from any electronic or paper files. If they began the focus group, they were informed they could choose to leave and/or stop taking part in the discussion at any time (i.e., remaining silent or leaving the group to another part of the building, or leaving the building). There were and are no incentives, financial or otherwise, for participating in the study.

In summary, there are three steps to this study for participants of the focus group. First, participants were recruited and given a pre-screening survey in order to establish that they have met the criteria for the study. Second, the focus group met one evening for approximately two hours on Wednesday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019 at Church of the Savior in Cedar Park, TX. Third, once the focus group was completed, I provided a written synopsis to the women highlighting key ideas that emerged from their conversation. All names in the synopsis were changed to preserve anonymity. The synopsis was emailed to the participants and they were given an opportunity to provide feedback about what I observed, heard, how I reported on the themes of the conversation, and other salient features of the group experience. Participants were free to respond or not to the request for feedback regarding the synopsis. They were also afforded the flexibility to spend as little or as much time on their responses as they felt warranted, but I did not anticipate anyone would spend more than two hours on their feedback. Of the seven women who participated in the focus group, three responded to the follow-up email, all three indicated they had no further input and that the synopsis was a fair recording of the evening.

#### *Therapist*

The primary concern for the group of women participating in this study is the potential for unwanted stimuli or triggering response related to their abuse experiences to arise in ways that cause psychological or spiritual distress. Every effort was made to protect the vulnerability of the women in the study. As indicated earlier, one way to address these concerns was to secure a therapist to be present during the focus group gathering. The therapist's role during the focus group was to be present but remain an

observer. The therapist was not involved in directing the group or interpreting the material. She was present at the focus group to insure that, if there was a crisis or concern that occurred for anyone in the group during our time together, a licensed counselor would be present (not the researcher) to attend to her immediate needs and to assist her in finding resources after the focus group concluded. The therapist, of course, is bound by professional ethics that require her to maintain confidentiality for every participant in the focus group.

Information about the therapist was included in the consent form and in resources given to participants before the focus group was conducted. The therapist who has agreed to serve in this capacity is a Licensed Professional Counselor, LPC. She has over ten years of experience counseling sexual abuse survivors. She is experienced in multiple approaches for addressing traumatic experiences, including EMDR and the Somatic Experience Approach. In addition, I provided names and contacts for local therapists as well as other local resources to all focus group participants before the meeting and each person was given a hard copy of the resources to take with them when they departed after the focus group time concluded (Appendix G). As a final means of following up with each person, each participant will be sent an email by Ms. Roberts inquiring about whether they feel a need to talk to someone about anything that arose during the focus group. If a participant responds affirmatively, every effort will be made by Ms. Roberts to assist the person in finding an appropriate counselor and/or therapist to speak with about the issues.

If a participant determines that they have need of further counseling, the informed consent document clearly notes that any costs related to that will be their responsibility, and not the responsibility of the researchers or Ms. Roberts.

Another potential risk, as explained in the informed consent document, has to do with the nature of the focus group and the lack of being able to guarantee confidentiality among group members. The consent document notes that people are requested and expected to be respectful of one another's stories, but it is clearly impossible to guarantee absolute confidentiality. Every effort to maintain confidentiality has been made. However, the nature of a focus group means that this cannot be guaranteed among its members.

#### *Audio Recording*

An audio recording was made during the focus group time. A written transcript has also been made from the audio recording. I used the audio recording and the transcript as the resource for writing the focus group synopsis.

Each participant was asked to give permission for me to make an audio recording of the focus group time prior to the evening in which it took place. (Appendix H). Participants were informed of the risks involved in using an audio recording. Specifically, if someone decided to withdraw from the project there was little or no ability to delete their particular voice from the recording. The digital recording will be maintained in a locked drawer or on a password protected file, on a password protected computer while the data is being analyzed. Once the project has been written, the digital recording will be

given to the project director (Dr. Marshall) and will be held for three years in a locked cabinet separate from any other files pertaining to the identities of the participants.

All digital and paper files (pre-screening instruments, consent documents, audio recordings, data collection, etc.) will be kept in locked cabinets in the office of Rev. Wilson (behind a locked door) until the written part of her Doctor of Ministry project is completed. Upon completion, they will all be turned over to Dr. Marshall and held in the locked cabinets at Brite Divinity School for three years, after which time they will be destroyed. Information about the participants will be kept separately from the data in order to protect the identities of all persons involved.

Provisions were made to delete a written record of any participant who chose to withdraw, despite the inability to remove their voice from the recording. However, no withdrawals occurred, so it has not been necessary to remove or redact anyone's comments from the focus group transcript or synopsis.

### *Benefits*

The focus group experience provided participants an opportunity to reflect on their theological perspectives in conversation with other survivors. Consequently, benefits of participating in the focus group may include a sense that their voices have been heard, that their experiences are not isolated, and that the ways they have made meaning from their experiences will help others along their journey.

It is also my intention that this study will benefit pastors who offer pastoral care to survivors and provide them a means to offer more insightful pastoral care. Consequently, by sharing their thoughts and insights, the women in this group will

broaden the resources available to others who seek to make meaning of their traumatic abuse experiences, as well as assisting those who are care providers in their recovery process.

### **Conclusion**

Any pastoral care methodology designed to engage in research with survivors of childhood sexual abuse begins with a theology in which the voices of the women involved in the study are highly valued, respected, and safeguarded. With this objective in mind, sharing the details of how the women in the focus group for this study were gathered should demonstrate those features – value, respect, and safety. Furthermore, a theology that is grounded in the relationality co-creating work with God honors the choices and the faith journey survivors undergo in the midst of their meaning making processes. Hopefully, this chapter has accomplished both of these goals, hence setting the stage to learn more in the next chapter from trauma literature and trauma therapists who work with survivors in their recovery process.

### CHAPTER THREE: TRAUMA AND MORAL INJURY: WHAT DO PASTORS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE RECOVERY PROCESS FOR SURVIVORS OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE?

This chapter provides a brief overview of literature on trauma and moral injury. This will not be an exhaustive explanation or exploration of trauma studies; rather its purpose is to provide a background necessary for pastors who work with survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Furthermore, it will focus primarily on the experience of women. Clearly, men are also survivors of childhood sexual abuse, but the parameters of this project have been designed to focus on the experiences of women. The goal of this chapter, and this project, is to help inform pastors about the experience of women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse. What do they need to know about the women sitting in their pews who may be calling them for pastoral care?

Judith Herman's format for recovery from traumatic experiences, "safety, remembrance and mourning; reconnection", is a widely used resource among the therapeutic community to assist trauma survivors in their recovery. With that in mind, I will use those three stages to provide structure for the conversation in this chapter about the trauma recovery. And then, when it is helpful, additional information from other trauma theorists (e.g. Laura Brown, Bessel Van der Kolk, and Peter Levine) will be included to add more insight and depth to the recovery process.

The second section of this chapter will cover the topic of moral injury as first presented by psychiatrist, Jonathan Shay M.D. in his award-winning work, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. Rita Brock is a recognized expert in the field of moral injury within the veteran population. Her work has added to the discourse of how moral injury impacts trauma survivors. In addition, a similar

concept to moral injury known as betrayal trauma, as explained by Jennifer Freyd, will be explored. This material forms the core of what is necessary to begin to move toward the integrative approach of this project.

## **Trauma Basics**

### *The Problem of Silence*

Let us first delve into the groundbreaking work of Judith Herman, M.D. in her classic, must-read text, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Herman opens the book by describing the incredible tension that surrounds traumatic experiences, the desire to talk about those experiences, and the difficulties in doing so.

The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma. People who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner which undermines their credibility and thereby serves the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy. When the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery. But far too often secrecy prevails, and the story of the traumatic even surfaces not as a verbal narrative but as a symptom.<sup>30</sup>

Silence is a formidable obstacle to overcome. Herman continues by explaining the importance of silence to perpetrators of trauma, “secrecy and silence are the perpetrator’s first line of defense. If secrecy fails, the perpetrator attacks the credibility of his victim. If he cannot silence her absolutely, he tries to make sure that no one listens.”<sup>31</sup> In addition to feeling silenced, survivors often doubt their own ability to tell their story. They are not

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<sup>30</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

immune to attacks on their credibility by the perpetrator or those who cannot fathom the trauma they attempt to describe. And because trauma distorts memory and time, stories about traumatic events are not told in a typical narrative chronological timeline. This becomes another means of silencing victims. Questions arise about the “accuracy” of their story even though trauma disrupts the ability to tell the story in a straightforward chronological fashion. Furthermore, as survivors piece together the narrative that becomes their story, details and timelines may shift, become clearer or unintuitively, less clear. This ambiguity or malleability in the narrative can have the effect of silencing the survivor even as she attempts to recover her own truth.

Herman sums up the issue, “Traumatic memories are not encoded like ordinary memories in a verbal, linear narrative that is assimilated into an ongoing life story.”<sup>32</sup> Without a linear narrative, not only does the survivor doubt herself, but others question her validity and experience, which can intensify the overwhelming need to stay silent.

Furthermore, fear is an effective tool to silence children. Children do not need to be under immediate threat of violence to be silenced. A perceived ongoing threat is sufficient. “Most abused children reach adulthood with their secrets intact.”<sup>33</sup> However, the defenses used by a child to maintain the silence into adulthood eventually fail the survivor and breaking the silence is a time of crises. “The psychological defenses formed in childhood become increasingly maladaptive.... Eventually, often in the third or fourth decade of life, the defensive structure may begin to break down.... The failing of a marriage, the birth of a child, the illness or death of a parent.... Survivors fear that they

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<sup>32</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 37.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

are going insane or that they will have to die.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, silence is embraced as a survival mechanism.

The implication of Dr. Herman’s observation is that as pastors, we may engage women in crises, and the reasons for the crises may not be obvious to the pastoral care provider or to the survivor. Unfortunately, for these women, the past trauma has not stayed in the past, but has returned to invade their current lives. Although the impact of their experience as a victim of childhood sexual abuse has been a part of their lives, it can reach a new level of consciousness as well as a new level of debilitation. They may experience a renewed level of fear, terror, and inability to share their experiences.

Bessel Van Der Kolk echoes the same sentiment,

Even years later traumatized people often have enormous difficulty telling other people what has happened to them. Their bodies re-experience terror, rage, and helplessness, as well as the fight or flee, but these feelings are almost impossible to articulate. Trauma by nature drives us to the edge of comprehension, cutting us off from language based on common experience or an imaginable past.<sup>35</sup>

As a pastor, I have experienced women in exactly this scenario. The women have a desire to talk to someone but struggle mightily with the ability to actually speak their truths. There are phone calls with long pauses or conversations in person in which the survivor struggles to breathe as she tries to speak. This silence is a telling sign of the level of fear they are experiencing as an adult and parallels the fear they experienced as a child in an impossible situation.

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<sup>34</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 113.

<sup>35</sup> Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 43.

Another characteristic of trauma is dissociation. It is a coping mechanism that allows both the child and the adult to escape the terror of their situation. Dr. Herman explains,

...the abuse is either walled off from conscious awareness and memory, so that it did not really happen, or minimized, rationalized, and excused, so that whatever did happen was not really abuse. Unable to escape or alter the unbearable reality in fact, the child alters it in her mind... Dissociation thus becomes not merely a defensive adaptation but the fundamental principle of personality organization.<sup>36</sup>

Another way we might hear someone describe their dissociation is “checking out.” Dissociation, reflective of the trauma the young girl or adult woman is trying to escape, once again causes a disruption of time, narrative, or ability to speak. Breaking the silence is more difficult for a survivor than it may seem when we see an adult in front of us. The protection silence has offered, possibly for decades, is not easily changed. Old messages of danger, prompting fear, quickly return.

In addition to dissociation, self-harm, including cutting, substance abuse, and suicidality, are prevalent among childhood sexual abuse survivors. They are coping mechanisms, tools that aided their ability to survive the abuse as children. Laura Brown’s feminist approach to therapy rests on the empowerment of the individual seeking therapy. In the case of self-inflicted violence, she proposes, “the feminist therapist honors the goals of the strategy, which are self-soothing and preventing suicide, while offering ways of developing alternatives for accomplishing the same outcomes that are less harmful to the body, and thus more powerful.”<sup>37</sup> A child who has been abused has been

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<sup>36</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 102.

<sup>37</sup> Laura Brown, *Feminist Therapy* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2010), 42.

overwhelmed, disempowered, and betrayed. Presenting her with choices as an adult is the start for helping her recognize the power she has and the power she accessed in order to survive. Childhood sexual abuse is an experience that completely and utterly disempowers the victims. Recovery, meaning making, or healing all include the goal of helping the survivor reclaim her power.

*Safety, Remembrance and Mourning, Reconnection*

***Safety***

Given the fear, silencing, and loss of autonomy that comes with childhood trauma, it is not surprising to see why Judith Herman proposes three stages of “safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection” for recovery from trauma.<sup>38</sup> She fully acknowledges that the recovery process is messy and these stages are not necessarily traversed in a smooth linear fashion.

Why these three stages? First of all, she notes that “trauma robs the victim of a sense of power and control...The first task of recovery is to establish the survivor’s safety.”<sup>39</sup> A survivor needs to feel safe with her body and her environment. “Issues of bodily integrity include attention to basic health needs, regulation of bodily functions such as sleep, eating, and exercise, management of post-traumatic symptoms, and control of self-destructive behaviors.”<sup>40</sup> Secondly, the “remembrance and mourning” stage allows the survivor to tell her own story and grieve the impact the trauma has had on her

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<sup>38</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 155.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 159

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 160

life. The third stage, “reconnection” is a time in which the survivor is able to look toward a future that she is now empowered to create. The childhood abuse has still happened. There is no going back and changing that part of her story, but she is in a position where it no longer haunts her.

Herman’s description of safety is thorough, but not exhaustive and not easily achieved. Brown has pointed out numerous obstacles for many survivors to realize a basic level of safety, including the recognition of how cultural and identity factor into one’s experience of safety. Herman focuses on individual bodily needs. Brown expands the concept of safety to include the environment in which the survivor lives. For instance, Brown notes safety includes safe water, safe air to breath, and safe housing.<sup>41</sup> Is it possible for a survivor in Flint, Michigan or on a Navajo reservation to feel safe, when access to safe water is questionable? Environmental justice, or injustice, is a contributing factor to one’s basic safety. “Even though a person may not be consciously aware of the danger in which she or he lives, the presence of such threats to health and life resting omnipresent in the background may subtly undermine therapeutic attempts to work on creating safety for a trauma survivor.”<sup>42</sup>

Brown also reminds us that safe housing in the United States is a function of financial standing. “Living in poverty often means increased risks of exposure to violence in one’s immediate surroundings.”<sup>43</sup> In her text, *Cultural Competence in Trauma Therapy: Beyond the Flashback*, Brown drives home the ways in which each person has

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<sup>41</sup> Brown, *Cultural Competence in Trauma Therapy*, 73.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

multiple identities and social locations. Therefore, in establishing safety, a trauma survivor may not only need to overcome economic challenges in housing, if the survivor is also an immigrant or refugee, she may also need to overcome prejudice and hostility from neighbors. Feeling “at home” is a way of describing safety. And yet, “There is the omnipresent reality that immigrants are never quite home. If home is safety and the achievement of safety is a basic component of recovery from trauma exposure, then the absence of true home in the life of any immigrant must be figured into the equation and addressed by a psychotherapist who is striving for cultural competence.”<sup>44</sup>

In the LBGTQ community, a sense of safety can be undermined by a homophobic comment from friends, public political rhetoric, including homophobic or transphobic legislation. Similarly, spiritual safety can be compromised by insensitive sermons, lack of welcome in a community that professes to be open and affirming, or dismissiveness from a pastor who does not comprehend the ways LBGTQ people are hypervigilant to their surroundings.

As pastors, understanding a survivor’s social location, family of origin history, and her multiple identities that come from such places as her sexual orientation, gender identity, or ethnic and cultural identity are all important to understanding how she may achieve safety. In addition, recognizing our own places of privilege is essential to assisting her in finding strategies for creating a safe environment. To that end, Brown draws upon the work of another feminist, Pamela Hays.

Pamela Hays has proposed a feminist-informed epistemological framework for considering the social locations that evolve into multiple identities. Hays uses the acronym, ADDRESSING, as a mnemonic for her epistemic system; this stands

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<sup>44</sup> Brown, *Cultural Competence in Trauma Therapy*, 219.

for age, disability (acquired and/or developmental), religion, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, indigenous heritage, national origin, and gender/sex.<sup>45</sup>

Brown says she draws on this paradigm as a way to remind herself of human diversity and the multiple ways trauma survivors understand themselves.<sup>46</sup> She also professes that after three decades of working with trauma survivors, “that I have no idea of how any particular person will have experienced and made sense, or not, of her or his traumatic experiences.”<sup>47</sup> The ADDRESSING paradigm helps illustrate the difficulty in establishing safety because the lack of safety can come from multiple places and the examples of ways in which safety can be compromised are numerous.

Furthermore, sadly, our faith communities may be one of the places children experience sexual abuse. We have seen the attempts to cover up abuse by the Catholic church along with abuse stories coming to light in Southern Baptists churches and others. Consequently, our faith community is not automatically viewed as a safe space, on the contrary, it may be viewed with great suspicion. One area of concern is the language we use to talk about God. For example, God the Father is not comforting when a father is the perpetrator (either father at home or Father at church). Creating a safe environment in our faith communities requires an intentional approach by the faith leaders and the community.

Theologian Monica Coleman laments in *The Dinah Project* that even the most socially active churches fail to address the crises of sexual violence in America, which is

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<sup>45</sup> Brown, *Feminist Therapy*, 73.

<sup>46</sup> Brown, *Cultural Competence in Trauma Therapy*, 12.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

truly unfortunate because the church has the capacity to bring forth words of “hope, promise, and healing in a society torn by the evil of sexual violence.”<sup>48</sup> One of her first recommendations on how the church can be supportive of women who have experienced sexual assault is to simply sit with them and ask them what they want and need. She shares that after she was raped, she wanted and needed her friends to sit with her in her pain. And she needed community because community is supposed to be about empathy.<sup>49</sup> Safety in our faith communities begins with acknowledging the survivor’s pain. It is not all we can do, but if we want to participate in laying the foundation of safety for survivors, this is the place to start.

### ***Remembrance and Mourning***

The second stage of recovery, remembrance and mourning, is a complicated stage. First, no one wants to remember traumatic experiences. Second, traumatic experiences impact our brains. Consequently, how we remember traumatic experiences means that they are not recalled in the same manner as non-traumatic memories. Timelines are distorted, gaps emerge, and the memories may shift, which often leads to doubts about the experience for both the survivor and those who may hear her story. But, we need to recognize, telling the story of a traumatic experience is not the same as telling the story of non-traumatic memories. I was in a class with Rita Brock, and she made a poignant comment about recalling traumatic memories. Because traumatic memories are

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<sup>48</sup> Coleman, *The Dinah Project*, 4-5.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

difficult to share as a consistent narrative, she said the optimal way to listen to someone's story is to "believe the suffering."

Pastors would do well to keep that in mind. It is not our task to sort through a survivor's memories to get to the real "truth". The truth is in the suffering and details in a chronological order that are the root cause of the suffering may never be completely known.

Therefore, in this second stage of remembrance and mourning, there are differing opinions as to one, how much an adult survivor can remember from her childhood, especially when it comes to a traumatic memory in which it has been a survival skill to keep silent, dissociate, and/or forget, and two, it is not clear that it is necessary for her recovery to remember details of the abuse she experienced.

Peter Levine came to the conclusion after treating trauma survivors for many years, "it was unnecessary to dredge up old memories and relive their emotional pain to heal trauma. In fact, severe emotional pain can be re-traumatizing. What we need to do to be freed from our symptoms and fears is to arouse our deep physiological resources and consciously utilize them."<sup>50</sup> In his book, *Waking the Tiger: Healing from Trauma*, he offers several examples of helping clients physically work through their traumatic experiences in such a way that they release the trauma through both the re-telling of the event and the movements of their bodies.

For instance, he describes one person, Joe, who was in a car wreck caused by another driver running a stop sign. Joe described the sensations he was feeling in his

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<sup>50</sup> Peter A. Levine, *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books), Kindle Edition: page 31.

body, locating where the stress and tension of the collision were located, and the movements his body was making at the time of impact – shoulders pulling up, arm moving, back tensing. With the awareness of his body’s movements, Joe was able to recognize that he tried to avoid the other car. His therapist encouraged him in their session to complete the turn of the steering wheel he had started in an effort to avoid the collision.

