

Worship Materials

From Global Ministries Southern Asia Initiative

Lamentations

Voice 1: *I am a young girl and I hail from a remote village in Kandhamal a district in Orissa. I have always dreamt of a life in which I can live confidently, independently and happily. On October 26, 2012 I went to watch a movie with my male friends not knowing that I would not return home. I was brutally assaulted, gang raped and murdered. The media did not know anything about me, the newspapers did not speak about me, there were hardly candles lit paying tribute to me. I am not an isolated case, there are many young Dalit women like me who are raped, tortured and killed but we are buried in the pages of history. Do I as a woman deserved respect, am I a sexual object?*

Voice 2: *I am a young girl who was not known to the world when I was alive but was known to the world when I am no more. I am a 23 year old medical student and I was gang raped, assaulted by iron rods and I was thrown out of a bus. The passerby has not cared for my wounds, my naked body was not covered, the oozing blood was not wiped, I was not even treated like a human being. I struggled for life for 13 days and I breathed my last breath on December 29, 2012. Unlike the other rape victims I appeared in the newspapers, I was the talk of the town, my sisters and brothers stood in solidarity with me and protested for justice, but what justice can be done to a person who lives no more? As a woman do I deserve respect?*

Voice 3: *I am a 3 year old year girl. I go to playschool and I am drugged and raped in the bathroom of my playschool. The Playschool owner's husband raped me. I don't even know the meaning of rape, but I am raped. I am a kid and I am not sure what pleasure men get by doing this to me. I am a girl, and as a girl, don't I deserve respect and dignity?*

Call to worship

Our minds are disturbed by the incidents we hear, our hearts are burdened by the voices we listen to, O come let us disturb others, disturbing others to action, disturbing others to protest, disturbing others to live in solidarity and disturbing others until they recognize, realize and recommit themselves to the cause of wiping out discrimination against our sisters, mothers and daughters. O come brothers and sisters let us together celebrate the lives of women who have sacrificed their lives, let us commemorate the brave hearts who have shed their blood for no fault of theirs, let us together stand in solidarity for the coming generations of women who need to be loved, respected and cared.

Opening Prayer

God the creator, sustainer and redeemer, we beseech your presence with a burdened heart remembering the atrocities that are happening to the women around the world. We seek your guidance as we women and men together try hard to fight against the violence against women. Help us to realize that you have created both women and men in your own image and have given both equal status. As we observe International Women's day and we commemorate the lives of the women who have struggled hard to ensure equality, justice and dignity for women. Create in us a clean heart so that we all may work for justice, peace and love. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn (of your choice)

Praise and Thanksgiving

Women: We praise you God Almighty creator, sustainer and redeemer for your never ending love, nurture and guidance, we praise for your manifold revelations in us your creation. We thank you for creating us in your own image and for inherently implanting in us dignity, patience to forgive and the perseverance to fight for ourselves

Men: We praise you Triune God, for your constant presence in our lives and for motivating us to live a better life. We thank you for instilling in us the ability to love, care and respect our neighbors, both men and women. We pray that your gifts of understanding and sensitivity will transform those who are violent and abusive, and that your healing powers will ease the burden of their hearts.

ALL: We all are created in the God's own image. Let us respect each other, love each other, care for each other and live in solidarity with each other. We praise you for what you are and we thank you for what you have done to us. Amen

Confession

Gracious God, we come to your throne of grace seeking forgiveness for the good we have left undone and the evil that we have done. We have often failed to listen to your whispers which call us to build a society where freedom, equality and dignity are assured. We have directly or indirectly taken part in the violence that is happening to women every hour. We have been silent spectators and have been often promoters of injustice to our sisters, daughters and mothers. We seek your forgiveness for not protesting when our sisters are raped, sexually abused, tortured and molested. We have often spoken about gender justice but we were unable to do justice to the women within our families. We are truly sorry for our acts which have caused pain to the women around us. We ask you to forgive us and enable us to overcome our weakness and strive hard for a better world.

Assurance of pardon

God hears our cries and longs to help us in our struggle. God hears our confessions and forgives us. May we take God's desire for transformation seriously, and find ways to respond to God's forgiveness with acts of love and faith.

