

# Sermon Starter and Response – Holding Tamar’s Story

*2 Samuel 13:1-20*

## Sermon Starter

Before the Scripture is read, ask those gathered to consider the following questions. If possible, gather responses.

- What does it mean to hold a story?
- What stories do we have permission to tell?
- What stories are we most likely to tell?

Explain that the text for today follows the story of David and Bathsheba: After noticing and desiring the beautiful Bathsheba, David summons her and she becomes pregnant. David orders the husband of Bathsheba to the front lines of battle, where he is killed, and David marries Bathsheba. Their son is born, but dies soon after birth. After mourning their son, David and Bathsheba have other children—Solomon (who eventually succeeds David’s throne), Absalom, and Tamar. Amnon is David’s son from another wife, thus a half-sibling of Tamar.

Choose two or three people to read the biblical text as described. Allow for moments of silence as indicated:

Verses 1-3

*(Silence)*

Verses 4-6

*(Silence)*

Verses 7-9

*(Silence)*

Verses 10-11

*(Silence)*

Verses 12-14

*(Silence)*

Verses 15-17

*(Silence)*

Verses 18-20

*(Silence)*

Every two minutes, a woman or girl in the U.S. is sexually assaulted. Nearly half of the victims are under age of 18, and over half of these assaults are never reported. Most of the assaults are committed by someone who is known by, and is close to, the victim.

For one week during each school year, clotheslines festooned with colorful T-shirts are displayed on college campuses around the country as part of a national movement called The Clothesline Project. From a distance the shirts—colorful and bright—look celebratory. The shirts wave in the air like flags announcing a festival. Upon closer inspection, these shirts tell a different story. They are the narratives of women who have been sexually assaulted. The T-shirts are emblazoned with words, quotes, and images from survivors of violence. Some shirts bear the words of friends, partners, and allies who tell the story for those who cannot speak, or those who did not survive. “I was just a little girl.” “No means No!” “You were supposed to protect her.” “I am strong and beautiful. I am a survivor.”

In today’s text, Tamar is introduced as Absalom’s beautiful sister. Hebrew narrative is characteristically very sparing. No detail is meant to go unnoticed, and so it seems significant that she is described, from the moment we meet her, as beautiful. She is also a virgin. Her beauty “tormented” her brother Amnon. Amnon’s friend Jonadab helps Amnon hatch a plan to help trick Tamar into his bedroom.

Tamar’s story is not far-fetched at all. For many women, it is perilously close to their own experiences. Women and girls are socialized to believe that physical beauty is our most important attribute. When a woman is assaulted, she bears the risk of being blamed for the assault because of how she was dressed, because she “came on” to the assailant, or because she had a relationship with him before. The myth of being raped by the stranger in the bushes is just that—a myth. Women and children who experience sexual assault and rape are far more likely to be victimized by someone they know well—a trusted family friend, a teacher or counselor, a relative. When the assault is at the hands of someone known to and trusted by the victim and her friends or family, it makes it that much harder for the victim to tell—and to be believed.

In Tamar’s case, she is believed, but she is not immediately vindicated. King David does not punish Amnon because “he loved him, for he was his firstborn.” Amnon’s privilege as a male, and as a son of the king, allows him to do whatever he wants, even rape his sister. For more on the reality of sexualized violence in the lives of Mennonites in particular, visit Our Stories Untold at [OurStoriesUntold.com](http://OurStoriesUntold.com).

## Response

Gather slips of colored paper, several pens, a basket, pins, and a piece of cloth, approximately 2 x 3 ft. Have "Tamar's robe" written on the cloth. Have the cloth draped on a table. If possible, arrange your worship space in a circle, and put the cloth and table in the middle. Or, arrange the cloth and table at the front your worship space. Invite participants to take a pen and several slips of colored paper as they enter the worship space at the beginning of the service and then share in the following litany and exercise as a response to the message.

Leader: Naming is important.  
To be named is to be known and identified,  
to take one's place.  
To be named is to have dignity.  
By naming women past, present, and future,  
we invite women and their stories into this space.  
By writing these names we honor all women's stories,  
their joys as well as their pains.  
On your papers, write the names of women:  
biblical women, women you know, women you know of,  
or women you don't know.  
In a moment you will be invited to pin these names onto this cloth,  
which represents Tamar's robe.

*Explain that these names don't necessarily have to be women whose stories of abuse and violence we know. The name of any woman is welcome, regardless of that woman's particular story. The goal is simply to acknowledge the stories of the women who are named, whatever those stories may be.*

*(In silence, write names.)*

Leader: We acknowledge that too often women's pain is buried, denied, and hidden.  
This pain becomes a source of shame.  
By writing these names, we acknowledge pain.  
We do this not to glorify pain and brokenness,  
but to honor it.  
We name our pain and the pain of our sisters  
as a step toward ending violence against women and girls.

Today we remember, honor, and name  
the mothers, sisters, daughters, and friends  
who have experienced sexual assault and domestic violence.

We also name and honor those who have not experienced this particular pain but carry the stories of others.

We name and stand with all women,  
knowing that one in four will experience violence at some point in their lives.

As we speak names,  
if you are more comfortable holding the name of a woman in silence,  
you are welcome to do that.

Let us name women and give voice to their stories.

Now is the time to call the names of the women who came before us,  
our ancestors.

**People: We call your names, and we hold your stories, all of them.**

*(Allow space for names to be called out.)*

Leader: Now is the time to call the names of the women who are with us:  
our mothers, sisters, cousins, friends, daughters.

**People: We call your names, and we hold your stories, all of them.**

*(Allow space for names to be called out.)*

Leader: Now is the time to call the names of the women who will follow us:  
our daughters, granddaughters, students, friends.

**People: We call your names, and we hold your stories, all of them.**

*(Allow space for names to be called out.)*

*(Invite participants to come forward and pin the names on the fabric.)*

Leader: As we gather before these names, hear the words of the prophet:

Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;  
break forth, O mountains, into singing!  
For the Creator has comforted her people,  
and will have compassion on her suffering ones.

We have said, "The Creator has forsaken me,  
the Holy One has forgotten me."

Can a woman forget her nursing child,  
or show no compassion for the child of her womb?

Even these may forget,  
yet I will not forget you.

See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands;  
your walls are continually before me.

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