Levine argues that the release of the body’s energy surrounding a traumatic event helps us to recover from the trauma. In Joe’s case, when he was able to re-enact the collision in a safe space, he recognized that he tried to avoid the collision. In the therapy session, he physically and mentally changed the outcome by completing the turn that would have allowed him to avoid it, releasing pent up tension and anxiety his body had stored. Afterwards, Joe felt peaceful and safe.<sup>51</sup> Notice that safety occurred in two ways. First, via the controlled environment the therapist created, moving slowly through the event, taking time to ask Joe how he felt, what he was doing, and allowing Joe to slowly describe events leading up to the collision. Secondly, because of the safe environment, Joe’s body was able to help him verbalize what he experienced in the collision and after the re-enactment, he was able to feel the safety of living through it.

Although, Levine does not specifically point to Herman’s stages of safety and remembrance and mourning, they are evident in the description of events. By focusing on the body’s needs, the narrative emerged and by allowing space for the body to release the tension of the event, a newfound safety was created. In the re-enactment, Joe remembered

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<sup>51</sup> Levine, *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma*, 244.

pieces of his day that helped explain the aches and pains in his body. But, feeling the aches and pains in his body, helped him tell the story.

A narrative, although it may feel desirable and may be incredibly helpful, may not be the only avenue to remembrance. It may not even be possible to fill in the memory gaps caused by traumatic experiences, consequently the survivor, her therapist, her pastor, and other supporters will need to have a tolerance and patience for those gaps. The goal of any form of memory reconstruction is to empower the survivor to tell her story on her terms. Herman points out “in the course of reconstruction, the story may change as missing pieces are recovered...both patient and therapist must accept the fact that they do not have complete knowledge, and they must learn to live with ambiguity.”<sup>52</sup> Since childhood traumas do not simply stay in the past, but instead disrupts the present, remembrance is a way to confront the disruption of the present and integrate the survivor’s trauma into her present adult life. This can be a painful process and consequently, the empowerment and pacesetting of this stage rests with the survivor. Re-traumatizing the survivor is not the objective.

The difficulties of this process of remembrance and mourning is highlighted by the depression, PTSD, rage, nightmares, and other physical expressions of the distress the survivor is experiencing today due to past trauma. Fortunately, there are helpful tools that a therapist and physician have available to them to assist the survivor. Many survivors take medication for depression, anxiety, and help with sleep disruptions. Therapists may be trained in EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), mindfulness meditation, or somatic experience therapy, which are all designed to address PTSD

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<sup>52</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 180.

symptoms for trauma survivors. Yoga and other forms of exercise have also proven to be helpful in addressing symptoms of PTSD. And each of these have a place in the therapeutic process, depending on the needs of the survivor.

Van Der Kolk reports: “Prozac worked significantly better than the placebo for the patients from the Trauma Clinic. They slept more soundly; they had more control over their emotions and were less preoccupied with the past.”<sup>53</sup> However, Prozac or other SSRI’s are not cure alls. For instance, in the same study, a separate group of veterans experiencing symptoms of PTSD, showed no improvement of symptoms while using Prozac. Furthermore, in another study, Van Der Kolk found that patients who experienced childhood trauma, benefitted more from EMDR than medication. Talk therapy, EMDR, or yoga practice have been found to be more effective in treating symptoms caused by PTSD.<sup>54</sup> In fact, Van Der Kolk’s study indicates “a focused, trauma-specific therapy for PTSD like EMDR could be much more effective than medication.”<sup>55</sup> The goal for each survivor is to find the combination of therapeutic tools available that are most effective for her.

One might think that remembrance and truth-telling would bring a sense of relief and liberation, and it will, eventually, but “trauma inevitably brings loss.”<sup>56</sup> And loss

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<sup>53</sup> Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 35 - It is worth noting that in this study, another group, consisting of veterans who were experiencing PTSD symptoms, did show improvement using Prozac. Van Der Kolk does not have a ready solution to this disparity. I believe further research in the area of moral injury and how it differs from PTSD might be the key.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 256, 256, 271.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>56</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 188.

produces grief. For some women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse, they grieve the loss of a “normal” or good childhood that cannot be relived. They may grieve the loss of relationships that become strained or severed from the truth-telling. They may grieve the loss of innocence they hoped would protect them. The lists of losses will be unique to each person, but mourning is a draining part of her recovery process. As Herman notes, “Mourning is the only way to give due honor to loss; there is no adequate compensation.”<sup>57</sup>

It might be helpful to note that although both terms, grief and mourning, are applicable in this second stage, they are not identical in meaning. Writing from a pastoral care perspective, Allan Cole provides a helpful distinction between grief and mourning. “Grief describes how we respond to loss, including how we feel, think, and behave. Mourning refers to the process whereby we loosen the emotional attachment (bond) to a loss, relocate the loss in our emotional life, and create emotional space for investing anew in relationships and other aspects of living.”<sup>58</sup> The process of mourning cannot be rushed, but it is an intentional process.

It is important in this stage of recovery to avoid minimizing the trauma because minimization leads to silencing. Remarks such as, “It’s no big deal. This happens to all of us. It’s the way of the world” are indications that the survivor anticipates she will suffer in silence. They also suggests both her silence and her suffering are somehow

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<sup>57</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 190.

<sup>58</sup> Allan Hugh Cole Jr. *Good Mourning: Getting Through Your Grief* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) Kindle Edition: Locations 702-703.

acceptable.<sup>59</sup> Once again, in highlighting the need for culturally competent therapy, Brown proposes, “This process of suppression of individual in favor of necessary collective narratives can be seen in many cultures in which colonization and or genocide have been prominent historical features.”<sup>60</sup> Silencing can have the effect of re-traumatizing the survivor, sending the message that her story and her being are not worthy of the grief she feels or the struggle she has lived.

In recounting the losses that come from childhood trauma, the survivor may enter a period of despair, which unfortunately, may bring on increased thoughts of self-harm and suicidality.<sup>61</sup> She may feel as though she was abused because she is unlovable or unworthy. Building loving connections are helpful during this time, but it is still a frightening time. Herman points out that there is no fixed timetable for this stage of the process, and “it will almost surely take longer than the patient wishes, but it will not go on forever.”<sup>62</sup>

As a pastor, walking with someone through this process, it may feel like the person is getting worse instead of better. However, it is important to remember once again that recovery is not a linear process. Feeling the pain that comes from trauma is part of the recovery, but it is not an easy place to be, nor an easy place to witness. Again, we are in a position to be truth-hearers, even when the truth is painful and difficult. We would also do well to remember that “the goal of recounting the trauma story is

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<sup>59</sup> Brown, *Cultural Competence in Trauma Therapy*, 82.

<sup>60</sup> Brown, *Cultural Competence in Trauma Therapy*, 82.

<sup>61</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 193.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 195

integration, not exorcism...The fundamental premise of the psychotherapeutic work is a belief in the restorative power of truth-telling.”<sup>63</sup> The function of a minister can be a truth-hearer. Please, do not attempt to be an exorcist, seriously.

In the course of remembrance, questions of meaning arise. “The traumatic event challenges an ordinary person to become a theologian, a philosopher, and a jurist.”<sup>64</sup> We can have a role in helping women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse think and reflect theologically about their experiences and the spiritual questions that are inevitably going to arise in the midst of their meaning making process.

As a survivor perseveres through this second stage, Herman notes, “the major work of the second stage is accomplished when the patient reclaims her own history and feels renewed hope and energy for engagement with life. Time starts to move again.”<sup>65</sup> This does not mean she will never be triggered or experience a time in which she returns and reflects differently about the traumatic experience. Brown remarks that “this component of therapy in which a survivor tells the story of what happened and begins the process of integrating that narrative into the narrative of life... is actually a component of therapy that cycles through over and over as time goes on.”<sup>66</sup> Yes, it includes grieving what was lost and what will never be, however, the persistent disruption of daily life due to the traumatic past is lessened. The survivor is able to focus more on present day tasks

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<sup>63</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 181.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 195

<sup>66</sup> Brown, *Cultural Competence in Trauma Therapy*, 80.

and goals, looking toward a future that is not as encumbered by the weight of her past traumatic experiences.

### ***Reconnection***

Being able to live life in the present, begs the question: How does the survivor want to live? Herman proposes, “they must build a new life within a radically different culture from the one they have left behind.”<sup>67</sup> The process of building a new life is what Herman refers to as “reconnection.” Vocational choices, relationship shifts, and self-care are all open for discussion and revision. What is empowering? What does she want to feel in contrast to burying or running away from feelings from the past? “Helplessness and isolation are the core experiences of psychological trauma. Empowerment and reconnection are the core experiences of recovery.”<sup>68</sup>

Brown adds, “Culturally sensitive trauma treatment invites survivors to deepen their own systems of meaning making and to integrate the discoveries of the healing process into the identities with which they initiated that process. ...crafting an identity as a thriver, the person who has moved from surviving into a new identity of a person with an understood history of trauma.”<sup>69</sup>

It feels important to acknowledge that during this stage of recovery, some survivors may seek to confront their abuser, share their experience with family or friends

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<sup>67</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 196.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>69</sup> Brown, *Cultural Competence in Trauma Therapy*, 85.

in ways that have not been disclosed prior to feeling empowered to do so. Disclosures are rife with unpredictability and vulnerability and consequently, can be a delicate and precarious undertaking. People who receive the information may not react in ways the survivor anticipates. Therefore, “while she may be clear about the desired outcome, she must be prepared to accept whatever the outcome may be.”<sup>70</sup> There are no guarantees that she will receive the emotional support or validation that one might hope comes with disclosure.

For pastors, if a survivor has chosen to disclose her story to us, then it is essential that we recognize the vulnerability that comes from sharing and the privilege the survivor has shown us because she has perceived us as a safe person. We should take care not to undermine her safety and we should encourage the power she has claimed in choosing to share with us the trauma that has impacted her life. These are sacred stories.

Whether to disclose her story or not, whether to confront the person who abused her or not, are choices for the survivor to make and no one else. The power to choose is critical. For that matter, the power to make choices in every facet of her life is critical. The survivor is entering a place of exploration about who she is and what she wants to become. So, this is an exciting time, even as it becomes less dramatic. The rush of adrenaline that comes with being in crisis dissipates and “ordinary” time begins. Ordinary time does not imply that there is less to learn, simply that the survivor may no longer be operating from a place of crisis.

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<sup>70</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 201.

We should not assume this is automatically a comfortable place. As Van Der Kolk explains, “Somehow the very event that caused them so much pain had also become their sole source of meaning. They felt fully alive only when they were revisiting their traumatic past.”<sup>71</sup> Part of the work in reconnecting, is learning to feel fully alive in the present ordinary time.

Brown tells the story of an African American woman who found reconnection via drumming rhythms. The rhythms, rooted in Africa and in her African American heritage, were spiritually meaningful for her. According to Brown, Joann, the trauma survivor, was able “revise her personal narrative to include the reality of having been a trauma survivor, and to use that revised narrative as the springboard for connecting in new ways with self and community.”<sup>72</sup> In turn, she experienced a greater sense of safety.

Herman noted in talking with a good number of trauma survivors that “in the third stage of recovery, as the survivor comes to terms with the meaning of the trauma in her own life, she may also become more open to new forms of engagement with children.”<sup>73</sup> Or she “may begin to take a new and broader interest in young people.”<sup>74</sup> I mention this particular insight because the women in the focus group for this project were very motivated to make a difference for the next generation and they are engaging in specific activities they believe will positively affect the generation to follow.

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<sup>71</sup> Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 18.

<sup>72</sup> Brown, *Cultural Competence in Trauma Therapy*, 87.

<sup>73</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 206.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

Herman speculates that for some survivors “the trauma is redeemed only when it becomes the source of a survivor mission.”<sup>75</sup> Participants in the focus group for this project have become engaged in political activism, environmental work, social justice work, and mentoring. They expressly stated that these activities were a way to make meaning from their traumatic experiences.

All of the women in the focus group were very clear that the sexual abuse they experienced had a profound impact on their lives. Recognition of the impact is part of their healing or meaning-making process. “Her recovery is based not on the illusion that evil has been overcome, but rather on the knowledge that it has not entirely prevailed and on the hope that restorative love may still be found in the world.”<sup>76</sup>

Women who experienced childhood sexual abuse have wounds. As they work toward integration and recovery, open wounds become thin places with scars. They can be irritated, even poked open at times. She may need to return to therapy on occasion, but her continued resilience is to be encouraged and applauded even as we acknowledge that “resolution of the trauma is never final; recovery is never complete.”<sup>77</sup> Recovery may never be complete in the sense that trauma has a way of reminding the survivor it has occurred, but survivors have proven resilient in making meaning and finding their own paths in choosing how to live.

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<sup>75</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 207.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

## Moral Injury

Betrayal is a mainstay of trauma. Trust has been broken and harm either physically, emotionally, or spiritually has occurred. For survivors of childhood sexual abuse all three have transpired. Bodies have been violated, emotional stability has been overturned, and questions of meaning have been raised in ways that are beyond the capacity of a young girl to process.

When a young girl is sexually abused by her father or other nearby relative, there is no safe space. Their home is the home of their perpetrator. When a young girl is raped by a priest or minister, then the church is no longer a safe space. God is not safe, after all it was God's person who harmed them. Consequently, as we think about Herman's call to safety in the recovery process, the betrayal of what should have been safe is one of the first obstacles to overcome. Faith communities have been places of betrayal, but they can also be places of recovery. Brown highlights the conundrum,

All traumatic stressors are assaults on meaning-making systems, and trauma will have lasting transformative impacts on the survivor's ways of making meaning. There is a pervasive interaction between trauma and issues of meaning making, with religion being equally a source of trauma, a location at which trauma is directed, and a source of coping in the aftermath of trauma.<sup>78</sup>

As noted in the opening chapter of this paper, Jennifer Freyd calls betrayal in the midst of trauma, simply betrayal trauma, i.e. betrayal trauma occurs "when people or institutions on which a person depends on survival significantly violate that person's trust or well-being: Childhood physical, emotional, or sexual abuse perpetrated by a caregiver

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<sup>78</sup> Brown, *Cultural Competence in Trauma Therapy*, 30.

are examples of betrayal trauma.”<sup>79</sup> Similarly, another term that seems fitting is moral injury. Shay defines moral injury as “the betrayal of ‘what’s right’ in a high stakes situation by someone who holds power.”<sup>80</sup> Rita Brock offers additional framing of moral injury. Moral injury is sustained, “Because of things we do, witness, are ordered to do, or fail to do in high stakes situations. We can lose our moral foundations and our sense of being a good person. Most religious traditions understand this inner anguish. This sense that we have failed our core moral self.”<sup>81</sup>

Although neither term, betrayal trauma or moral injury, were part of the trauma lexicon when Judith Herman first wrote *Trauma and Recovery*, she was very aware of the damage caused by betrayal and its relationship to faith questions. “The belief in a meaningful world is formed in relation to others and begins in earliest life. Basic trust, acquired in the primary intimate relationship, is the foundation of faith.”<sup>82</sup> She shared the story of a war veteran’s conversation with a priest. As he exclaimed his profound sadness about the good men he had seen killed and innocent children who had died, the priest confessed that he did not know the answer to these questions because he had never been to war. The soldier replied, “I didn’t ask you about war, I asked you about God.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Jennifer Freyd, <http://pages.uoregon.edu/dynamic/jjf/articles/freyd2008bt.pdf> (accessed November, 10, 2016).

<sup>80</sup> Jonathan Shay. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, Vol 31(2), Apr 2014, 182-191. <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/pap/31/2/182/> (accessed February 1, 2016)

<sup>81</sup> <https://www.voa.org/moral-injury-center/videos/rita-brock-discusses-moral-injury-soul-repair>, accessed September 18, 2019

<sup>82</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 54.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

Notice that the focus of the veteran's questions are not from his PTSD symptoms, they are instead moral questions or meaning-making questions. These are questions raised in response to moral injury, betrayal of what's right. Good men and children should not die such violent deaths. Similarly, young girls should not be used as sexual objects by adults. It is a betrayal of trust and undermines their perception of "what's right" in their world.

Brock and Lettini offer a great description of moral injury in the introduction of their book "Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War". First and foremost, they separate out the differences between PTSD and moral injury.

Moral injury is not PTSD. It is possible to have moral injury without PTSD. The difference between them is partly physical. PTSD occurs in response to prolonged, extreme trauma and is a fear-victim reaction to danger. It produces hormones that affect the brain's amygdala and hippocampus, which control responses to fear, as well as regulate emotions and connect fear to memory. A sufferer often has difficulty forming a coherent memory of a traumatic event or may even be unable to recall it. Symptoms include flashbacks, nightmares, hypervigilance, and dissociation.

The moral questions emerge after the traumatizing symptoms of PTSD are relieved enough for a person to construct a coherent memory of his or her experience. We organize emotionally intense memories into a story in the brain's prefrontal cortex, where self-control, planning, reasoning, and decision making occur. The mind creates a pattern from memory fragments stored in various places. Emotions are essential to moral conscience,..<sup>84</sup>

It may seem obvious in the case of childhood sexual abuse that the betrayal begins with the perpetrator and the abusive acts. This is a significant betrayal to a child, but it is only the beginning of the sense of betrayal a young girl experiences when she has been

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<sup>84</sup> Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabrielle Lettini, *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012). xiii.

sexually abused. As mentioned earlier, if the perpetrator is a clergy person, then the church, God, and faith in something good beyond herself is called into question. As a pastor, if we have been trusted enough to hear a survivor's story, we may also hear, "Why did God let this happen to me? Where was God? I prayed to Jesus to save me, but he didn't." We may become the embodiment of the betrayal the survivor feels today. Pastors need to affirm the betrayal, loss of trust, and the validity of the questions she asks. We need to affirm that what has happened to her is not right. We should not try to "fix" her theology, but instead walk with her as she discovers what her theology will become.

Due to potentially multiple sources of betrayal, survivors of childhood sexual abuse experience moral injury from an array of causes. Brock's definition above highlights the causes; "because of things we do, witness, are ordered to do, or fail to do in high stakes situations." Survivors of sexual abuse are often convinced they are willing participants in the sexual exploits of the perpetrator. Hence, they often believe they are as guilty as the perpetrator. They are doing things potentially at the perpetrators suggestion or guidance that later make them question their role and these actions become a source of moral injury to the survivor. In addition, the survivor may also believe her inability to stop the abuse is a moral failing on her part, and once again, she experiences injury as a result, specifically moral injury. Arguing that the perpetrator is the guilty party does not absolve the survivor from injury whether it be physical, spiritual, or emotional. Moral injury is one of several ways a survivor is injured from an abusive past.

Pastoral care theologian Larry Graham offers this definition for moral injury, "Moral injury is the erosive diminishment of our souls because our moral actions and the

actions of others against us sometimes have harmful outcomes."<sup>85</sup> In the case of survivors of childhood sexual abuse the actions of the perpetrator, the betrayal she experiences as a result of those actions, along with her internalization of her own culpability all contribute to her suffering from moral injury.

As survivors explore what faith means to them in light of the abuse they experienced, pastors can be conversation partners, listening and sharing as the women reflect theologically on what makes meaning in their lives and the role faith has to play. It is also important to recognize; pastors typically are not trained therapists. Pastors do not treat symptoms of PTSD or employ resources such as EMDR, somatic experience therapy, prescribing medications, or other specialized therapy. We should recommend the survivor seek out those experts who do offer these resources and it is wise to have a list of referrals for exactly such scenarios.

It is also not uncommon for a survivor to feel betrayed by her own body or her own personhood. She may feel like she is responsible for the abuse, that she somehow instigated or encouraged the abusive acts. She may have experienced some physical pleasure, beyond her control, that makes her question whether the abuse was indeed abuse. It is imperative that as pastors, we are clear that the responsibility and betrayal for the abuse lies in the hands of the adult perpetrator. In this scenario, the betrayed also experiences herself as the betrayer. The internalization of betrayal heightens the moral injury she feels and the consequence of this is devastating. Brock and Lettini share a word of warning, "one of the most dangerous aspects of moral injury is the collapse of

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<sup>85</sup> Larry Graham. *Moral Injury: Restoring Wounded Souls* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017), Kindle Edition: Location 80.

meaning and the loss of a will to live.”<sup>86</sup> Brock and Lettini, and Shay have all worked with combat veterans versus childhood sexual abuse survivors, but the impact and consequences of moral injury are analogous.

Complex trauma, which is sustained trauma, has no quick fix. But, because trauma is isolating and shaming, the young girl and the adult she becomes, feels alone. Faith communities and pastors, are in a position to support, encourage, restore trust, and offer community. We are in a position to reclaim and reimagine a faith that has been incredibly damaged. And to reiterate a point made in the opening chapter, Allan Cole notes that when someone seeks out a minister, on some level, there is an underlying belief that whatever help the minister provides is related to their vocation as a pastor.

Furthermore, as Barbara McClure articulates, pastors have the ability to live with people in their context and the suffering they experience is not outside of their contexts, it is part of their daily lived experience.<sup>87</sup> Pastors and faith communities have a role to play in the recovery process as we listen and live with survivors. We are part of the community and social context in which survivors live and therefore, in which they will work through their recovery process if we provide safe spaces for questions, pain, and healing.