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 65: 17-25, A New Heaven and a New Earth

Reflection

Thirty-two years ago when I was 17 and living in Bombay, I was gang raped and nearly killed. It's not exactly pleasant to be a symbol of rape. I'm not an expert, nor do I represent all victims of rape. All I can offer is that — unlike the young woman who died in December two weeks after being brutally gang raped, and so many others — my story didn't end, and I can continue to tell it.

When I fought to live that night, I hardly knew what I was fighting for. A male friend and I had gone for a walk up a mountain near my home. Four armed men caught us and made us climb to a secluded spot, where they raped me for several hours, and beat both of us. They argued among themselves about whether or not to kill us, and finally let us go. At 17, I was just a child. Life rewarded me richly for surviving. I stumbled home, wounded and traumatized, to a fabulous family. With them on my side, so much came my way. I found true love.

Rape is horrible. But it is not horrible for all the reasons that have been drilled into the heads of Indian women. It is horrible because you are violated, you are scared, someone else takes control of your body and hurts you in the most intimate way. It is not horrible because you lose your “virtue.” It is not horrible because your father and your brother are dishonored. I reject the notion that my virtue is located in my vagina, just as I reject the notion that men’s brains are in their genitals. If we take honor out of the equation, rape will still be horrible, but it will be a personal, and not a societal, horror. We will be able to give women who have been assaulted what they truly need: not a load of rubbish about how they should feel guilty or ashamed, but empathy for going through a terrible trauma.

At 17, I thought the scariest thing that could happen in my life was being hurt and humiliated in such a painful way. At 49, I know I was wrong: the scariest thing is imagining my 11-year-old child being hurt and humiliated. Not because of my family’s honor, but because she trusts the world and it is infinitely painful to think of her losing that trust. When I look back, it is not the 17-year-old me I want to comfort, but my parents. They had the job of picking up the pieces.

This is where our work lies, with those of us who are raising the next generation. It lies in teaching our sons and daughters to become liberated, respectful adults who know that men who hurt women are making a choice, and will be punished. When I was 17, I could not have imagined thousands of people marching against rape in India, as we have seen these past few weeks. And yet there is still work to be done. We have spent generations constructing elaborate systems of patriarchy, caste and social and sexual inequality that allow abuse to flourish. But rape is not inevitable, like the weather. We need to shelve all the useless talk about honor and virtue and did-she-lead-him-on and could-he-help-himself. We need to put responsibility where it lies: on men who violate women, and on all of us who let them get away with it while we point accusing fingers at their victims.

May the Lord lead us to **‘a new heaven and a new earth’** as was prophesied by prophet Isaiah; where the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard no more, where children will not die early, and will not be doomed to misfortune; where there will be justice and people will enjoy the fruits of their labour. He has assured peace and harmony among human beings and all creatures. The Lord has promised to answer us when we cry out to him, and proclaimed that there will be no harm or destruction on His Holy Mountain. May we look forward to that beautiful heaven.

Intercessory prayers

Leader: Lord we pray for women through all ages in their roles as mother, sister, wife, and daughter, who have been denied the opportunity to enjoy life in its fullness.

All: God of life, lead us to justice and peace.

Leader: Lord we pray that your Church will awaken to the call of being a perfect model of an inclusive society and a safe haven for women, children and men.

All: God of life, lead us to justice and peace.

Leader: We pray that everybody realizes the true worth of women and would strive in earnest to preserve and protect their dignity throughout their lifetime.

All: God of life, lead us to justice and peace.

Closing song (*of your choice*)

Lord's Prayer (All)

Benediction

May the peace of God which passes all understanding fill our hearts and mind; and may our lives overflow with mercy, grace and love to those around us. Amen

Note: *This liturgy has been prepared by Rev. Sweety Helen, Executive Secretary, Youth Desk, National Council of Churches in India and CCA-EGY. Voices 1, 2 and 3, and the Reflection story are based on true incidents that were widely reported by the Indian media. Songs are left to your choice for flexibility and contextual relevance.*