Monica Coleman adds, “Some people feel as though God did not protect them from suffering...Everyone becomes a little less trustworthy...When we understand the specifically religious and spiritual dimensions to the experience of sexual violence, we

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<sup>86</sup> Brock and Lettini, *Soul Repair*, 80.

<sup>87</sup> McClure, Barbara J., *Moving Beyond Individualism in Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Kindle Locations 2328-2329.

understand that the call to address sexual violence is a call to churches.”<sup>88</sup> She believes churches are uniquely positioned to offer survivors hope and healing in the midst of sexual violence and in the midst of betrayal.

Rita Brock teaches, “conversations about moral injury require deep listening.”<sup>89</sup> Pastors can be and need to be one of these deep listeners as women break the silence, tell their truths, and explore the meaning they want to create for their lives.

### **Conclusion**

There is no magic pill that heals the harm caused by childhood sexual abuse. Saying, “the past is in the past” does not apply to traumatic experiences. The way forward for the survivor is challenging, painful, and nonlinear. The past invades the present and cycles around like a spiral staircase as survivors explore how to heal and make meaning out of the abuse inflicted upon them.

From the psychotherapeutic community, we have learned the basic template of recovery; “safety, remembrance and mourning; reconnection.” We also recognize the way our body and minds hold memories via the work of Van Der Kolk and Levine. Laura Brown helps us understand the complexity of recovery via one’s social location and through the explanation of Pamela Hays’ ADDRESSING paradigm. Last, but not least, we see the emergence of the study of moral injury and how it is differentiated from PTSD, and yet, is potentially debilitating and life threatening.

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<sup>88</sup> Coleman, *The Dinah Project*, 15.

<sup>89</sup> Brock and Letti, *Soul Repair*, 91.

For pastors, who are rarely experts in the field of trauma, much less childhood sexual abuse recovery, this chapter was constructed to help inform and educate ministers about the needs of women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The next chapter will add the voices of particular women who volunteered to participate in a focus group about their recovery process. As the reader hears their voices, it is helpful to be cognizant of the themes in this chapter, which have hopefully raised awareness for how the past abuse shows up in their lives today, where they have experienced moral injury, and how their faith journey has been influenced by the trauma in their lives.

## CHAPTER FOUR THE WOMEN BREAK THE SILENCE: SHARING THEIR STORIES

### INTRODUCTION

After reading through an overview of trauma history and the recovery processes in the previous chapter, this chapter is designed specifically to listen to the stories of women who volunteered to participate in the focus group, where they explore what helps them make meaning in their lives and how resurrection might fit into their paradigms. Their stories have heartbreak, but they also highlight the resiliency of these particular women. The pain they have experienced is evident and yet, the choices they have made to heal and to live meaningful lives is equally evident. Consequently, their views on resurrection are informative, not as an intellectual exercise, but as ones who know how to critique what helps them find meaning in their faith journeys.

Since the goal of this project is to give pastors an understanding of how trauma survivors view resurrection through the lens of trauma, the voices of these particular women offer insight into how pastoral care conversations might take shape. This chapter also serves as a bridge between the overview of trauma literature presented in Chapter 3 and the Pastoral Theology of Trauma and Resurrection offered in Chapter 5 because it adds live voices to the conversation. There are no “pie-in-the-sky” comments, views, or hopes. In this chapter we hear how the past abuse experiences continue to shape the lives of the women in the focus group and what they think that means about the potential meaning, or lack thereof, for resurrection.

This chapter is arranged into three sections. The first section is simply information about the focus group, its location, some background about the participants,

and the purpose of the synopsis. The second section is the synopsis as it was written for the participants. They were invited to provide feedback about its accuracy and the observations I made about the conversation. The third section is a deeper look into their views on resurrection and how those views are informed by trauma, moral injury, as well as their current religious beliefs and connections. The goal of this chapter is to hear their voices and then incorporate their perspectives into the next chapter, where I develop a pastoral theology of trauma and resurrection.

### **Focus Group Participants and Background**

#### *Location*

A focus group was conducted on June 5, 2019 at Church of the Savior. The purpose of the group was to engage in conversation about the meaning of resurrection for them as survivors of childhood sexual abuse. There are at least two primary concerns in conducting a focus group for participants who are survivors of abuse. One is safety and the other is confidentiality. Consequently, I chose this location because it is my home congregation where I serve as the pastor. As such, I am familiar with the calendar, who comes and goes at what times, entrances/exits, security, and its availability for a private gathering. As I communicated with the focus group participants, I specifically gave them options where I knew we would be the only people on the property and at times in which there were no unexpected interruptions or visitors.

### *The Women*

There were seven women from different faith traditions, experiences, and perspectives who volunteered their time to participate in this conversation. The women's ages ranged from 38 – 64. Five of the women are white, one Chinese for whom English is a second language, and one woman who identifies as Hispanic. Two women are seminary graduates, one a former pastor, another who currently works in a ministerial position, although not parish ministry. Two women are very active in progressive politics, although they had not met before this evening, primarily because they live in different counties. One is a Chinese immigrant from mainland China. As an undergraduate, she attended a Christian university, so although she is Buddhist, she met the religious criteria for the focus group. The other activist was very active in the Roman Catholic Church at different times in her life, but as you will see, trauma undermined her desire to stay connected to organized religious groups. Two other women attend the same church in the local Austin area and although they were acquaintances, they did not know each other well. They shared stories during the focus group that illuminated each other's involvement in their local congregation. The seventh woman has visited my congregation on one or two occasions because one of her best friends is a member of the church. However, she is reticent to get involved in any church due to her abuse experience and the sense that she lost her faith as a result of it.

### *Information about the Synopsis from the Focus Group Discussion*

Once I completed a transcript of the entire focus group conversation, I wrote a synopsis of the event and emailed it to the participants. The purpose of writing and

sharing the synopsis was threefold. One, it was designed to obtain feedback from the participants to see if I had captured the evening's discussion accurately. Secondly, to offer a brief reflection from my perspective about what they had shared, especially from the guided meditation portion from the resurrection story in Mark. Third, the email exchange regarding the synopsis was also a time in which they could offer additional comments if they had additional thoughts to share. Three of the women responded positively to the synopsis indicating they thought it was an accurate reflection of the conversation. Four women did not respond to either the first email or to the follow up email once again requesting their feedback. I am not going to try to interpret what the lack of response from those four participants might mean. I also included the therapist who was present during the focus group to get her thoughts as well. She too believed I had captured the spirit of the evening in the synopsis. What follows is precisely the synopsis I sent to the focus group participants. All names of the women have been changed as a means to protect their identities and to guard their confidentiality.

### **Synopsis of Focus Group (as distributed to focus group participants)<sup>90</sup>**

On the evening of June 5, seven women gathered to share their thoughts on what makes meaning in their lives, how they have processed abuse that was part of their childhood, and how the concept of resurrection might be useful. In the summary that follows, as indicated in the consent form, all names have been changed, but I believe each participant will recognize their voices. The participants varied in age, ethnicity,

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<sup>90</sup> All the names of the women have been changed and although I have tried to offer a description of the group, their participation in the group is confidential. Consequently, I have tried not to share any explicit details that would reveal any of their identities.

vocational experience, and religious background. Furthermore, even though details of their experiences were not discussed, it is clear their experiences were not the same, and yet, held a long-lasting impact. The conversation was animated, rich, and inspiring.

One of the most moving experiences for me, as the researcher, was the vocal support that the women expressed for one another. Throughout the evening as the women shared their stories there was a constant stream of “yeahs”. Although most of the women had not met prior to the focus group, they readily encouraged one another, cheering their ability to overcome obstacles and to speak strongly today. Their collective resilience felt empowering.

In order to begin the conversation for the evening, I invited the participants to share anything in their life that is currently grounding or foundational for them. The responses referenced looking to the future, being engaged in their respective communities, activism, giving back, and building healthy relationships. They also voiced a collective dismay, anger, and frustration with our current climate that seems to tolerate sexual violence. In particular, the president is triggering. For some of the women, there is a rawness that they have not felt in quite some time, even decades.

For example, Riley voiced her agitation and outlet, “my work, ...activist work...It feels important to me...And as soon as I got my PTSD back together, which took a couple of months. You know, I was like okay, I got to fight this. And then I was lucky enough to find Indivisible.”<sup>91</sup>

Lynn also increased her activism. “I'm Chinese. Our Asian community usually so very quiet, not involved, not engaged. That's why I be volunteer to try to encourage the

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<sup>91</sup> Indivisible is a political activist group.

woman and not just the woman and for Asian Pacific Islander Americans to step up, speak up, to have a representation for their, this, for their new country we're living in. I feel like I'm passionate to do right now.”

The second question posed invited the group to share any faith claims that are important to them now. Responses included - belonging, having a community that affirms their equal worth, forgiveness and hope, karma, safety, but also loss, loss of faith and feelings that their faith had been crushed. They expressed a need and desire for environments that allow for questions, no faith, or changing faith. Some Biblical stories that have been helpful include the story of Ruth choosing her family, the story of Judith beheading an unjust ruler, and the hope that resides in the act of baptism.

In their words, from Claire, “I think feeling that I am of equal worth in having my faith community affirm that I'm of equal worth, is pretty priceless.” And from Jill, “I think my more current sort of theological theme probably is hope because ...it's so easy to get sucked down and be without hope, and yet I think you know there's something, there is hope.”

And from Anne – “for me it's *tikkun olam*, to repair the world. It's a Jewish concept. And that's kind of my, I guess that's my grounding and it's kind of what drives me. So as long as I'm contributing towards something that's repairing the damage of the world, ... I feel like I'm making a difference in contributing. Helping.”

During the course of conversation, it became clear that Donald Trump is a trigger and that our current climate has brought new challenges with respect to past histories of sexual abuse or assault. Many of the participants indicated that even after decades since

their abuse occurred and significant therapy to address it, they are feeling more raw and angrier than they have in a long time.

Lucy described her unsettledness, “I'm in a real odd place - is that I think I was as strong as I could - did therapy for many, many years, of intense therapy and I was good. And now I'm going through another...I don't know if there's any, any stability right now.” Anne also expressed that she was in a time of searching. “Well, I guess I'm kind of in that place, I've had a lot of life changes recently, and it's like - so I'm trying to find community and I'm trying to find some grounding.”

Claire summed up the collective anger with this remark. “You know, I mean I got really, I got really mad when I heard that you know in 2008 that you could go to the airport, you could find Hillary nutcrackers. But you know, I thought that was personalized at her. Well, no, it's not; it's all of us. (background, yeses) And I didn't realize that it wasn't just her. You know what, I felt sad for her then, but now I'm pissed off for all of us.”

This climate is a reminder of times in which the women were not believed, did not feel safe, did not feel they could speak up, or felt diminished. So, the meaning that the participants have carved out in giving back to their communities, in finding faith stories that are meaningful, or taking up activism is essential right now. It is not only what feeds these women, but what also helps them overcome an inhospitable environment.

The last question posed prior to reading the selected resurrection story from the gospel of Mark inquired about the participant's views on resurrection. In our opening conversation, I think it is fair to say that no one considered resurrection their most meaningful faith belief. In fact, some found it exactly the opposite, more of an obstacle

due to the violence that precedes the resurrection stories or due to the pie in the sky, happy ending that is so often presented as the resurrection story.

As we continued to talk, some of the women explored how resurrection might become useful. The survey monkey pre-screening question prompted some of the exploration, followed by the conversation during the focus group.

Specific burgeoning insights about resurrection included, the ability to change for the better, i.e. we're not stuck in one place; the ability to grow; the ability to overcome violence so that violence is not the last word of our stories; and the ability to embrace hope for a future, not just for others, but also for themselves.

Tori's remarks highlight the journey. "In young adulthood I had to be stronger... And I need to change and I need to grow. And hope is part of that, I just recently got baptized... I had a baptism and it wasn't based on you know cleansing, but it was - I'm embracing hope (for the future) for myself and not just for my children."

But resurrection also presents challenges because there is so much violence that precedes it. For Anne, a former pastor, the violence blocks her ability to find hope in resurrection, "I guess I, I struggled with coming tonight. I, I've never really identified much with the resurrection. And I had trouble when I used to be a pastor, I had trouble preaching at Easter because of the violence and I uh I it's like a stumbling block. I can't get to resurrection because of the violence."

And if one's faith was lost, crushed, or damaged by abuse, lost trust, or church violence, then survivors like women in this group, may not be in a position to consider a religious idea as specific as resurrection to be helpful. Hope maybe helpful, in an abstract unspecified way, but resurrection may be too tied to the harm they experienced.

As we moved to the final phase of the focus group, there were some shifts or coalescing of ideas that emerged after the guided meditation reading from Mark 16. For instance, Resurrection can encapsulate the fear and silence the women experienced around their abuse. There can be more to the story after abuse, including now, i.e. more to know, more to live, more to understand.

Based on the responses written on the index cards post-reading and the sorting of those responses into “like” categories, here are the results from the guiding meditation reading of Mark 16. The seven participants divided the 31 responses (number of index cards) into 7 categories with 4-6 cards in each grouping.

1) RENEWAL (resurrection)

- i) If real – would be source of transformative strength
- ii) Future
- iii) Life
- iv) Be brave to face whatever
- v) Bring back to life

2) OVERCOMING

- i) violence not the end
- ii) Resurrection means – no one can irreparably hurt me w/o my cooperation
- iii) An end to the violence
- iv) Believe

3) AGENCY

- i) Community to continue fight
- ii) Resurrection means I should seek to see that potential in everyone else too
- iii) Resurrection means grace
- iv) Resurrection requires my work and cooperation

## 4) HOPE

i) suffering in this life “doesn’t really matter” – whether it was “back from the dead” or “mind over matter” – that the suffering is what’s not real

ii) hope

iii) Resurrection means my history isn’t the end of the story

iv) hope

v) meaning not clear when it happens

## 5) EMERGING FUTURE (trust)

i) an open and unpredictable future

ii) Resurrection means the story isn’t over

iii) Meaning becomes clearer over time

iv) Possibility a future that is not closed

v) forget therapist, move on!

## 6) FEAR (from outside)

i) they were afraid for their lives

ii) silence

iii) too much of a “happy ending” to be plausible

iv) retribution

## 7) UNKNOWN MEANING (anxiety, nervous)

i) An event that is risky to embrace

ii) a fearful event, in the sense of awe of what it means

iii) not knowing what it means

iv) faith

As I consider the responses, the conversation, and reflect on the results, there is a flow to the responses and potentially a merging of a couple of categories. For instance, RENEWAL AND OVERCOMING both indicate that there is an open future where violence and harm are not the end of their stories. Resurrection, as a metaphor via the reading of Mark, has presented them with options. My interpretation of these responses is that the open-endedness of Mark allows for seeing our own futures with openness and with the hope, specifically expressed in the category labeled, HOPE.

There is hope that while we are in the midst of pain, that it will not have the last word. There is hope that the past is not all there is even if the future is not clear. So, from HOPE, we can move to an EMERGING FUTURE, a future in which meaning can emerge, not all at once, but little by little as our own stories continue. However, even with this hope, an open future also produces a certain amount of anxiety because it is unknown, hence the category of UNKNOWN MEANING. In an uncertain future, there are risks. We can hope for end to violence and harm, but there are no guarantees. And yet, given the experience of having survived and thrived past hurts, there is an expectation that it is possible to persevere again. But FEAR is a reasonable response. We have been silenced due to fear, just like the women at the tomb who feared for their lives. And we cannot control what others do, including inflicting pain.

Fortunately, we have AGENCY. There are things within our control, choices about our future, about our healing, about what makes our lives meaningful that we can choose to do. Resurrection allows us to also see an open future for others as well, including their agency to make choices.

Resurrection, as a metaphor for women who have survived childhood sexual abuse, allows for uncertainty, hope, ambiguity, choices, trepidation, and grace for others. Resurrection may be perceived on the surface as a “happy” ending to a tragic death, but it is much more than that. However, for survivors, the perception of a happy ending may glibly overlook the violence preceding the resurrection stories in both the biblical text and in our lives. Consequently, for some survivors, resurrection may not be an accessible motif. For others, resurrection is not an ending at all, but a beginning toward a process of healing, meaning –making, and strength for living into our own stories without a particular expectation for what the future may hold. We can venture into a future with the experiences we have, sharing those experiences, and building relationships and community for the better.

The ultimate take away for me as a pastor from this evening’s time together – listen, listen, and be willing to explore with female survivors the paths that help them raise their voices and tell their stories.

### **Additional Analysis – What Do the Women Have to Say about Resurrection?**

After receiving feedback from the synopsis distributed to the focus group, the question remained, what did they say about resurrection? Answering this question required an additional look at their comments beyond the summary provided in the synopsis. Since the goal of this project is to listen to the voices of women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse and to understand their views of resurrection in light of their abuse, it is helpful to review the focus group conversation once more with that perspective in mind. Before jumping into the responses that specifically address their

views on resurrection, it is instructive to analyze comments and ideas that influence their interpretation of resurrection. First, I want to highlight from their remarks where trauma emerges for them today. Secondly, it is instructive to focus on how their remarks identify the moral injury and betrayal trauma they bring to the conversation. Third, as a precursor to their views on resurrection, I want to point out other views about faith, religion, the church, and particular faith claims embraced prior to the focus group that have helped them on their journey. These three pieces provide a framework for the final section, their perspectives about the meaning of resurrection.

*Trauma – what do the women have to say about trauma?  
How does it come through in their remarks?*

Clearly, each of the women in the focus experienced trauma. They all responded “yes” to the questionnaire that brought them to the focus group, but more than that, the trauma they experienced was present in their remarks during the focus group conversation. For instance, Riley specifically pointed to the 2016 election as triggering a return of PTSD for her. Her response, once she got her “PTSD back together” was to jump into political activism, which continues to today. She has noticed that she gets pulled back into her childhood abuse because she feels like “we’re all watching it” and no one is helping. Riley shared with the group she had been raped by a catholic priest who had been reassigned to her parish in Texas from Boston. She also felt like people knew that he was a perpetrator and yet, did nothing to stop him.

Riley and others in the group expressed anger and rage at the lack of reactions from others to the president. Lucy specifically cited Trump as a trigger for her today, “we’re all just having to deal with it and take it.” Claire recognized her anger showing up

in the suggestive attack on Hillary Clinton via “Hillary nutcrackers” and the implications of the name.

Tori has found meaning in writing her story with an editor who has been able to help her dig deeper. The process of writing has given her perspective as an adult that she could not see as a child. As she reflected on past behavior from her childhood, she emphatically exclaimed, “oh, my god, the trauma we were living through. Like how else could we have been?!”

In addition to anger about their own abuse and how current events have triggered reactions in them, the women also expressed how they had been silenced when they were younger. First, by the lack of action or protection they felt should have been forthcoming, but also since then as they tried to talk about it. Lynn, in particular shared that she realized no one was going to protect her then, but until more recently “I couldn’t even talk.” She followed that with, “I’m willing to sacrifice my life to get Trump down.” Like Riley, she has become very politically active, in particular in the Asian community and in registering voters. Lynn also adds a dynamic to the conversation because she immigrated from mainland China to the USA. Her parents were punished when they were younger for speaking up about political issues in China. Lynn referenced Tiananmen Square, but due to language issues, it is unclear if she meant to suggest her parents were there or whether she named it as an example to point out the dangers of speaking up in a country under oppressive rule.

Anne, who is someone I have known for many years, was reserved and predictably soft spoken during the focus group. She is a former pastor and shared with the group that she always had trouble preaching an Easter sermon due to the violence around

Jesus' death. The violence was a roadblock and although she didn't use the word "trigger", it seems to apply. And it's a violence that is not redemptive by what happens later. It's a hard stop. Along with the other women, she has renewed agitated feelings about violence within the culture today. She says she feels it all around her.

It is impossible to not hear the trauma these women have experienced throughout this conversation. Clearly, they carry their childhood abuse experiences with them and although they have shown themselves to be remarkably resilient, and intentionally so, the scars are there and they can be jabbed and stirred by incidents that re-open them.

*Moral injury and betrayal trauma as it emerged from the focus group conversation*

There are two significant definitions that are interesting to explore in the midst of this conversation, betrayal trauma and moral injury. Jennifer Freyd, a professor of psychology at the University of Oregon, states betrayal trauma occurs "when people or institutions on which a person depends for survival significantly violate that person's trust or well-being: Childhood physical, emotional, or sexual abuse perpetrated by a caregiver are examples of betrayal trauma."<sup>92</sup> Referring once again to Jonathan Shay, a psychiatrist who worked with Vietnam veterans, moral injury is "the betrayal of 'what's right' in a high stakes situation by someone who holds power."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Jennifer Freyd, <http://pages.uoregon.edu/dynamic/jjf/articles/freyd2008bt.pdf> (accessed November, 10, 2016).

<sup>93</sup> Jonathan Shay. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, Vol 31(2), Apr 2014, 182-191. <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/pap/31/2/182/> (accessed February 1, 2016)

Clearly, the two concepts are related, if not identical. They both have a basis in trauma, one sexual abuse or assault and the other violence from war. Secondly, they both involve a loss of safety, trust, or sense of well-being from external sources. However, moral injury also has another component to it that is internal and soul crushing.

Rita Brock explains the fullness of the concept of moral injury as follows –

Moral injury is sustained, “Because of things we do, witness, are ordered to do, or fail to do in high stakes situations. We can lose our moral foundations and our sense of being a good person. Most religious traditions understand this inner anguish. This sense that we have failed our core moral self. Sometimes because we have no other choice. In war, it's often your job to do those things that violate everything you were ever taught is wrong. Moral injury afflicts ordinary moral people, when no good choice is possible in situations where people must use the power they have to act, knowing they will cause harm, or violate their own core moral values. In those situations we actually don't lose our moral conscience, but in judging ourselves, we become both betrayer and betrayed. A soul divided against itself.”<sup>94</sup>

As we can see, moral injury is not limited to betrayal by another person, but can be experienced based on personal actions, ones that violate a person's moral code. In war, it may be shooting another person causing them harm even death, when the shooter never believed they would or could kill another human being. For survivors of sexual abuse, it can occur when the survivor believes they somehow perpetuated the abuse, that there was something about them as a person that caused the abuse, made it warranted or deserved. Betrayal trauma may include this dynamic as well, but I believe the argument would be made that the victim of sexual abuse, especially children who are victims of sexual abuse, cannot rightly be called the betrayer. Children do not have the agency to make choices in an abusive environment. Nevertheless, they often feel responsible, feel like they could

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<sup>94</sup> <https://www.voa.org/moral-injury-center/videos/rita-brock-discusses-moral-injury-soul-repair>, accessed September 18, 2019

have or should have done something to stop the abuse. Consequently, they experience moral injury as both an internal and external betrayal.

Listening to the women from the focus group, it is clear moral injury is part of their experience. Riley explicitly states, “one of the issues from childhood was that nobody helped me. Everybody knew it was going on, nobody helped – my family, friends, or whatever.” The church betrayed her and those closest to her both in relationship and in proximity, did not come to her rescue. She notes later in the conversation that she had to call the guy who raped her “father.” Consequently, she observes, “I probably have more of a spiritual crisis than I do a child abuse crisis.”

Later, as an adult, Riley returned to the Catholic Church as an administrator serving her local parish. Unfortunately, as an adult, she experienced another betrayal from yet another priest. This priest started spreading rumors that she was mishandling church funds. Eventually, she was walked off the church property. Afterwards she would encounter people from the church in public places. With sarcasm in her voice, she noted, “I would go to the HEB and my brothers and sisters in Christ would be on the other side of the aisle and they would see me and they’d do that thing where they duck, you know. They’re all horrible. I felt very betrayed.” Today she feels fine with Jesus, but the Church continues to be a place of betrayal and moral injury. She says her faith was “crushed beyond repair.”

Claire noted the emotional toll she experienced from her father. She said she learned that her value was in her appearance and sexuality, particularly since she knew he divorced her mom after she gained weight via pregnancy. Her body was the only source

of value she had, not her intelligence nor any other part of her. She remarked with a tone of exasperation that this “kind of screwed with my idea of God the Father.”

It is important to note that moral injury and betrayal does not have to occur from the individual who perpetrated the physical sexual abuse. Claire is a case in point. Lynn reinforces this observation. She told us her mother said she was “dumb” for letting herself be molested. Lynn carried this internal blame, i.e. moral injury for many years. Now she knows the abuse was not her fault and hopes no child experiences what she did, but it comes with a price. “We can’t depend that anybody to protect you, you have to do yourself.” You have to be your own angel.

The betrayal Lucy experienced is clearly active today. She feels like the abuse stole her faith and it has never come back. It is a huge loss for her and observable in the sadness in her face and the softness of her voice. It is unclear if she blames herself for this loss, if there is something she should be doing to retrieve something that is valuable to her. But, it hurts her soul.

Jill explicitly states that she felt responsible for the abuse she experienced. She felt like it was something she did. Consequently, she shoulders guilt and blame for it rather than attributing it to the person who abused her. She knew something terrible had happened and she must somehow be to blame. This is classic moral injury.

Now that we have heard the effect of the sexual abuse, betrayal, and moral injury through the voices of the women in the focus group, let us turn to how these experiences have impacted their views on faith and religious topics.

*Additional views on faith, religion, or the church*

The women all voiced concerns about religious life, beliefs, and religious institutions, but almost all of them have also navigated their way to meaningful faith language and some to faith communities. Each of their stories is uniquely theirs and so, I would like to simply share the highlights of each.

I am still struck by the sadness in Lucy's voice and the body language of fatigue when she talked about how she had lost her faith. Visiting a "safe" church was not as safe as she expected. Simply doing good in the world seems to be her focus, but even the value of those actions seems to be questionable for her right now. "God meant good... We all know what's good and we all know what's bad... My goal was just to do good." She laments the loss of hope she feels is part of faith. But, it is easy to see why. She listened to the suffering of Jesus and believed somehow her suffering was for a greater good, that she was suffering then in order to have a better future. "You know, I'm gonna' be great. It's gonna' be great later. I'm gonna' have a great, great life." There came a point where she realized life didn't work that way and then her faith was gone. Listening to her, it is not difficult to see that resurrection poses an open, unanswered question. She is not really sure what resurrection means.

Riley also talks about her faith being crippled beyond repair. Calling the priest who raped her, "Father", is surely spiritual abuse. Her second bad experience with a priest and the church meant she needed to walk away. She dearly wants a savior, hopes there is a savior, but has no expectation that a savior will show up at church. Her favorite Bible story is the story of Judith who is cunning, brave, and fierce. Today, she is

comfortable tagging along with her “seeker” husband, not worried about doctrine or the specificity a church might suggest.

Claire’s story is a little more mixed. After growing up in a traditional southern Presbyterian church, she found herself in the midst of a cult during her college years. We did not have a chance to delve into the full implications of this time in her life during the focus group session, but she saw parents essentially kidnap their own grown children in order to get them out of the religious group and deprogram them. Ultimately, she felt like she didn’t fit into this group and coupled with getting an education, she was spared from some of the potentially more dangerous issues.

Today, Claire attends a progressive Protestant church in Austin, but there was a period of time in which she was not religious at all. Her home church appears to be a place of safety, intellectual stimulation, and theological freedom. She remarked that her current church does not require her to have any faith. When she made this comment she sighed, maybe incredulously, but also with a tone that could be interpreted as relief. I understand the relief to come from a place of intellectual freedom, where she is able to sort through her faith without others imposing specifics that do not make sense to her. Her faith community has also given her another gift, equal worth as a woman and the recognition that Jesus valued women. In her words, “Feeling that I am of equal worth in having my faith community affirm that I’m of equal worth, is pretty priceless.”

In contrast to Claire’s comfort with her community of faith, Anne told us she is in search of community. As mentioned in the synopsis, she finds grounding in the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam*, which is roughly translated as “repair the world”. She wants to contribute to repairing the damage in the world, be it environmental or relational or

systems that cause harm. As an engineer, she's charting her story, looking at the highs and lows in her life, and using that information to help her now. As she spoke about this analytic approach to her journey, her voice faded and she grew silent. Clearly, there is an internal work in progress and past experiences, including the abuse she endured, is part of her present evaluation.

Jill is currently a minister, although not serving as a parish pastor. Her work in the arena of social justice is fulfilling and her engagement with congregations is enriching. Her position allows her to talk to a variety of people from different types of faith communities; rural, urban, and suburban; progressive, conservative, and more moderate; small, large, economically diverse, and more. Jill is a deep thinker who is interested in what motivates others, why they believe what they believe, and then how she can be most helpful in her role or relationship with them.

From the therapy she sought regarding her abuse history, she wanted to explore the concept of forgiveness. Her therapist made it clear that forgiveness was not required, but Jill wanted to have a deeper understanding of what it meant in light of the abuse she experienced. Exploring the meaning of forgiveness was a path through a door that gave her some peace of mind about the abuse and abuser. And now, hope is an important concept for her. Hope that violence does not have the last word. The work on forgiveness and the embracing of hope, appears to give Jill peace of mind.

Not only is Tori writing her life story as a way to get a handle on the trauma she experienced, but she has a tattoo that is a project, one that will grow like a vine as she grows. So, one focus in Tori's life is her own personal growth and her growth as a parent. Secondly, the story of Ruth is a powerful motif for Tori. The idea that Ruth chose her

family is compelling and gives her hope that she too can make choices about her family and as a parent.

Tori was involved in a more conservative church when her children were younger than the one she currently attends. However, there came a point where the beliefs espoused by that church were too different than what she believed, and she chose to find another church. When she found her current church, she found words of love, acceptance, and inclusion that felt authentic to her. It was here that she was able to discuss with a minister what her beliefs could be and then how baptism was a sacrament of hope for her and her future, not one only reserved for children. Growth, expressed by writing her story, choosing a church, choosing a family, and choosing to be baptized brought enthusiasm to her voice and energy to her demeanor.

Last, but not least, is Lynn's perspective, which is a little different for a few reasons, not the least of which is due to the fact she is Buddhist and not Christian. However, she did spend time at a Christian university in Texas, so she is very familiar with Christian ideas. As mentioned earlier, Lynn is also an immigrant from Mainland China and English is not her first language. Nevertheless, we understood her quite well because she is vocal, passionate, and energetic. She pointed out after Jill's comments on forgiveness that she didn't worry about that because, as a Buddhist, she believes in karma. What she does now, how she gives back, how she encourages and leads others is more significant than forgiveness. She works diligently within the Asian community on political endeavors, voter registration, and education. In the Austin area, she is a recognized and respected leader both in her Asian community and beyond it to the larger politically active communities. I dare say, she and Riley were pleased to meet one

another. Their paths had not crossed until this group, but they share very similar activism interests.

Lynn's determination, drive, and hard work could not be missed in the passionate ways she shared her story, her goals, and her commitments. Clearly, she gained the group's respect through the evening discussion. They offered vocal support, laughter and smiles, and tissues.

All of the women have given faith issues and religious beliefs considerable and in depth thought. Their views have clearly been impacted by the abuse trauma and moral injury. They are adamant about improving the lives of others. They are passionate, driven, and incredibly productive. They may have suffered from the abuse of another, but they have chosen how they want to live in intentional meaningful ways.

### *Thoughts on Resurrection*

It is fair to say that none of the women had embraced the theme of resurrection as their primary faith concept that helped them make meaning for their lives. It is also fair to say that the focus group gave them an opportunity to think about resurrection in a different light, which may prove to be helpful in the future, but it may not. The idea that resurrection is automatically a hopeful or helpful religious belief, whether it be a literal or metaphorical belief, is simply not true. However, as part of the focus group they were invited to offer their thoughts on resurrection after a guided meditation that used Mark 16:1-8 as the reflection reading.

Prior to the reading and quiet time, their views on resurrection through the lens of abuse and trauma were either nondescript or dismissal that it could be helpful. Anne, in

particular, found resurrection to be so wrapped up in violence that she does not find it a helpful, healing, or useful in any way. Others mentioned the “Passion of Christ” movie, promoting the violence as entertainment. Anne’s body language, rising and dropping of shoulders, seemed to indicate that this is exactly what she meant, there’s too much violence to find hope in resurrection.

Riley picked up the violence theme and noted that she sees violence all around her today. In the current environment, she needs and wants a savior that speaks to the violence. She has a desire “to go back to the Savior and have the happy ending. Oh, we’re all gonna’ rise. It’s all going to be great.” The yearning for an end to injustice, harm, abuse, and trauma, especially for children, was a deeply emotional yearning. And the desire to participate in that healing for others with whatever tools we can muster, is profound. As part of her activism, she has protested at least two of the child detention centers, helping to close them. Helping the traumatized children in whatever way she can is highly motivating for her right now.

Jill remarked that resurrection was something she would “chew on” after the session because resurrection could suggest to us that violence does not get the last word, it’s not the end of the story. “Life can go on and be good, something that is killing you, that could kill you, doesn’t have to kill you.” Given her propensity to deep contemplation, I would not be surprised to run into her again in the future and hear that she spent more time thinking about the evening and then hearing what her views on resurrection had become.

Lucy continued to grapple with the meaning of resurrection. She asked for my opinions, but I was reticent to offer any during the focus group. I did offer up that I

resonated with those who said it could mean that violence was not the end of the story. In setting up the reading, I also pointed out that our reading would be open-ended, that historically we do not know the ending of Mark. I commented that I personally found that an appealing way to engage the topic of resurrection. Once the entire focus group session had ended, Lucy and I talked a little more. She was very interested in exploring my perspective, so I shared a few more thoughts on how I believe we can write our ending and then, despite the fear (like the women in the story), we can break the silence and speak to how we have chosen to live. I am not sure, at all, that she found that helpful.

Claire had an interesting take. For one, she pointed out that “I can’t resurrect you.” Resurrection is more about personal growth, changing and becoming, improving for the better. She said, “I don’t know where I’d be if I didn’t think I could change because I wasn’t a loving person because I wasn’t open to other people because I didn’t know how to learn from experience and not be better. So, I guess that’s my resurrection.” Tori picked up on the idea of change. The “mental health” tattoo is a tangible representation of her hope to grow and change.

Lynn closed the evening with the proclamation, “we cannot keep silence anymore.” Women finding their voices and speaking up was a consistent theme in her remarks throughout the evening. Now the resurrection story from Mark is one more place where silence needs to be broken and presumably is, since we have their story. Similarly, the women from this focus group are able to share their stories, despite the fears they experienced and despite the self-worth they questioned.

## Conclusion

Watching the women interact during the focus group was inspirational. I witnessed a group of women, who did not know one another prior to the focus group, become collaborators. They were quick to voice encouragement to one another. They nodded approvingly as they shared their triumphs and passed the tissues when they shed tears from their pain. For all their personal struggles, unique stories, and individual accomplishments, they were unified in their desire to share their stories.

When women are given a space to voice their thoughts, opinions, and dreams, they are able to thrive. Thinking about the women at the tomb, scared and trembling, I can envision a gathering where they gave voice to their fears, embraced one another to calm the trembling, and together, recognized they had a story worth sharing.

This chapter was designed to convey the thoughts and insights of the women in the focus group as they shared their experiences and beliefs that have brought meaning to their lives, especially in light of the abuse they endured. From those voices, I learned that the concept of resurrection has the potential to be meaningful, but it is not necessarily so. These women took initiative and found the Biblical stories that spoke to them as part of their organic healing process. They were also very open to thinking together about how resurrection had the potential to be an additional story that could be meaningful to them. They were thoughtful, playful, and serious in considering what resurrection could add to their toolbox. For some, not all, it will be an ongoing thought process. Where resurrection seems to be the most helpful is in the hopefulness that violence is not the end of their stories. Even so, they are not expecting an uncomplicated joyous future. Instead,

they are willing to embrace a future filled with hope, even amidst struggle, and a future where they can assist others in making a positive impact on their particular communities.

Moving into the next chapter, their voices will be put in conversation with trauma theorist and feminist theologians who speak on the topic of resurrection, along with the resurrection story from the Gospel of Mark. Together, the voices of women are used to construct a pastoral theology for understanding a healing relationship between trauma and resurrection.

CHAPTER FIVE  
A TRAUMA-INFORMED PASTORAL THEOLOGY OF RESURRECTION

*“To know that the presence of God endures through violence is to know life holds more than its destruction. The power of life is strong. Salvation is sometimes possible. Salvation requires love. Fainthearted love, idealized love, impatient love cannot walk in the valley of the shadow of death Healing love touches the hidden wounds of violation, lance the places of stored trauma, restores glimpses of soul. The world offers too few such love and care. Violence persists.”<sup>95</sup>*

In this chapter I am going to develop a trauma-informed theology of resurrection. Such a theology will need to take into account what we learned from the trauma overview presented in chapter 3, followed by the perspectives of the women in the focus group from chapter 4. Herman’s three stages of trauma recovery – safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection – are formative for structuring the theology I am proposing in this chapter. Secondly, the voices of the women in the focus group both shape and critique the theology I am advancing.

Resurrection is a process of living through and finding new life after a traumatic experience. Resurrection, with trauma as its companion and catalyst, begins with silence, fear and trembling, moves toward breaking through silence borne of fear, building relationships, and emerging from trauma with scars from wounds that point to real pain and harm. Resurrection is a beginning that does not negate crucifixion, but instead insists that crucifixion does not have the last word. Furthermore, I am proposing that resurrection is not a singular solitary event. Resurrection is cultivated and nurtured in relationship and in community.

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<sup>95</sup> Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and the Search for What Saves Us* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 250.

Shelly Rambo, Rita Nakashima Brock, Brock and Rebecca Parker, and Flora Keshgegian have all explored the theological implications of resurrection in relationship to abuse, trauma, or moral injury - sometimes in conversation with one another - in ways that I believe are particularly beneficial to this project. Rambo highlights the ongoing nature of trauma and what it means to live through it. Brock emphasizes the way in which resurrection happens in community. Brock and Parker argue that violence is not what saves us, not the violence of crucifixion and not the violence of abuse. Keshgegian explains the way memories of trauma can be redeemed, fueling the empowerment of survivors. With those approaches in mind, I am going structure this chapter around the themes of silence, re-remembering, and empowerment. In other words, the process of resurrection is one that rises from the traumatic symptoms of silence and fear, it continues as survivors struggle through the impact of trauma as they remember their experiences, and ideally, culminates in the empowerment of trauma survivors as they persist in making meaning in their lives from the trauma.

Furthermore, I will utilize the gospel of Mark as a conversation partner in order to enter into a resurrection experience with the women at the tomb and with women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse. A colleague of mine said it well when he talked about eating his grandmother's mashed potatoes at family dinners. He said he didn't want to simply believe in his grandmother's mashed potatoes, he actually wanted to experience them. This is the way I am thinking about the resurrection story in Mark. How can it be used to help us think about and describe an experience of resurrection in the context of childhood sexual abuse?

The goal of this chapter is to build a trauma informed theology of resurrection by viewing resurrection as an ongoing process that will assist pastoral care providers as they work with survivors of childhood sexual trauma. We will explore this process by engaging the work of feminist theologians, the women in the focus group, and the resurrection story from the gospel of Mark. Specifically, I am proposing that a trauma informed theology of resurrection is a meaning-making process, one that originates out of the silence and fear associated with trauma, continues with re-remembering, and culminates in the empowerment of those who have endured trauma and seek to rise again. Viewing resurrection as a process suggests resurrection is not a singular event, nor is it a linear process. Identifying or naming movements in the process aids in understanding, but the movements should not be considered rigid. Furthermore, viewing resurrection as a process borne out of trauma implies it is not devoid of pain, even if it is a process that eventually allows the survivor to live fully, deliberately, and joyfully. There is an “alleluia” awaiting, sometimes.

The first task in this chapter is to explore the pervasive presence of silence in the resurrection story from the Gospel of Mark. The silence of the women and the silence of its ending all speak to how resurrection begins in silence. Pooling together the voices of the women in the Markan text, the focus group, feminist theologians, and by trauma theory, we will explore the complex nature of traumatic silence.

Once the silence of trauma has been disrupted, buried and silenced memories start to emerge. Learning how to take those memories, piecing together a story that feels right and make sense to the survivor is both a therapeutic and spiritual endeavor. Simply recalling events is not particularly healing. In fact, the initial recall is more likely to be

painful than not. The question becomes, how does a survivor move from remembering to re-remembering? In other words, as intrusive memories from the past invade the present, how does a trauma survivor put her life back together? Re-remembering is somewhat like trying to put Humpty Dumpty together again. It is not possible. Survivors do not and cannot put the pieces of their lives back together in the way they previously existed. Therefore, the idea of resurrection can be useful because resurrection is not about returning to the old ways, but instead is about creating a new life. Once again, utilizing the Markan text, the voices of women in the focus group, and feminist theologians such as Flora Keshgegian, Rita Brock, Rebecca Parker, and Shelly Rambo, this section will explore the theological implications of re-remembering as a facet of resurrection in order to assist pastors in helping trauma survivors explore their spiritual questions.

As trauma survivors work through fear, silence, and traumatic memories, the hope is they find meaning and joy in their lives. A member of my congregation has a mantra that seems applicable here. "If you're going to go through hell, you might as well not come out empty handed." For trauma survivors, it is not an overstatement to say they have gone through hell, and recovery and resurrection are about forging a new and empowered life so the trip through hell is not futile. The final section of this chapter highlights how resurrection functions as a tool of empowerment; through community, through finding a mission in life, to envisioning a future beyond the constrictive binds of trauma. Pastors who are willing, able, and informed are in a position to help make sure survivors do not make the journey alone nor come out of it empty handed.

## Silence

*“In the beginning was silence.”<sup>96</sup>*

Since the resurrection story from the gospel of Mark is the inspiration for my proposal that resurrection is a process and one that we are invited to experience and share, let us begin by looking at how the Gospel of Mark and how the women in this story experienced resurrection at Jesus’ tomb.

Mark 16:8 -Καὶ ἐξεληθοῦσαι ἔφυγον ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου, εἶχεν γὰρ αὐτὰς τρόμος καὶ ἔκστασις· καὶ οὐδενὶ οὐδὲν εἶπαν· ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ

“And they went out, fled from the tomb for terror (trembling) and astonishment (amazement) had seized them. And they said nothing to no one; they were afraid for (since/then/indeed)...”

The resurrection story in the Gospel of Mark ends with a conjunction, apparently mid-sentence and mid-thought, creating a very abrupt ending. It also ends with the women in a state of fear with their bodies trembling and voices silenced, both signifying they have had a traumatic experience. The open-ended nature of the story and the obvious signs of trauma are the attributes of this particular gospel resurrection story which led to its selection as the guided meditation for the focus group.

Daryl Schmidt translates Mark 16:8 as, “And once they got outside, they ran away from the tomb, because great fear and excitement got the better of them. And they didn’t breathe a word of it to anyone: talk about terrified...” He points out that the phrase “they didn’t breathe a word of it to anyone” contains two forms of the same negated word, “no one, nothing”, emphasizing their silence is borne out of fear. In addition, he proposes that the usage of the Greek word, γὰρ (gar), to end the story suggests there is a resolution

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<sup>96</sup> Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 21.

which is yet to come because ending with a conjunction usually means there is something to follow, such as an explanatory note.<sup>97</sup> As such, he uses the “...” to indicate the story is not complete and notes, “Mark’s use (of the word  $\gamma\alpha\rho$ ) is startling because he ends the whole story with it. As the last word of the text, it suggests a sudden ending, rather than a resolution.”<sup>98</sup> The ending of Mark has received considerable attention. Some have called the ending awkward<sup>99</sup>, while others have described it as “evocative, even profound ending” that is awkward and abrupt, but one that is not necessarily unusual for literature of the time.<sup>100</sup>

Although alternate endings have been proposed for this story, it is the incompleteness that I find appealing. Theologically, I propose it can mean we are part of the ongoing resurrection story. There is not one definitive ending, but instead, there is an ongoing story of resurrection that includes our stories. Ideally, resurrection stories should be celebrated, but it is this particular story without a celebratory ending, which serves as a reminder that the journey to resurrection arises from the ashes of fear, silence, and trembling.

As noted in the introductory chapter, there seems to be a disconnect between the fears and silence of the women at the tomb compared to the joyous celebrations in our churches on Easter morning. As I think about women who are survivors of childhood

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<sup>97</sup> Daryl Schmidt, *The Gospel of Mark* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1990), 151.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>99</sup> Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 162.

<sup>100</sup> Richard Miller, *Mark’s Empty Tomb and Other Translation Fables in Classical Antiquity*, (*JBL* 129.4 (2010): 759-76), 768.

sexual abuse, I see a parallel. They are often afraid, often silenced, and bear the scars of their abuse, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Consequently, I would argue that resurrection has the potential to be part of the meaning-making themes in a survivor's recovery process. The *Women's Bible Commentary* asks, "Can those who flee in fright experience resurrection?"<sup>101</sup>

Flora Keshgegian begins "Redeeming Memories" with an eloquent description of the meaning and power of silence. She thoughtfully observes, silence "screams words of pain, of ignorance, of evil unacknowledged, and of desire unfulfilled."<sup>102</sup> Keshgegian draws on the words of Dorothee Soelle and Paolo Friere, both of whom speak to the dehumanizing nature of silence borne from abuse; Soelle writes how suffering reduces one to silence and Friere how the oppressed have no words to name their condition. And yet, Keshgegian also speaks to the power of silence, how it is pregnant with meaning and how silence invites us to a time of listening, making space for those who have been abused to be heard.

The women in the focus group experienced silencing in multiple ways as noted in the previous chapter. Riley lamented that when she was a girl being abused, no one helped her. "Everybody knew it was going on, nobody helped me – my family, friends, or whatever." The lack of intervention is silencing. It sends a message to a young girl that her concerns, her body, and her well-being are not a priority to anyone else. The silence of others became her silence.

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<sup>101</sup> *Women's Bible Commentary*, Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, Editors. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 492.

<sup>102</sup> Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 21.

Lynn echoed a similar experience an ocean away. No one helped her either. In fact, when she finally told her mother, she said her mother screamed at her “how could you be so dumb?!” As a child, Lynn was expected to know who was safe and who was not. Instead, like so many abused children, she assumed something was wrong with her. She did not tell anyone immediately, but given her mother’s response, it is not hard to understand her silence.

More than one of the women in the focus group expressed frustration with today’s environment from the president to the overall mood of the country. This is demonstrated not just in Lucy’s words, but her lack of them when she started to share her thoughts, but had trouble finishing them. “I’m in a real odd place... I think I was as strong as I could be, did therapy for many, many years and I was good. And now I’m going through...” and then her voice faded off. Later she added, “So stability for me is....” And again, her voice faded. The silence of trauma returns if a survivor is triggered again.

Once again, it is worth noting how trauma disrupts the present, disrupts the healing and mean-making survivors achieve, and exposes their scars. Scars are thin places which can be irritated long after the wound has closed.

Many years ago, I read a poem Susan Thistlethwaite included in one of her books, “Sex, Race, and God” It was by an anonymous female author, expressing her identification with the image of a woman, crucified, on a cross.

O God,  
Through the image of a woman  
crucified on the cross  
I understand at last.

For over half of my life  
I have been ashamed  
of the scars I bear.

These scars tell an ugly story,  
 a common story,  
 about a girl who is the victim  
 when a man acts out his fantasies.

In the warmth, peace and sunlight of your presence  
 I was able to uncurl the tightly clenched fists.  
 For the first time  
 I felt your suffering presence with me  
 in that event.  
 I have known you as a vulnerable baby,  
 As a brother, and as a father.  
 Now I know you as a woman.  
 You were there with me  
 As the violated girl  
 Caught in helpless suffering.

The chains of shame and fear  
 No longer bind my heart and body.  
 A slow fire of compassion and forgiveness  
 Is kindled.  
 My tears fall now  
 For man as well as woman.

You were not ashamed of your wounds.  
 You showed them to Thomas  
 As marks of your ordeal and death.  
 I will no longer hide these wounds of mine.  
 I will bear them gracefully.  
 They tell a resurrection story.<sup>103</sup>

The scars bear witness to a story of trauma. Professor Thistlethwaite hung a copy of this poem on her office door and shared that female students routinely stopped by, read the poem, and then opened up to her telling her their own stories of abuse. I am having a similar experience as I share with friends, colleagues, and acquaintances the work I am doing for this project. Women are coming up to me, unsolicited, and sharing how they

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<sup>103</sup> Susan Thistlethwaite. *Sex, Race, and God: Christian Feminism in Black and White* (New York: Crossroads, 1989), 92-93.

could have been part of the focus group for this project. Others are asking if they can read it when it is finished and then share it with friends. There are stories to tell, stories to hear, and making safe spaces for them to be shared is no insignificant matter.

When a suffering God identifies with a survivor's pain, scars, and fear, then a resurrected God has the power to resurrect others in pain as well. The violence of the abuse is acknowledged. The real suffering it causes is claimed and the scars, whether they be physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual, bear witness to the harm inflicted on the young girl. Moving from open wounds to scars indicates resurrection stories are stories of redemption without hiding the reality of the pain endured.

Poetry and an open office door invited survivors in Dr. Thistlethwaite's community to share their stories with her. Breaking silence requires a sense of safety and expectation that one's story will be heard and believed. Safe spaces and safe relationships echo Judith Herman's observation that safety is fundamental to recovering from trauma.

Unfortunately, silence can be distorted in a young child's mind. It can be portrayed as a means of protection for either the survivor or her perpetrator. For instance, if the survivor is still in an abusive setting, then silence can be a mechanism to avoid confrontation and further abuse. As a young child, she may believe silence is good when it protects the perpetrator if the perpetrator is in an authoritarian role in her life. When she becomes an adult, silence becomes a means to bury secrets filled with shame and vulnerability. In any case, the protection granted by silence is impossible to maintain, but also difficult to break. And when the silence is wrapped up in theological claims, it becomes further distorted and more challenging to disrupt.

Rebecca Parker shares the story of a friend whose father repeatedly sexually abused her from a young age. But, because she identified her father with the idea of God the Father, she did not understand how something that felt wrong to her was indeed wrong. Instead she sought to protect him.

Her church taught her a good child honors her father as Jesus honored his when he consented to die at his father's request. At the same time it taught her to see herself as a sinner whose internal sense of resistance to abuse threatened the life of her father. By keeping silent she protected her father from "being crucified". Her silence "saved" him and trapped her in ongoing violation.<sup>104</sup>

Rev. Parker could not remain silent about a theology that was so damaging. Pastors have a platform in which to break silences around sexual abuse. We should use it. By doing so, we not only demonstrate the ability to break through the barrier of silence, we give others permission to do so as well. In addition, like Dr. Thistlethwaite, we can provide a safe space for those who need to tell their stories.

Rev. Parker goes on to share how women in her church initially came to talk to her about her more vocal sermons on sexual assault and abuse. As it turns out, they all had a story to share, but their stories had been buried in their individual forts of silence. However, once they sat down together with their pastor, the flood gates opened, the stories filled the room, and tears of rage and grief spilled out. In the end, they agreed that she should continue "preaching about what happens to women's lives."<sup>105</sup> Rev. Parker reflected later in the book, based on a myriad of examples and experiences, "Violence, I

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<sup>104</sup> Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 28.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

was beginning to understand, is assisted by silence. To stop violence, silences have to be broken.”<sup>106</sup>

In *Proverbs of Ashes*, Brock and Parker effectively argue that violence is not salvific and a Christianity that uses the violence of the crucifixion as the cornerstone for what saves us, opens the door to silencing victims of abuse. After all, Jesus was the obedient child of God and he was willing to suffer and die. To be good, means to suffer and for children, it means to suffer in silence.

From her own life story, Rebecca Parker reminds us that children are fragile when it comes to being manipulated by adults. “Frank exploited my desire to be good and reinforced it with threats of frightening punishment. “You want to be a good girl, don’t you?” Of course I did. He told me that good girls don’t tell about the things he did to me.”<sup>107</sup> Silence becomes a refuge for all the secrets, shame, and pain of sexual abuse. It is encouraged by the perpetrator, believed by the child, and becomes a prison to the adult survivor.

The problem with being good is that there is no way to be good enough. A young girl cannot be good enough to stop the abuse, the suffering that goes with it, or the pain of dealing with it later in life. No matter how good or perfect she is, the abuse does not go away due to her goodness. Lucy tried to make sense of the abuse she experienced at the time it was happening by thinking she was suffering for the future. If she could get through it, then the future would be good, one day, sometime. She placed her faith in the “J.C. fellow”, but then she lost hope for the future and lost her faith. “So, the faith really

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<sup>106</sup> Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 108.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

never came back even though I wanted it so bad because I loved it.” Clearly, being abused as a young girl has had a profound impact on her faith today. Riley followed Lucy’s comments with, “My faith wasn’t just crippled. It was just crushed beyond repair.” Their faith wasn’t merely impacted by the abuse they experienced. It was silenced.

Silence occurs not only as a result of intimidation or threats, but it also takes place as a by-product of forgetting. Someone who has been abused cannot talk about what they do not remember. Hence, silence, in the form of forgetting, is a coping mechanism that allows a child to displace what they cannot comprehend. Unfortunately, forgetting abuse does not make it go away and does not heal its wounds.

As we learned from Levine and Van der Kolk, the body will remember. The question is really only when will the memories become intrusive, not if they will. And, in a sense, the disruptive memories break the silence of the abuse because they cannot be contained any longer. Keshgegian points out that remembering may begin as the result of an “intrusive flashback, or may be found in the response to a new situation or life stage, or to hearing another survivor talk about her experience.”<sup>108</sup> Quite frankly, it could be all of the above, at the same time.

Even when memories begin to intrude the survivor’s consciousness, the lack of a cohesive narrative, consistency of the particularities of the memories, and the passage of time between when the abuse occurred, and the recall of the abuse can all work together to re-silence the victim. Remembering may feel like the beginning of a nightmare, indeed the memories may become literal nightmares. Silence feels safer, but ultimately, it is not.

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<sup>108</sup> Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 40.

Remembering is the first step in breaking the silence, but it is not sufficient to end the fear or intimidation. The survivor must still overcome questions of what happened, questions of whether the abuse was real, and questions from those who might not believe her.

Remembering is painful, which allows for silence to persist. After all, who wants to acknowledge or put into word the pain that comes from abusive memories? Sharing these memories is an incredibly vulnerable time. Who can be trusted with them? A pastor? A therapist? Friends? Family members? The answer is “yes” and “no” to each of these. Treading the rocky path of first realizing the painful memories are present within the survivor’s mind and/or body, and then sharing them, giving voice to them, can be like climbing Mt. Everest. It is not easy and there are many places along the journey in which the survivor can be re-traumatized. “Remembering does enable healing, but only, as I have indicated, through a long, arduous, and painful process of revisiting, feeling, and reinterpreting the past. This process is made more difficult by those who would deny the validity of memories and seek to reassert cultural messages of control.”<sup>109</sup>

Resurrection in the Gospel of Mark begins with silence, fear and trembling. Resurrection continues by ending the silence around trauma. But, make no mistake, ending the silence is a treacherous journey. It is difficult, non-linear, and a roller coaster ride. How do we speak of things that have caused us pain? How do we speak when our minds and bodies are overwhelmed?

Breaking the silence of trauma, and childhood sexual abuse in particular, requires safety and the ability to share painful memories. The one place silence is a plus, is for

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<sup>109</sup> Keshgejian, *Redeeming Memories*, 53.

those of us who bear witness, offering the ability to hear, listen, and not speak over the stories that the survivor needs to share. We participate in the ongoing resurrection story and in the process of resurrection when we are partners with survivors as they break the silence of abuse. Once the silence begins to break, once there is a crack in its armor, then stories of remembrance can emerge and shed light on the recovery process. And then, remembering can be transformed into re-membering.

### **Re-membering**

*“Remembering is for the sake of re-membering.”<sup>110</sup>*

As noted in the previous section, remembering the trauma of sexual abuse is a painful whirlwind of belief and disbelief, a desire to forget again, and yet, the knowledge that forgetting is not healing. But, remembering in a vacuum, without the capacity to process the memories in a safe environment is harmful. The goal of remembering is to “re-member” the mind, body, and spirit. To re-member that which was broken and to re-member with the ability to enter into intentional, chosen, nurturing relationships. Flora Keshgegian has observed for survivors of childhood sexual abuse: “Remembering is both necessary and exceedingly painful... Forgetting, however, tends to submerge, but not deal with, the trauma. How is life to be affirmed without hiding or overlooking the dead and the lost?”<sup>111</sup> She also emphasizes the need for safety and support, mirroring what we have heard from Judith Herman. And like Herman, she recognizes when “recalling the

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<sup>110</sup> Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 202.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87.

abuse and the painful feelings attendant to it lead eventually into a process of mourning and of reinterpreting and working through the past.”<sup>112</sup>

Keshgegian also reminds the Christian community that when we observe communion, listening to and saying the words, “whenever you eat this bread or drink this cup, do this in remembrance of me” we are demonstrating that remembering “is a Christian obligation that holds redemptive potential.”<sup>113</sup>

In addition, the process of mourning cannot be glossed over too quickly. Rebecca Parker shared how her experience of grief brought her back to life. “Mourning cut through my attempt to carry on with daily life as if I were the same. Pain lanced the sadness and freed me. Life would go on, not as before, but it would go on.”<sup>114</sup>

Resurrection is not a return to the old, but instead is foraging a new life in the midst of the wounds and scars of trauma.

Brock illustrates the costs of remembering with this story.

In the late 1970’s, there was no public speaking or writing about the rape and violent abuse of children. I learned about them from survivors who taught me about the power of the human urge to heal and thrive and the crucial role of memory in the aftermath of violence.

Memory of abuse was, I came to understand, excruciatingly hard-earned. At a meeting at which women shared stories of rape and sexual abuse, a staff counselor, Alicia, suddenly doubled over as if she had been struck in the stomach. She bolted for the door and ran out...Slowly, in rambling fits and starts between jerky sobs, Alicia told us she had suddenly remembered being raped by a family friend when she was five. The memory hit her like a physical blow.

Alicia and other survivors in the program helped me understand that remembering violence requires a descent into hell. The terrifying feels return, as if

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<sup>112</sup> Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 41.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>114</sup> Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 227.

the flesh is torn again. Remembering requires reliving what happened before it can be retrieved and put into words.<sup>115</sup>

Shelly Rambo stresses that for trauma survivors, “life, for many, does not triumph over death. Instead, life persists in the midst of death and death in the midst of life.”<sup>116</sup> There is no escaping the reality that trauma shapes us. The wounds it causes may eventually become scars, but scars reflect a story. Rambo also notes, “In the aftermath of a traumatic event, practices and ways of life that people knew before trauma can never be fully recovered and restored as they once were. Instead, forms of life must now emerge with death as a shaping force.”<sup>117</sup> I maintain that remembering and re-membering are part of the resurrection process, finding new life and a new way of living, bearing the scars of trauma, but living again. Reflecting on Van der Kolk’s work, Rambo muses, “for trauma healing to happen, the capacity to imagine one’s life beyond a radical ending, to imagine life anew, must be restored.”<sup>118</sup>

This comment makes me think of Tori and the reasons she chose to be baptized at her current church. First, she had a safe experience at the church simply through the signs she saw posted in the church, ones that came across to her as “really positive.” With deep emotion, she describes her baptism as “embracing hope for myself and not just my children.” Finally, she has reached a place in her life where she can envision a future that

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<sup>115</sup> Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 145-146.

<sup>116</sup> Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 165.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

is different from her abusive past. Between the baptism, a tattoo, and autobiography, she is finding multiple ways to express her life story, her growth, and her hope for the future.

The grapevine tattoo Tori has is one that continues to grow. Right now it is still at the top of her head, but she imagines it growing downward to her feet the more she feels grounded. The imagery of the grapevine would indicate she expects her growth to be non-linear, even meandering at times, but headed in an intentional direction. The tattoo is a physical representation of the way she is re-membering her mind, body, and spirit.

Drawing further on the work of Keshgegian, we have description about the process of remembering trauma. “Remembering refers to a complex and ongoing process, with multiple stages that involve not only recalling the event of abuse but revisiting the abuse cognitively and affectively in order to reclaim the parts of self that were hidden or lost along the way to terror.”<sup>119</sup>

Delving back into the story of resurrection in Mark, we can observe signs of this process weaving through the story. Although, the story in the Gospel of Mark does not explicitly share more of how the women at the tomb experienced resurrection beyond the fear, trembling, silencing and scars, I would like to suggest that we know the story of the women at the tomb because they eventually found their voices and shared their story. Who else would be able to articulate the fear and trembling they felt if they had not found the ability to share it? Who else would know what it was like to be so physically shaken by the experience of finding an empty tomb where they thought they would only find death and grief? “The women flee the tomb, terrified and amazed,...The women... are

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<sup>119</sup> Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 41.

fallible followers, humans struggling to think the surprising things about God. But, as everyone in the audience knows, the story gets out.”<sup>120</sup> The women found their voices, broke through the silence, and I would argue experienced not only Jesus’ resurrection, but their own. Their lives were transformed at the tomb.

It is worth noting, the word for tomb and memory in Greek have the same root, “μνήμη (mneme; remembrance)”.<sup>121</sup> With that in mind, we can think of the tomb as a place to remember the dead. And certainly, that is initially the reason the women went to the tomb. But, in the story of Mark, the tomb and remembering is also place of confusion and fear. As we read the story today, noting that in the re-telling and remembering of the story, the women clearly voiced their fears. Remembering did not erase the fear they experienced.

In the story, a messenger is present, imparting three words of instruction to the women. First, do not be alarmed or astonished. Second, Jesus is not there because has been raised (ἠγέρθη). Third, tell the disciples Jesus will meet them in Galilee, in other words, go back to their home base, Jesus will be waiting. The messenger voices a “remembering” of the community of Jesus’ faithful followers in the instruction to gather in Galilee. It also serves as a statement that crucifixion is not the last word. Trauma is not the last word. The community bands together, re-remembering, overcoming the fear and trembling, raising their voices and breaking the silence together. They are witnesses to resurrection and together experience it with one another.

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<sup>120</sup> *Women’s Bible Commentary*, 492.

<sup>121</sup> Accordance software tools

During the 2016 election cycle, Canadian author Kelly Oxford penned a twitter post in which she invited women to share their first sexual assault story.<sup>122</sup> In a relatively short period of time, she had over one million responses.<sup>123</sup> While reading some of the responses, women acknowledged they had never told anyone about their experience. Others realized while writing their posts that they were remembering or recognizing that there was more to remember about their story. Although disturbing in its content and quantity, this communal act of remembering, telling, and offering support is captivating. I believe it highlights a position Brock expressed in *Journeys by Heart*, “The resurrection of Jesus is a powerful image of the need for solidarity among and with victims of oppressive powers. The resurrection affirms that no one person alone can overcome brokenness.”<sup>124</sup>

In the midst of numerous life changes, Anne shared “I’m trying to find community and I’m trying to find some grounding.” As an engineer, she found it helpful to chart out her life experiences, when “things” were happening, and what positive reflections should could take away from those times. She hoped that she could apply some of what she has learned about the past to today, but she is struggling. Her voice faded as she became drawn into her own thoughts. Anne remembers and she is in the process of re-membering, looking for a community that feels safe.

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<sup>122</sup> Kelly Oxford posted her tweet in response to the infamous “grab them by the pussy” audiotope leaked during the presidential election on October 7, 2016.

<sup>123</sup> From Kelly Oxford’s twitter account - <https://twitter.com/kellyoxford/status/784637410206375937>

<sup>124</sup> Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 103.

Claire had an epiphany walking through an airport back in 2008. She noticed you could find “Hillary nutcrackers” for sale. At first, she thought it was personalized, directed only at Hillary Clinton. But later she came to the conclusion “well, no, it’s not. It’s all of us. And I didn’t realize that it wasn’t just her. You know what, I felt sad for her then, but now I’m pissed off for all of us.” The other women in the focus group vocally agreed and the way they raised their bodies up indicated more emphatic support. You could see their postures rise as she said, “now I’m pissed off for all of us.” This is a perfect illustration how we rise together in voice, in body, and in spirit.

Breaking the silence of abuse is essential to the well-being of the victim because silence isolates the victim from a larger community that may be able to offer support, healing, and potentially, protection. And as Brock and Parker argue, “When the victims of violence are made singular, solitary, unprecedented in their pain, the power of violence remains.”<sup>125</sup> Those who have survived childhood sexual abuse often remain intimidated by the abuser into adulthood even if the abuser is no longer in their life. Fear from the abuse continues long past the episode(s) of abuse. When survivors find their voices the violence of the abuse can be transformed.

It is worth noting, as stated in chapter 3, it is not necessary nor is it likely that a survivor will be able to come up with a complete narrative of the abuse from her past. That does not mean it did not happen. And it does not mean the process of resurrection via remembering and re-remembering is less accessible. However, as the memories are processed by the survivor, sifting through what seems true and authentic, re-remembering is also underway.

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<sup>125</sup> Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 248.

In the process of re-membering, new bonds and connections are formed. Quoting Judith Herman, Brock and Parker emphasize the importance of remembering as part of the journey to restoration, and a “return to ordinary life”. As Judith Herman notes in *Trauma and Recovery*, “Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community. Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others.”<sup>126</sup>

Moving from remembering to re-membering has its own barriers. “The challenge for me, as for many survivors of abuse, was to find a way beyond the possibility of healing and wholeness to its actual realization. Facing the horrors of the past was not enough. The violence was in me. In my body. In my impulses.”<sup>127</sup>

Our bodies do keep the score and so it is imperative for survivors to have a means to re-connect with their bodies. Peter Levine’s somatic experience therapy is one technique that helps release the body from the hold these memories possess. Running away from a perpetrator today does not change the fact that a child could not escape him in the past, but it does release the body’s need to flee. Remembering happens in more than one way and consequently, re-membering happens in more than one way too. A trauma informed theology of resurrection will be cognizant of the needs of our bodies. Crucifixion happened to Jesus’ body and consequently, in our gospel stories, so did resurrection. Similarly, resurrection happens today in survivor’s bodies too.

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<sup>126</sup> Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 100.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 204.

A trauma informed theology of resurrection will seek to nurture healthy relationships.

The self is an achievement of our relationality, structured in our existence from birth,...the self only exists in relationships as it focuses and structures those relationships. The self, the heart, therefore is recreated continuously through feeling, connectedness, and memory.<sup>128</sup>

Re-membering is the beginning of reconnecting with others. It begins with re-membering the self, which is important in and of itself. And, by re-membering as an individual, the survivor is in a position to reconnect with others.

Similarly, Keshgegian repeatedly emphasizes how survivors live with the scars of abuse, the memories of abuse, but when memories are “brought to the surface and the abuse relived affectively, reinterpreted cognitively, and mourned in a supportive context, the survivor can go on to claim the rest of her life in a way that keeps the effects of the abuse in place.”<sup>129</sup>

The process of resurrection allows for the pain of abusive memories, the healing of wounds, and the reclaiming of new life, re-membering one’s self and re-membering with community. It does not celebrate abuse but provides a means to allow life to persist with its reality. “The resurrection is not about Jesus the hero breaking the bonds of death or about God the almighty doing battle on behalf of a lost humanity. Rather, the resurrection is about the power of life to persist and to prevail. It is the affirmation of life even when death seems more powerful.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Brock, *Journeys by Heart*, 16 -17.

<sup>129</sup> Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 53.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

In conversation with Brock, Keshgegian opens doors for survivors and the community of witnesses.

The resurrection is an event that happens among the followers of Jesus. RNB refers to this as Christa/Community. Christa/Community begins in Jesus' lifetime as the expression of erotic power; the witness of Christ/Community continues after Jesus' death. For Brock the community resurrects Jesus' memory and his power through erotic power that is divine power. I would propose a more dialectic relationship. The community resurrects Christ, but the resurrection also shapes the community.<sup>131</sup>

As each of the women find their communities, whether it be churches, political groups, or other organizations, it is clear that they intend to work for a future that makes a positive difference. Whether it is Anne seeking ways to use both her ministerial and engineering experience guided by *tikkun olam*, to heal the world, or Claire mentoring younger colleagues at work, or Riley witnessing the atrocities at the border, in particular the way they effect children, these women are actively seeking to shape their communities. They have seen pain, they have lived it, and they want to transform those experiences. These women know as well as anyone, "Resurrection is always framed by crucifixion. There would be no need for the resurrection if there were no suffering and death.... Resurrection never gets beyond life as struggle. But life is more than suffering and survival and struggle...There is nothing final about the resurrection. It is the ongoing witness to life that is always challenged and threatened."<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 179.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

Life persists. Resurrection is possible. As women rise up, speak their truth beyond the silence imposed by fear, they are on the road, a potentially rocky road, but the road to empowerment.

### **Empowerment: Redeeming Memories**

*“In Christ, God lives among us, as one of us, as that energy in us that most wants to keep breathing and going on, as flesh of our flesh, forever scarred and yet resilient in its healing.”<sup>133</sup>*

Empowerment honors past memories and past trauma. As a part of the resurrection process, empowerment allows the survivor to celebrate a new life lived beyond the confines of fear, silencing, and intrusive memories. Empowerment continues the re-membering aspect of resurrection and gives the survivor the ability to thrive, hence living a resurrection story.

Returning to the unresolved ending in the resurrection story from the Gospel of Mark, I propose one resolution to the open-ended abrupt ending of Mark is that it sets the stage to consider how resurrection seeks to find a new beginning, not an ending, but a beginning that is still coming, one that continues to be lived out today. In addition, I propose we should be encouraged to embrace the open-ending nature of the text as an invitation to participate in the ongoing resurrection story. In the words of Elizabeth Malboun, “The good news is resurrected, so that the whole of Mark’s story becomes just ‘the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ’<sup>134</sup> Because the women found their

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<sup>133</sup> Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 192.

<sup>134</sup> *Women’s Bible Commentary*, 492.

voices, we have insight into how resurrection continues by overcoming trauma via overcoming silence, fear, and trembling. “Clearly some have taken up the work of going and telling.”<sup>135</sup> This work continues today.

As noted in the previous section, Flora Keshgegian recognizes the trauma of remembering abuse and the damage caused by silence. She explores ways in which to empower survivors and yet, honor their memories, all the while cognizant of the reality that remembering is a painful process. Her goal is to find a way to redeem these painful memories. One of the ways in which she does that is to embrace the complete story of Christ.

The promise of redemption is told through the story of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet too often when Christianity has remembered Jesus Christ it has not told a fully redeeming story.... We need to retell the story of Jesus Christ in such a way that our narrative witness speaks to the complex processes of remembering revealed in attending to those who suffer and struggle for fullness of life.<sup>136</sup>

As survivors piece together their narratives, we should listen with ears attuned to how the telling of their stories helps the survivor make meaning of their struggle and how it acknowledges the pain they have experienced. As the survivor builds their narrative, they are empowered. Every truth shared and every wound healed, is another step toward redeeming the memory (not the violence or the abuse) and empowering the survivor to live into an intentional future.

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<sup>135</sup> *Women's Bible Commentary*, 492.

<sup>136</sup> Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 161.

Influenced by Herman's stage of reconnection, Keshgegian states, "This stage may entail finding what Herman calls a "survivor mission," a way to take action and make a difference. Evidence of reconnection is a renewed and fuller sense of commitment to life."<sup>137</sup>

One of the common traits among the women in the focus group was their motivation to impact their spheres of influence to make the world a better place. These choices included commitment to environmental work, political activism, and mentoring young adults. Reconnection was not limited to their personal relationships. Most of the women had a sense of purpose in their work whether it be volunteer or professional. As they reconnected, they came to realize they had gifts and skills to share in positive and influential ways. It is my stance that these gifts, skills, and hopes is resurrection lived out in their choices, in their impact, and in their sense of empowerment. These are examples of how resurrection is lived in and through community.

I cannot overstate how motivating and inspiring it was to listen to these women passionately talk about what motivates them. Lynn voiced how she does not want another child to go through what she did, "hope to not have another child like me." Through her tears the other women responded, "I hope there are more kids like you. I hope they end up like you." Of course, none of them wanted other children to experience abuse like they had, but they saw power and strength in one another. They saw Lynn's determination and drive. Lynn has proven to be a relentless advocate for her Asian community. Without knowing her before the focus group event, the other women embraced her, encouraged her, and were inspired by her.

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<sup>137</sup> Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 42.

Claire acknowledged she had not been the most loving or kindest person she wanted to be. In thinking about the focus group gathering, resurrection for Claire became the ability to change, to be open to other people, and to learn from experience. She added, “I can’t resurrect you” because she does not believe it is her role to change anyone else in a relationship. But, I think the key here is she wants better relationships and the way she sees her relationships improving is through her actions, not waiting on others to do what she wants them to do.

I think the role the women in the focus group play in their communities highlights the reflection Keshgegian articulates in her in depth discussion of Brock’s ideas of erotic power and Christa/Community. In *Journey by Heart*, Rita Brock proposes how resurrection is an event that happens in community. Keshgegain adds her own reflection to Brock’s theology by suggesting, “The community resurrects Christ, but the resurrection also shapes the community.”<sup>138</sup>

Resurrection is not a single solitary event. Just as trauma does not stay in the past, resurrection is not confined to the past nor is it confined to one person. Resurrection as an ongoing, lived experience continues today, in individuals and in the communities that support them. Consequently, resurrection is relational and in relationships, we have an effect on one another.

The process of resurrection may never reach what might be considered completion because trauma has a way of rearing its ugly head. Rambo describes trauma as “the crisis of what remains after a radical ending. It is the crisis of what persists

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<sup>138</sup> Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 179.

beyond its end.”<sup>139</sup> Indeed, trauma has a way of returning. For those who have experienced sexual abuse, triggers can arise years after therapy and healing have been incredibly productive. So, if resurrection is going to come close to the celebratory expectation of Easter morning, then it comes when survivors are empowered. “If Christianity is to be redeeming memory, then its theology must support the kind of remembering that honors the suffering yet makes life possible. The Christian story must be one that heals and liberates through its memorative narratives and practices.”<sup>140</sup>

Resurrection will never live up to the Easter morning alleluias unless it has provided the survivor of childhood sexual abuse a way to address the violence of abuse, the pain of remembering and opportunity to live without fear. “What is ultimately to be deemed as true is that which both honors suffering and empowers.”<sup>141</sup>

I do not want to minimize Anne’s hesitancy to embrace resurrection as a meaningful metaphor or theological concept. However, in her desire to be a part of beginnings, of doing things that are healing for the environment and other people, I do believe she is finding ways to feel empowered. Clearly, at the time of the focus group, she was in a reflective place, not certain participating in the group was what she wanted to do because resurrection is fraught with violence. Thankfully, she did participate because it is important to acknowledge her view that the violence of crucifixion is overwhelming. And also thankfully, she did not let that stop her quest to find meaningful motifs; *tikkun olam*, Christmas, other beginnings.

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<sup>139</sup> Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 109.

<sup>140</sup> Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 158.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

Riley picked up on the violence theme from Anne. She commented on the “crazy drunk anti-semitic dude” who made the harsh movie about Jesus and the crucifixion/resurrection story. She related the violence in the movie to the violence she sees all around her today. And she’s struggling between seeing a need for resurrection in the midst of all this violence and yet wanting it to end, to have some direction where violence is not the last word. In that context, she hopes resurrection is available, but she’d prefer the violence never be there in the first place. If resurrection is a means to overcome violence in our culture and in our communities, then it might have meaning, but it is not completely clear that it will. Riley desperately wants to believe in a risen Savior that helps us rise, but she’s skeptical as to whether it is more than magical thinking.

This is exactly why a concept of resurrection needs to be community inclusive. One person rising does not raise a community out of violence or trauma. For those that would argue that it was Jesus who was resurrected, not the women, I would counter by saying, we all need resurrection and the resurrection stories of Jesus highlight the need for the entire community to experience resurrection and for individuals to experience it within community. It is in community that we build relationships. As pastors, leading congregations filled with hurting people, it is good to remember these words from Rita Nakashima Brock, “The function of the healer is not to gain power, but to facilitate the recreation of it.”<sup>142</sup>

Empowerment is a place of vision, one where the survivor can look toward a future. “Whatever restoration we find comes always with the legacy of the harm done to

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<sup>142</sup> Brock, *Journeys by Heart*, 82.

us. Nothing erases violence, but, sometimes, the power of presence gets us through, literally saves us to live on, to heal, to work for justice.”<sup>143</sup>

Life is beautiful and painful. Childhood sexual abuse is one of the most traumatic experiences a young child can endure. Recovery as an adult is painful as the adult relives the emotions of the experience, digs into the jagged memories of what is their truth, and tries to find some internal peace with their own story. It is my hope that this project is one tool to help pastors become safe people offering safe spaces for survivors to begin their resurrection journeys.

### **Conclusion**

*“Life for many, does not triumph over death. Instead, life persists in the midst of death and death in the midst of life.”<sup>144</sup>*

Silence, fear and trembling – these are signs of trauma and yet, they are also the place where resurrection begins. Is this a hopeful view of resurrection for women who have survived childhood sexual abuse? The women in my focus group had mixed opinions and perspectives as to whether this is the case. However, they were open to the idea that it could. It will be hopeful when the remembrance of abuse, which is so gut wrenching, can be overcome by re-membering one’s self and one’s relationships. When survivors are empowered to make choices about their relationships, their work, and what is meaningful in their lives, then resurrection becomes more tangible.

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<sup>143</sup> Brock and Parker, *Proverbs of Ashes*, 213.

<sup>144</sup> Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 165.

Women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse need witnesses even as the women at the tomb were witnesses to Jesus' crucifixion and the startling events of visiting the tomb a few days later. As Fred Craddock put it, what can be said about the women who were afraid and silent? "When such persons find their voices, what powerful witnesses! No glib and easy Easter words here. They had been to the cemetery." These women had something to say and I bet once they started talking, there was no stopping them.<sup>145</sup>

Despite the fear articulated in Mark, there is also a message from the one who greeted the women at the tomb, which was, "don't be afraid." So, the question becomes, how do we leap from fear and tremble to a strong enough sense of safety in order to not be afraid?

The women at the tomb had each other, they were not alone. That helps. Survivors of childhood sexual abuse are silenced in many ways and with silence comes the sense that they are alone. Finding a safe community helps break through the loneliness. I wish it were that easy. Not all the women in the focus group have found complete safety in community, specifically, they have not all found safety in faith communities. And yet, for the focus group discussion, they all appeared to feel safe amongst other women that they knew had gathered because they shared a common history of childhood sexual abuse. Initially, the conversation was not particularly animated, which is to be expected given they had just met. However, it did not take long before they started offering supportive "uhs and ahs, that's right, yes" to one another.

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<sup>145</sup> Fred Craddock, "Above and Beyond: Mark 16:1-8", *Christian Century*, April 5, 2003. <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2003-04/above-and-beyond>

You might say, it did not take long before they “got” one another. It appeared they felt safe with one another rather quickly and consequently, the stories flowed.

Resurrection may begin with silence, fear and trembling, but hopefully that is only the beginning of the story, not the ending. Resurrection continues with storytelling in which the women find their voices. Resurrection continues in and through empowering and empowered redemptive relationships.

As pastors, when we offer pastoral care to survivors of childhood sexual abuse, we want to participate in their resurrection, their empowerment, and enhancing their redemptive relationships. Moving into the final chapter of this project, we will focus on what we have learned and where we can be most effective as pastoral care providers.

## CHAPTER SIX: PASTORAL CARE FOR SURVIVORS

### **Introduction**

Given what we have learned from leading researchers and care providers in the field of trauma and given the stories from the women in the focus group, the purpose of this chapter is to offer insight into how pastors can offer effective pastoral care for survivors of childhood sexual abuse. To that end, it is also useful to identify what this study did not do and what open questions remain because the open questions lead to additional research. For instance, pursuing open questions in the field of trauma is what prompted Judith Herman to listen to women's stories anew after they had been dismissed for decades.

Listening to stories of childhood sexual abuse is not a benign process. Consequently, care providers, including ministers, need to be familiar with the impact of secondary trauma. All of us that have ever flown on a commercial airline have heard the instruction, "place the oxygen mask on your face first..." Pastors, as care providers, must be able to "breathe" in order to remain emotionally and spiritually healthy because that is the only way pastors will be able to offer ongoing effective pastoral care and be a non-anxious presence all the while nurturing a safe space for survivors to share their stories. Hence, the second section of this chapter addresses issues related to secondary trauma and self-care as a facet of providing valuable pastoral care to survivors.

The third section of this chapter delineates contributions from this study to the field of pastoral care for women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The main objective underlying each suggestion is to provide safe spaces for the women to tell their

stories, provide support as they go through the arduous remembering and re-remembering process, and to walk alongside them as they are empowered to live a new life. The new life will have scars, but scars are both evidence of hurt and healing. They point to the reality of the harm sexual abuse causes, but they are indicative of the hope that healing is possible.

Let us turn now to the open questions this project points toward and how they can assist pastors in providing effective pastoral care to survivors.

### **What This Study Did Not Address**

Every research project has limitations and by articulating those limitations, both the reader and the researcher have a sense of questions that need to be addressed. This study is no different and therefore, it is useful to consider what voices have been absent from this study and what other research methods might offer additional viewpoints. Effective pastoral care is contingent upon attentive listening to those seeking care and an awareness of what or who is absent from this project invites pastoral care providers to be attentive to those absences. In other words, this study is a guide, not an exhaustive roadmap for understanding the experiences and meaning-making processes for the multitude of abuse survivors.

#### *What voices were not heard in the focus group?*

The voices of numerous women were included in this study from trauma theorists to feminist theologians to the women in the focus group. Laura Brown through her use of Pamela Hay's ADDRESSING paradigm, reminds care providers of the many influences

any one person brings to their recovery process. No doubt, a different composition of participants in the focus group for this study would have yielded a different set of stories, insights, and recovery perspectives. I want to take a brief look at some of the voices who were absent from the focus group.

The focus group did not include any transgender women or those who identify as non-binary. This is notable in that transgender women and people who identify as non-binary experience a great deal of violence in our culture.<sup>146</sup> The ever-present threat of violence while simply trying to live their lives with authenticity is clearly an ongoing form of trauma. No doubt their views on what it means to rise again every day or to live a resurrection process day in day out are unique to their particular identities. Consequently, one of the salient issues for transgender women and non-binary people is the establishment of safety. Therefore, pastoral care providers need to address the issue of safety and help establish a relationship that garners trust and acknowledges obstacles particular to these survivors.

Another minority group that was not represented in the focus group that I think would add yet another valuable perspective to the conversation are African American women. Historically, black women have been subjected to rape and sexual abuse at higher rates than white females.<sup>147</sup> Higher rates of poverty and sexual assault also tend to

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<sup>146</sup> According to a survey on transgender violence, nearly half (46%) of respondents were verbally harassed in the past year, 9% were physically attacked, and nearly half (47%) were sexually assaulted. <https://vawnet.org/sc/serving-trans-and-non-binary-survivors-domestic-and-sexual-violence/violence-against-trans-and> (accessed April 14, 2020).

<sup>147</sup> Data from the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence identifies a wide range for the percentage of black girls who have been sexually abused as children; 34-65% . <https://vawnet.org/material/sexual-violence-lives-african-american-women-risk-response-and-resilience> (accessed April 14, 2020).

increase mental health concerns; post-traumatic stress, drug use, depression, and suicidality to name a few issues that add complexity to the recovery process. Once again, the sheer prevalence of cultural biases which can lead to overt acts of violence or persist as micro-aggressions, suggests black women who were sexually abused as young girls have a narrative that was not heard in the focus group.

Similarly, I also want to note there were no Native American women in the focus group and like transgender women and African American women, there are unique cultural experiences that only their voices can illuminate. Sexual violence is extraordinarily high among Native American women; four out of five Native American women have experienced violence and 50% have experienced sexual violence. One of the biggest obstacles in addressing the violence committed against these women are the multiple legal snares. For instance. It is estimated that 96% of the violence against native women is committed by non-indigenous males. Under current laws, it is very difficult, if not impossible to hold the perpetrators accountable. “For more than 35 years, United States law has stripped Indian nations of all criminal authority over non-Indians.”<sup>148</sup> One book that captures the complexities of the insidious trauma for Native American women is *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich.<sup>149</sup> In the story, a woman is raped and the suspected rapist is widely known. However, finding justice is tragically difficult. Was she raped on recognized tribal land or non-tribal land? The answer to that question matters in the legal process. Who arrests the rapist and who prosecutes? Tribal courts or non-tribal

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<sup>148</sup> <https://indianlaw.org/issue/ending-violence-against-native-women> (accessed April 14, 2020)

<sup>149</sup> Louise Erdrich, *The Round House* (Harper Collins Publisher, 2012).

local jurisdictions? These difficulties exacerbate the post-traumatic stress for the victim and her family. Healing, meaning-making, and justice are called into question as the story unfolds.

Transgender women, African American women, and Native American women represent three particular minority groups who experience sexual violence much higher than national averages. They experience discriminatory biases unique to their particular identities or intersection of identities. Providing pastoral care for these women necessitates a sensitivity and awareness of their particular circumstances. I highly recommend referring back to Laura Brown's use of the ADDRESSING paradigm developed by Pamela Hays.<sup>150</sup> Social location, a person's multifaceted identity, impacts the ability to find safety in their world, hence the ability to find a healing pathway. Any care providers, including pastoral care providers, must be culturally aware of obstacles women face in any recovery process.

There are two more groups of women I want to mention that were not included in the focus group. None of the women in the focus group currently attend or identify with a more conservative or evangelical Christian tradition. Based on my experience with conservative evangelical and fundamentalist Christianity, those who tend toward a more literal interpretation of Biblical texts have a different understanding of resurrection than what is presented in this paper. For instance, resurrection is not a metaphor, but instead is understood to be a literal resurrection of Jesus' body from the tombs. How women from this tradition relate to resurrection as part of their faith story is not addressed in this project, but based on my pastoral experience, women with this view are in our

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<sup>150</sup> Brown, *Feminist Therapy*, 73.

congregations whether we pastor “progressive” congregations or not. Therefore, a sensitivity to this perspective is important when offering pastoral care for survivors with this outlook. Let the survivor question whether or not this approach still functions in a meaningful way and let her sort through the questions that may come with challenges to her faith. Support is necessary, but quick answers are not.

Last, but not least, the inclusion criteria for this project required women in the focus group to have received professional counseling related to the abuse in their past. That means women who do not have access to a therapist could not participate. Unfortunately, this particular criterion eliminated women from a lower socio-economic status who cannot afford a therapist, women who live in rural areas where distance prohibits access to a therapist, or women who have simply had a poor experience with a therapist and no longer trust therapists as a result. Women in any of these situations have shaped their own support system and their own recovery process. Providing pastoral care for women with these backgrounds makes it essential for the pastor to know her limitations for providing care, but also to be attuned to the ways in which the survivor has built her own system. Pastoral care in these circumstances may also necessitate assisting her in building a support system because one person, the pastoral care provider, is not a system.

As pastoral care providers, it is important to remember, there are voices and stories we have yet to hear. Laura Brown’s word to therapists is also applicable to pastors. “After 3 decades of working intentionally with trauma I can say with utter certainty that I know that I have no idea of how any particular person will have

experienced and made sense, or not of her or his traumatic experiences.”<sup>151</sup> Clients have been her teachers about survivors’ ability to thrive and show resilience in the wake of trauma. I dare say, pastoral care providers will find this to be true as well.

### *Alternative Methods for Studying Resurrection*

I have shared reasons for utilizing the resurrection story from the Gospel of Mark for this project; the abrupt ending, the reference to silence, fear, and trembling, and the potential for a future in which we participate in the ongoing resurrection story with our own stories. However, other gospels offer their own possibilities. Here are brief, very brief, suggestions how that might look from the vantage point of offering pastoral care.

In the gospel of Matthew, the women are described as leaving the tomb with fear, but there is also a reference to great joy.<sup>152</sup> Matthew is the only gospel that mentions joy as part of the resurrection story. The combination of fear and joy in the midst of trauma is an intriguing tension to explore because competing emotions are not unusual when recovering from trauma. Pastoral care providers can help normalize these types of moments for survivors who are conflicted or confused by their mixed feelings. And since trauma recovery is a non-linear process, feeling more than one emotion at once should not be considered out of the ordinary.

The Gospel of Luke offers a couple of options for thinking about trauma and resurrection. First, the women at the tomb return to the place where Jesus’ followers had gathered to tell them what they had seen at the tombs. No one believed them and their

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<sup>151</sup> Brown, *Cultural Competence in Trauma Therapy*, 16.

<sup>152</sup> Matthew 28:8, NRSV

story was considered an “idle” tale until Peter went to the tomb and corroborated their story. I suspect numerous women can relate to this sequence of events, the lack of belief in their telling of a story until a more “authoritative” voice renders the same telling of the events.

Moving to the Gospel of John, neither fear nor joy are mentioned, but there is grief. Mary is crying at the tombs after Peter and John return home, leaving Mary there by herself. Jesus appears, but it is not until he says her name that she realizes who he is. Questions that come to mind from this one exchange in the story include, how does it feel to be called by name at a time of grief and loss, especially in the aftermath of trauma? How does it feel to be seen and known at that time? So many women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse have felt as though they were not seen or not heard or important, which in their minds explained why no one helped them or stopped the perpetrator from harming them. Saying Mary’s name means she is seen and her presence matters to Jesus. Identifying with this moment in the story could be a powerful catalyst to a survivor who has felt undervalued and unseen.

The point of going through these brief thoughts on resurrection from the other gospels is to suggest there are more avenues to consider when thinking about the process of resurrection. The same story is told in more than one way and how survivors connect to a particular telling rests with their particular narrative. From a pastoral care perspective, as we have seen with the women in the focus group for this study, each person identifies with and is empowered by a spectrum of Biblical texts. This is no less true for the resurrection stories in each of the gospels. The variations in the gospel texts

create more opportunities for understanding or interpreting resurrection in light of experiencing traumatic events.

*Do the Women in the Focus Group Have More to Say?*

In chapter two, I offered up the reasons for utilizing a focus group for this project. However, individual interviews could have worked and certainly would have prompted different conversations. For instance, would the women have been more inclined to share more details one-on-one as opposed to a group setting? For that matter, follow up interviews after the focus group could have proven interesting. For example, I would like to clarify with Lynn how she found her way to a Christian university from mainland China. I would be interested in knowing how she views resurrection through the lens of her Buddhist faith. From Claire, I would love to hear more about the cult-like situation she was in and specifically how that has framed her faith or lack thereof since. I think it would also be interesting to follow up a year or two after the focus group to see if the conversation about resurrection had any lasting impact on their faith perspectives or recovery process. Pastors often have the opportunity for these types of follow up conversations. They are beyond the scope of this project, but not beyond the practical possibilities for pastors and pastoral care providers in long term relationships with survivors.

This project opens the door for pastors to engage in trauma-informed conversations with survivors of childhood sexual abuse and ideally, provides a foundation for pastors to have ongoing conversations like the ones suggested above in this section. Talking with survivors about childhood sexual abuse is rewarding when we

see the recovery process unfolding, but it is also a challenge because childhood sexual abuse is truly awful. Hence, pastoral care providers need to be aware of their own vulnerabilities and limits.

### **Secondary Trauma**

Stories of burn-out, compassion fatigue, or caregiver stress are not uncommon. Each of these terms point to the reality in which we can see that providing care for those most in need is exhausting. We talk about self-care as means to combat the fatigue, such as meditation, prayer, exercise, eating well, or participating in outside activities away from our care providing environment. All of these are wonderful suggestions and should be heeded. Given the verifiable nature of fatigue associated with care giving, it seems prudent to at least make note of it here. In these brief paragraphs, I will not be able to provide extensive information on addressing the problem, but I hope in raising the issue, I can offer some awareness and provide resources for pastors to pursue.

As noted above, there are several names that apparently describe the similar issues. Psychologist Kathleen Galek and her co-authors differentiate between burn-out and secondary trauma stress. They note that burn-out tends to come from systemic structural issues within an organization and is manifest via individuals, but the root is the structure. They identify secondary traumatic stress as compassion fatigue specifically related to providing care for those who have experienced trauma. One definition they cite

for secondary traumatic stress is “the natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other.”<sup>153</sup>

In the book, *Trauma Stewardship*, the authors use the term “trauma exposure response”. Here is their description, “The depth, scope, and causes are different for everyone, but the fact that we are affected by the suffering of others and of our planet – that we have a trauma exposure response – is universal.”<sup>154</sup> When providing care for trauma survivors it is important to be aware of the reality of secondary trauma, especially when one hears stories of abuse. It can be a heavy load, but if a pastor is going to be able to engage in the conversations with a survivor, the pastor needs to be aware of their own reactions and the need for their own self-care.

Brown spells out the dilemma for care-providers. As a specialist in therapy with survivors of childhood maltreatment I know that I sometimes feel as if I am surrounded by evidence of unspeakably horrible things that adults have done to children, behaviors beyond my capacity to have ever imagined until my clients gave me this painful education. It is impossible to work with trauma survivors and remain in a state of naïve hopefulness about the world and its human inhabitants... Yet hope is the necessary ingredient of therapy...<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Galek, et al, “Burn-out, Secondary Trauma, and Social Support”, *Pastoral Psychology*. (2011) 60:633-649.

<sup>154</sup> Laura van Dernoot Lipsky, *Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2009), 4.

<sup>155</sup> Brown, *Cultural Competence in Trauma Therapy*, 252.

So, as ones who hold the care of others in our hearts and minds, we need to be attentive to our own self-care, well-being, and personal issues. We can be triggered as we hear stories of abuse. We can be outraged for others and yet, if we want to continue providing pastoral care to others, we may need our own therapeutic resources.

Marie Fortune has a chapter in her text, *Sexual Violence*, specifically dedicated to the roles of pastors entitled “Wounded Healers and Bystanders.” In the spirit of Henri Nouwen, she reminds us that he taught us how “we must identify the suffering in our own hearts as a starting point for ministry.”<sup>156</sup> She goes on to warn pastors that we also carry wounds and to ignore them or believe we are somehow exempt from them is foolish. Furthermore, “we need to be about our own healing of those wounds if we are to be effective pastors.”<sup>157</sup> And the only danger here is not that we will be re-traumatized by those whose stories we hear or that we will experience secondary trauma, but more harmful is the potential that we will use them for our own purposes, for our own healing. Furthermore, we do damage to survivors and ourselves if we perceive that we are the only ones who can “save” them. It is simply not true and it is a dangerous lie that is easy to tell ourselves.<sup>158</sup> As we tend to our own healing, we are able to understand our roles from a healthier perspective.

Laura Brown’s word of caution to other therapists that they are not immune from being affected by the trauma they hear in the stories of their clients is also a word to

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<sup>156</sup> Fortune, *Sexual Violence*, 185.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

pastors. “Trauma does not simply affect the suffering individual; because psychotherapists are human and relational by nature; the distress of one person ripples into the experiences of every life that she or he touches.”<sup>159</sup> Similarly, pastors are also relational and because we live in community with the people in our congregations, we are very vulnerable to feeling the distress of the people in our care. Indeed, we may find ourselves identifying with her lament, “As grateful as I am to my clients for everything they have taught me, I wish that they had never had the experiences that have made each one such an excellent teacher. My sadness over their pain and my anger at the injustices that they have suffered can be considerable.”<sup>160</sup>

Let me close this section by simply reminding my pastoral colleagues to take notice of the care we need. Do not be surprised to find we are frustrated, angry, or seeking meaning at the same time those who come seeking pastoral care are seeking meaning from our faith traditions. We may find ourselves re-evaluating deeply held beliefs, asking anew whether they are useful if they do not provide comfort to those in pain. Do not be hesitant to check in with your own therapist to process secondary trauma. Trauma is isolating and as Laura Brown observes, no one heals from it alone. However, we do not serve our congregations well if we do not tend to our own well-being. A pastor attentive to her own self-care is not only healthier for it, but also providing a model for valuing self-worth to those in their care.

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<sup>159</sup> Brown, *Cultural Competence in Trauma Therapy*, 242.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

“Human beings are creatures in search of meaning... Trauma is the ultimate challenge to meaning making.”<sup>161</sup> Finding meaning is a sacred journey and walking with someone in that process is meaning making in and of itself. With these thoughts in mind, let us look at how the outcomes of this study enhance the ability of ministers to offer pastoral care to survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

### **Contributions of This Study to Pastoral Care Practices**

As pastors think about offering support to survivors of sexual abuse, there are multiple issues to keep in mind. First, like the women in the focus group, when survivors identify with stories in our Biblical text, it can be empowering. Whether it be Tori connecting with Ruth and the way she was able to choose her own family or Riley finding inspiration in the way Judith killed an enemy general and liberated a fearful people, the stories survivors find meaningful also come with a backstory as to why they are meaningful. Listening for these connections opens opportunities to learn more from and with the women telling their stories. A favorite inspirational story is a favorite for a reason and the reason gives insight into the recovery process of the survivor. For instance, Tori’s language about the way Ruth “chose” her family points to family of origin difficulties in her life. Attentive listening allows for a deeper conversation about the implications of the Ruth story in her own family history. And for Riley, knowing that the courage and cunning of Judith is inspiring at a time in which others felt fearful, sheds light on what she’s experiencing today as she advocates for children who she believes are

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 227-228.

being neglected and abused. Again, attentive listening is the first step in providing pastoral care.

With these examples in mind and with the specific exploration into the meaning of resurrection for survivors in this project, a second issue that deserves attention from a pastoral care point of view is the importance of Easter in our faith tradition. From the focus group, it is clear that survivors may not necessarily identify with the celebratory Easter services. As a result, they may not see resurrection as a helpful theological theme. One reason for hesitancy or outright rejection voiced in the focus group is the violence of the crucifixion and the injustice Jesus experienced at the hands of those in authoritative positions. Another is the simplistic way in which the story is often told; Christ is risen, Alleluia, all is well. For people who have experienced trauma, the jump to celebration without acknowledging the trauma in the story can be reminiscent of how their trauma was easily pushed aside.

Pastoral care providers should be careful about making the theological assumption that the celebration is equivalent to resurrection. As I have argued in chapter five, resurrection, like recovery from sexual abuse, is a process that was borne from trauma. Recovery from trauma does not begin with celebration or any sense that all is well. From our gospel stories, this is also the reality for the women at the tomb and if survivors are going to identify with resurrection, pastors are in a position to point out that the first Easter was not all flowers and alleluias. Therefore, I believe it is helpful, even essential, for pastors to have at least a rudimentary understanding of the trauma recovery processes. When we are able to talk with survivors from their places of pain and when we are able to

connect their pain with theological ideas, it offers a place for healing and meaning making that are particular to pastoral care.

Third, as I reflect on the responses of the women in the focus group, even though they did not come to the group with a particular attachment to resurrection, most of them left with a greater appreciation on how it could be meaningful to them. I say this, not to suggest that any of the women will embrace it as a new metaphor for their recovery process, but because all seven participants were willing to engage in how the topic of resurrection might, again might, be a hopeful theme. I do not want to claim too much, but their openness to conversation is a reminder that when we offer pastoral care, we have the ability to offer theological options to survivors. Pastors may have the opportunity to talk with survivors about a variety of faith ideas, resurrection included, that can become meaningful. Exploring faith stories, including Biblical narratives, with survivors is a valuable pastoral care tool. The exploratory process with survivors allows pastoral care providers to assist survivors in developing faith claims that are nurturing, healing, and meaning making.

Doing this work together presents a fourth observation; survivors have gifts to offer pastors and others. Like the women in the focus group, I anticipate that most survivors have thought deeply about what brings meaning to their lives. The women in the focus group have made intentional choices about their life's work, their activism, their parenting, and any number of other relationships in their lives. As pastors offer care to survivors, be aware that their meaning making process is instructive for care providers. Although there may be a template for a path to recovery, each person's story is different

from another and their journey is unique to their circumstances. And their stories are inspiring, even when they are difficult to hear.

Laura Brown's approach in her psychotherapy practice is helpful for pastors. She points out, "therapy is not a relationship of equals. It is instead a relationship founded in the notion that equal value should be accorded all participants in therapy..."<sup>162</sup> The therapist brings expertise from her training and experience and the client brings expertise from her story, her social location, and the coping mechanisms she has used to survive abuse "and that every act of the therapist has as one of its aims the empowerment of the client."<sup>163</sup> Similarly, pastors bring the education and experience from their vocation to conversations with survivors, but the parishioner also brings experience about her own life story. A willingness to be open to learning from the survivor is a pastoral care act because it empowers the survivor to examine her recovery process.

Fifth, given that this particular project explored resurrection as a meaning-making concept for trauma recovery, what I have gleaned from the women in the focus group is resurrection can be a helpful theme, but is one of many that survivors may embrace. I also believe it has the potential to be more helpful if we teach resurrection from a trauma informed position. The automatic celebratory nature of resurrection on Easter morning may be a feel-good moment for the day, but over the long term, survivors of sexual abuse need to know that the silence, remembering, and fear of our sacred stories matches their experiences too. And the more tools we provide as pastors, the more options we make available to survivors in our congregations. In thinking about how this looks in a tangible

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<sup>162</sup> Brown, *Feminist Therapy*, 38.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

way in a pastoral care conversation with a survivor, the pastor may simply ask a series of questions about what stories the survivor does find inspiring or joyful. Encourage the survivor to find her connections and be prepared to add insight from a place of one who has studied the texts.

Sixth, as pastors, we need to be knowledgeable about the violence women and girls experience as a result of bad theology. Former president, Jimmy Carter, as a matter of faith, has said he intends to dedicate the remaining years of his life to bringing awareness to violence against women, especially violence rooted in religious patriarchal bias. He argues for women's equality in both religious and secular settings, claiming any interpretation of scripture relegating women and girls to a lesser status than men is dangerously wrong. "I have become convinced that the most serious and unaddressed worldwide challenge is the deprivation and abuse of women and girls, largely caused by a false interpretation of carefully selected religious texts and a growing tolerance of violence and warfare..."<sup>164</sup> Any claim that makes women and girls inferior to men, opens the door to abuse, especially sexual abuse from rape to various forms of sex trafficking and other forms of sexual violence. He is concerned about how religious bias plays into the violence women experience. "When our mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters are considered both different and inferior in the eyes of the God we worship, this belief tends to permeate society, and everyone suffers."<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Jimmy Carter, *A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 3.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

In his book, *Call to Action*, Carter provides an assortment of statistics to enforce his concern for women's safety. For instance, "It has been estimated that one in five female students is sexually assaulted in American universities ... A report funded by the U.S. Justice Department found that more than 95% of students who are sexually assaulted remain silent, a much larger portion than among the general public."<sup>166</sup> The silence of victims affords protection to rapists because they know it is unlikely they will ever be identified, much less held accountable. Furthermore, the sheer quantity of sexual violence in the United States alone is beyond alarming. "According to the US Justice Department, there were 191,610 cases of rape or sexual assault in the United States in 2006, and 91 percent of the victims were female. That's more than 475 women assaulted every day."<sup>167</sup>

Consequently, as a means to combat the violence against women worldwide, the Carter Center has an initiative, Mobilizing Faith for Women, in which they support the following actions, "Encourage women and girls, including those not abused, to speak out more forcefully. Encourage more qualified women to seek public office and support them."<sup>168</sup>

Seventh, hand in hand with this data and the reality it points to about the violence women experience across the globe, pastors, as an act of pastoral care, in response to the stories they hear from survivors can operate from the stance: believe the suffering. Women have been dismissed and their voices silenced not just from sexual abuse, but

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<sup>166</sup> Carter, *Call to Action*, 43.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

from cultures who want to minimize its impact or would prefer it simply be left in the void of silence.

Pastors can lead by teaching and preaching a lived theology that not only respects women but uplifts them in every facet of life. This may mean supporting women vocationally in seminary and in ministry or quite frankly, in any male dominated field. Encouraging young girls to become engineers and scientists is an act of pastoral care. Encouraging women to live out dreams of becoming authors, physicians, and entrepreneurs can be an act of pastoral care. The visibility of women in roles throughout our churches and our society sends the message to young girls that anything is possible. And when a young girl who has been sexually abused hears from the pulpit and from her pastor that she is valued and that her vocational dreams are not pipe dreams; this is an act of pastoral care.

Finally, above all else, pastoral care providers need to be patient and kind as we build relationships with survivors that feel safe to them. Women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse have been told they are loved, but instead have been exploited. They have been told they are valued, all the while they have been devalued as an adult uses them for their own gratification. They have had to find refuge utilizing a variety of coping mechanisms, only to see the usefulness of those skills fade in adulthood. And as adults, far too many women who have endured sexual abuse as young girls have difficulty with intimate adult relationships because they have been harmed so badly. Drawing from her vast experience specializing in treating adults who were sexual abused as children, psychologist Christine Courtois shares what she has learned; "successful treatment is predicated on a trustworthy and secure relationship between therapist and

client that simultaneously serves as a catalyst for unresolved relational issues to emerge.”<sup>169</sup> Although pastoral care providers are not typically treating clients, the relationship between a pastor and a woman who is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse benefits from a stable, nurturing relationship with her pastor.

As pastors, we live in community with the people in our congregations. As we strive to build healthy communities, we offer safe spaces for those who need it most. I am reminded of a comment from a very young member of my congregation several years ago. I believe she was about four years old at the time. In my memory, I was holding her in the middle of our sanctuary. She looked around and spontaneously remarked, “This is a safe space.” I have no idea what prompted that observation from her, but I am thrilled that is way she felt about her church. Nurturing safe spaces is a gift to many who struggle to find connection and community.

### **Conclusion**

Christmas and Easter are the two biggest holidays in the Christian world. Christmas celebrates “God with us” in the form of a vulnerable baby born into the world with meager resources. In the vulnerability, there is also innocence and hope. Christmas is a story of the potential of life in the most unlikely places.

As we seek to celebrate the resurrection of Christ, voicing the belief that crucifixion does not have the last word, we are also aware that violence surrounds this story. There is trauma in this story, and the innocence of Christmas has long since passed.

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<sup>169</sup> Christine A Courtois and Julian D. Ford, *Treatment of Complex Trauma: A Sequenced, Relationship-Based Approach* (New York: Guilford Publications, 2013). Kindle Edition. Location 245 of 9355

Survivors of childhood sexual abuse have lost their innocence and mostly likely at some point, lost hope in having a life that can heal from the wounds of abuse. Pastors are in a position to be part of the care team that allows survivors to see beyond the trauma that has caused them so much harm to a new life unburdened by abuse.

This project sought to listen to the voices of women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse and what they had to say about resurrection. From their stories, the work of trauma therapists, and feminist theologians, this project has tried to capture an integrated approach to understanding how women recover from childhood sexual abuse and how their recovery may be interpreted within the resurrection story from the Gospel of Mark. Silence, fear, and an open future are part of the common experiences. Wondering what the future holds and if it holds meaning and wholeness are questions many survivors share. Ultimately, the theme of resurrection may not be the one that speaks to them, but the women in the focus group were willing to explore whether or not it could be. Exploration is part of the meaning making process. For those who find value in the resurrection story and for those who continue to deliberate, this project opens the door to ongoing conversations.

I have often told my own congregation that I am a hopelessly hopeful person. In the spirit of that hopeful persistence, I hope this project is one resource that offers tools to pastors as we seek to provide pastoral care to the women who hope to make sense of their faith, their life stories, and the theology we teach and preach in our faith communities. It is my hope that we can assist them in finding an “alleluia” to sing on Easter morning as they break through the silence and fear, the difficulties fraught with remembering, and the fight to thrive beyond the abuse they experienced when they were so young. It is my

hope that women who have survived childhood sexual abuse find moments in which they are able to join the refrain: Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! And finally, it is also my hope that we all intimately know the experience of resurrection as we continuously help each other rise up again.

## APPENDIX A

### ASSISTANCE IN FINDING WOMEN FOR THE FOCUS GROUP

Greetings friends,

As you may know, I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Brite Divinity School. For my doctoral research project, I am studying the relationship between trauma and theology, specifically, women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse and their views on resurrection in light of their abuse stories.

For the qualitative research component of this project, I will conduct a focus group with approximately six to eight women who, unfortunately, identify themselves as survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

The purpose of this email is to ask for your assistance in identifying women who might be interested in participating in such a study. I wonder if you would place the attached flier on your church bulletin board or throughout the church?

I am also including information about resources in the Austin community, should you ever find them helpful for you or those with whom you work.

Thanks,  
Rev. Mary Wilson  
[pastor@icots.org](mailto:pastor@icots.org)  
512-921-9391

## APPENDIX B

### RECRUITMENT FLYER

#### *Women's Voices Needed!*

Rev. Mary Wilson, a Doctor of Ministry student from Brite Divinity School, is looking for volunteers to participate in a focus group as part of her final doctoral research project.

The title of her research project is: *Resurrection through the Voices of Women Who Are Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse*

As a participant in this project, women who are survivors of childhood sexual abuse will be given an opportunity via a focus group to reflect theologically on their experiences.

You will not be asked to discuss details of your abuse experience.

- \* If you are interested in participating in this focus group, the first task will be to complete a short survey, less than 5 minutes, to see if you meet the criteria for the focus group.
- \* The exact date and time of the focus group will be established once Rev. Wilson has identified the participants and we can all coordinate schedules. The focus group will take up to 3-4 hours to complete.
- \* After the focus group has been conducted, you will be asked to read Rev. Wilson's reflections on the focus group and then respond to them. Each participant can spend as little or as much time as they choose on their response, but responses should take no more than two hours.
- \* There is no compensation for participation.
- \* Potential risks of participation involve the sensitive nature of the discussion topic.
- \* The potential benefits include an opportunity to reflect theologically on your experience and to share with others who may benefit from your perspective, and you theirs. In addition, your insights may offer insight to pastors seeking to provide appropriate pastoral care to survivors.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact Rev. Wilson at [pastor@icots.org](mailto:pastor@icots.org) or 512-921-9391 for additional information. She will send you a link to a brief questionnaire in order to verify your desire and ability to participate in the focus group.

Thank you,  
Rev. Mary Wilson

APPENDIX C  
QUESTIONNAIRE

Pre - Screening Questions for Focus Group Participants

- 1) Did you experience sexual abuse as a child?
  
- 2) Have you received any type of counseling, pastoral care, or other support that has allowed you to process the impact of the abuse experience(s)?
  
- 3) Has there been a time in your life in which you attended a Christian worship service at least six times a year for at least two years?
  
- 4) Would you say you are familiar with a Christian concept of resurrection?
  
- 5) Are you interested in participating in a 3-4 hour focus group conversation talking about the connection of surviving childhood sexual abuse and the theological theme of resurrection as told in one of the gospels?
  
- 6) Are you over 18 years of age?

Name:

Contact Information:

Thank you for your consideration,  
Rev. Mary Wilson  
512-921-9391  
pastor@icots.org

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

Texas Christian University  
Fort Worth, Texas

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**Title of Research: Resurrection through the Voices of Women Who Are Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse**

**Study Investigators:** Joretta Marshall, Professor of Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Care and Counseling & Mary Wilson, Doctor of Ministry student at Brite Divinity School

Contact information – Joretta Marshall, [j.marshall@tcu.edu](mailto:j.marshall@tcu.edu)  
Mary Wilson – [pastor@icots.org](mailto:pastor@icots.org) or [mary.e.wilson@tcu.edu](mailto:mary.e.wilson@tcu.edu)

**What is the purpose of the research?**

To elicit the theological reflections on the theme of resurrection from female survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

**How many people will participate in this study? 6-8**

**What is my involvement for participating in this study?**

There are three steps to this study.

The first step was the pre-screening survey, which you have already completed.

The second step is participating in the focus group once we have established a date and time that is agreeable for all the participants. The focus group will meet one morning or afternoon for approximately 3-4 hours. We will meet in a private space at Church of the Savior, Cedar Park, TX.

Focus groups are used to elicit information from a group of people. This focus group will be formed by a group of women who have experienced sexual abuse in their childhood. The group will be asked to respond to a few questions and then you will be given a prompt as a catalyst in which to share your thoughts about the theological concept of resurrection. You will not be asked to share details of your abuse.

Third, once the focus group has met, Rev. Wilson will provide a written reflection of three to five pages, noting the important aspects of the conversation that surfaced. No names will be attributed to any ideas or conversations. The written reflection will allow each person an opportunity to provide feedback to Rev. Wilson about what she heard,

how she reported on the themes of the conversation, and some of the salient features of the group experience. You will be asked to provide feedback to the reflection. You are free to spend as little or as much time on your responses as you feel warranted, but the hope is that it will take less than 2 hours.

**How long am I expected to be in this study for and how much of my time is required?**

As noted above, the focus group will last 3-4 hours on a particular day determined by the schedules of all the participants. The response to the written reflections should take no more than 2 hours, but may take considerably less time. Therefore, the maximum time commitment is approximately 5-6 hours.

**What are the risks of participating in this study and how will they be minimized?**

The primary concern for the group of women participating in this study is the potential for unwanted stimuli or a triggering response related to your abuse history. Every effort will be made to protect your vulnerability.

One way to offer support during the focus group is to have a therapist available during the meeting time. She will be present at the focus group to insure that if there is a concern, you will have a person readily available to assist you who is not the researcher. The therapist, of course, is bound by professional ethics that require her to maintain confidentiality for every person in the focus group.

The therapist has over ten years of experience counseling sexual abuse survivors. She is experienced in multiple approaches for addressing traumatic experiences, including EMDR and the Somatic Experience Approach. In addition, I will provide names and contacts for local therapists as well as other local resources to everyone who participates in the focus group before we meet. Following the meeting, you will be sent an email by the therapist inquiring about whether you feel a need to talk to someone about anything that arose during the focus group. If you do, every effort will be made by the therapist to assist you in finding an appropriate counselor and/or therapist to speak with about the issues.

Should you need any further counseling, you will be responsible for any financial obligations related to that counseling. It is not the responsibility of the researchers or the therapist.

Last, but not least, by agreeing to participate in the focus group, you are agreeing to keep the confidentiality and anonymity of the other women, the content of the focus group discussion, and any other identifying information about other people in the group.

**What are the benefits for participating in this study?**

The focus group experience will provide an opportunity for you to reflect on your theological understanding about resurrection with other survivors. Consequently, benefits of participating in the focus group may include a sense having your voice heard, knowing you are not alone, and helping other pastors offer more effective pastoral care to other women who come to them.

**Will I be compensated for participating in this study?**

There is no financial compensation for participating in this study.

**What is an alternate procedure(s) that I can choose instead of participating in this study?**

Participating in this study is dependent on your attendance and participation at the focus group. There are no other alternatives.

However, if you are interested in learning more about theological reflections on childhood sexual abuse, you may be interested in exploring the resource list attached at the end of this document.

**How will my confidentiality be protected?**

Every effort to maintain confidentiality will be made. However, the nature of a focus group means that this cannot be fully guaranteed among participating members of the focus group.

Permission for a digital audio recording of the group will be given to the participants prior to the beginning of the focus group.

All digital and paper files (pre-screening instruments, consent documents, audio recordings, data collection, etc.) will be kept in locked cabinets in the office of Rev. Wilson (behind a locked door) until the written part of her Doctor of Ministry project is completed. Upon completion, they will all be turned over to Dr. Marshall and held in the locked cabinets at Brite Divinity School for three years, after which time they will be destroyed. Information about the participants will be kept separately from the data in order to protect the identities of all persons involved.

The digital audio recording will be maintained in a locked drawer or on a password protected file on a password protected computer while the data is being analyzed. Once the project has been written, the digital recording will be given to the project director (Dr. Marshall) and will be held for three years in a locked cabinet separate from any other files pertaining to the identities of the participants.

In order to maintain the anonymity of any participant who withdraws from the project, every effort will be made to redact their comments from the focus group transcript. However, a comment or quote from the withdrawn participant could be included in the final transcript simply due to the inability to discern between more than one voice, or on occasions where there is more than one person is speaking.

**How will my information and participation be used?**

Your comments, remarks, reflections, or any other input you might share will be used by Rev. Wilson to write her reflection on the focus group time. This information will not be used in any other research project. In other words, it will not be shared beyond the scope of this research project. Also, any personal information will be removed in order to maintain your privacy and confidentiality.

**Is my participation voluntary? Yes**

**Can I stop taking part in this research?**

Participation in this project is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at anytime by simply informing Rev. Wilson verbally, via email, or text that she wishes to withdraw. You are free to withdraw at anytime, including during the focus group session (i.e., by leaving the room, or the building, or not taking part in the discussion).

**What are the procedures for withdrawal?**

Simply inform Rev. Wilson that you do not wish to continue via verbal communication, email, or text.

**Will I be given a copy of the consent document to keep? Yes**

**Who should I contact if I have questions regarding the study?**

Joretta Marshall, Phone 817- 257-7577, [j.marshall@tcu.edu](mailto:j.marshall@tcu.edu)  
Mary Wilson, phone 512-921-9391, [pastor@icots.org](mailto:pastor@icots.org) or [mary.e.wilson@tcu.edu](mailto:mary.e.wilson@tcu.edu)

**Who should I contact if I have concerns regarding my rights as a study participant?**

Dr. Michael Faggella-Luby, Chair, TCU Institutional Review Board, (817) 257-4355, [m.faggella-luby@tcu.edu](mailto:m.faggella-luby@tcu.edu) or Lorrie Branson, Research Integrity Officer, [research@tcu.edu](mailto:research@tcu.edu), 817-257-4266

Your signature below indicates that you have read or been read the information provided above, you have received answers to all of your questions and have been told who to call if you have any more questions, you have freely decided to participate in this research, and you understand that you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

**Participant Name (please print):**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Investigator Name (please print):**

Joretta Marshall, Professor of Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Care and Counseling

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Mary Wilson, Doctor of Ministry Student at Brite Divinity School

**Investigator Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

### FOCUS GROUP DETAILS

1. Welcome (from me to the group) – “You all are here because you have agreed to participate in this group. Unfortunately, you share a common experience, childhood sexual abuse. You also share the resilience of survival and all that entails – processing your experience, healing in whatever form that has taken for you, and an ability to share your story or as much of it as feels safe.

I would also like to say that the purpose of this time is to reflect on a theological or faith question in light of your experience, but I do not expect or need you to share detailed accounts of your abuse. In the interest of everyone’s safety and to guard against triggering anyone, sharing details of your abuse experiences is highly discouraged.

Are there any questions before we begin our conversation?”

#### 2. Opening Conversation Prompts

- a. I would like to begin by inviting everyone to share a bit about your faith foundations, i.e. what is important to you, meaning-making to you in your life right now.
- b. What are significant theological or faith claims that are important to you today?
- c. How has your abuse story changed or shaped those beliefs?
- d. Has the theological concept of resurrection been a useful metaphor/theme in processing your story? How?

#### 3. Guided Meditation using Mark 16:1-8.

“I am going to read a resurrection story from the Gospel of Mark. The resurrection story of this Gospel has a couple of unique features in comparison to the other gospels. It has no post-resurrection appearances after the empty tomb story and it ends in mid-sentence. After I read the story, I will invite you to respond to it by sharing words or short phrases that come to mind. I would like for you to write those thoughts on the index cards provided.”

Clarify any questions, then read Mark 16:1-8.

4. Supply each participant with a stack of index cards and a pen. After the reading say, “Given our opening conversation, the reading from Mark, I would like for you to tell me what resurrection means to you in light of your abuse story.”
5. After all the participants appear to be finished writing on their index cards, I will collect the cards and randomly display them on a nearby table. I will then invite the participants to silently begin grouping them into categories of likeness, which they will determine.
6. Once they seem to have completed as much as possible by not talking to one another, I will invite them to begin discussing their groupings and encourage them to make adjustments as needed.
7. The next step will be to name the categories they have constructed. The participants will do the naming, although we will discuss options and reasons for the names they have chosen. I will note any diverse views and at a later time when I am reviewing the data, I may slightly revise these names based on my observations.

8. Concluding conversation – Final thoughts
  - a. Thank the women for their participation
  - b. Remind them that I will share with them my written reflections on our time together at which point they will be invited to comment on whether or not they believe I have captured the thoughts and experience appropriately. At that time they will also be invited to share any other thoughts they think are important for me to know.
  - c. Remind them that they have an identified support system that I will encourage them to use if needed.

The use of Mark 16 is twofold, everyone is listening and responding to the same resurrection story; and the open-ended nature of it, I believe, invites the participants to share their resurrection stories, thoughts, beliefs, etc.

The post group reflections are an important piece to this. Taking a lead from Sensing, “People may choose not to reveal intimate details to the group or in a group setting that they would otherwise tell in a private and confidential setting. Possibly some people will slant their version in a group setting in order to maintain their pretenses or protect their secrets.”<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Wipf & Stock, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers) Kindle Edition. (Kindle Locations 2947-2948).

## APPENDIX F

### FOLLOW-UP EMAIL POST-FOCUS GROUP

As a member of the focus group I would like to ask your feedback regarding my reflections on the conversation and input during that time.

(You may choose not to respond, which will not negate your participation in the focus group time. If, however, you would like for me to delete your input from the focus group, you may still ask to withdraw from the study at this time. Simply notify me via email at pastor@icots.org or via phone or text, 512-921-9391 of your desire to withdraw from the study.)

If you would like to provide feedback to Rev. Wilson's reflections, please answer the follow questions, as they are applicable to your experience.

1. Do the observations about the focus group feel representative of your experience with the focus group? Can you offer specific examples of what resonates with your experience?
2. If the reflection does not match your experience, what would you change or propose has been missed?
3. As a result of participating in the focus group, is there anything else you would like to add that you did not voice during the focus group time?

## APPENDIX G

### RESOURCE LIST GIVEN TO FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

SAFE – stop abuse for everyone –  
[www.safeaustin.org](http://www.safeaustin.org) - includes an online chat option  
24 hr SAFEline – 512-267-7233  
text: 737-888-7233

Texas Advocacy Project  
<https://www.texasadvocacyproject.org>  
Get Help Now – 800-374-4673

National Domestic Violence Hotline  
800-799-7233  
[www.hotline.org](http://www.hotline.org)

Hope Alliance  
Shelter for women and children in Round Rock, TX  
800-460-7233  
[www.hopealliancetx.org](http://www.hopealliancetx.org)

SAFEPLACE Hotline  
Domestic violence and sexual assault survival center in Austin  
512-267-7233  
[www.safeaustin.org/safeplace](http://www.safeaustin.org/safeplace)

#### Therapists Resource List

Each therapist included in the list provided to the focus group participants is a certified Somatic Experience Practitioner and located in the Austin area. I added this disclaimer to clarify that I no personal stake in their choices

Disclaimer: Choosing a therapist is not simply based on the therapists' credentials, but also on the ability of the therapist and client to do meaningful work together. Not every therapist is the right fit for every client. The names below are given as options of professional therapists in case you need to discuss the impact of your sexual abuse experience more in depth. I receive no personal benefit from referrals to the therapists on this list. In addition, each person is responsible for any necessary financial arrangements and payments with the practitioners.

Additional Somatic Experience Practitioners may be found here -  
<https://sepractitioner.membergrove.com/search-directory.php?sb=zip&z=78703&r=25>

APPENDIX H

MEDIA RECORDING CONSENT



**TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**  
**Media Recording Release Form**

**Title of Research:** Resurrection through the Voices of Women Who Are Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

**Study Investigators:** Joretta Marshall

**Record types.** As part of this study, the following types of media records will be made of you during your participation in the research:

- Audio Recording

**Record uses.** Please indicate what uses of the media records listed above you are willing to permit by initialing below and signing the form at the end. We will only use the media records in ways that you agree to.

\_\_\_\_\_ The media record(s) can be studied by the research team for use in this research project.

I have read the above descriptions and give my consent for the use of the media recordings as indicated by my initials above.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

If you have concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, contact Dr. Michael Faggella-Luby, Chair, TCU Institutional Review Board, (817) 257-4355, [m.faggella-luby@tcu.edu](mailto:m.faggella-luby@tcu.edu) or Lorrie Branson, Research Integrity Officer, [research@tcu.edu](mailto:research@tcu.edu), 817-257-4266

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