

Margaret Kennedy's speech at her Service of Remembrance and Proclamation
Saturday 26th November 2011 at St Giles-in-the-Fields

Yesterday was the 'International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women'

Yesterday was my 59th birthday. I have been on quite a journey.

You will have noticed in your invitation to this service that I can't spell 'remember' or 'remembrance'. This shows I think how difficult this word actually is, but I called this service "remembering & Proclamation" for a reason.

Remembering is something that stays with you ...for life.

And for some remembering is so difficult they blot out traumatic events either completely or partially.

I never stopped remembering, what happened 28 years ago, though at times the memories took a back seat whilst I got on with the job of proclamation.

As you now know, this service is part of a compensation agreement with the diocese of London as a result of several serious sexual assaults I experienced at the hands of an Anglican clergymen. But Why have a service like this at all?

I am a feminist Christian. I am a believer. It was in the context of my beliefs and faith that I was sexually assaulted.

There was no other reason for me to know or be in contact with this clergy abuser. I hadn't met him in McDonalds, or the local squash course. I met him in 'the house of God'. He was my pastor, my faith supporter. I trusted him. Yet what this man did under criminal law was neither about faith or God. The official legal term to what he did is "sexual assault by penetration", I call it rape.

So it is here I want to 'proclaim' what he did. Here in the house of God, with friends, relatives, fellow survivors, church people, I will share those painful memories for one reason alone.

This must never, ever happen another woman or man who are congregants or seeking the pastoral care of a priest.

It is here, in this house of God, we survivors of clergy sexual abuse, abused as adults proclaim the suffering experienced and the justice demanded.

28 years ago I was taken to Epping Forest and raped. I could not challenge, I could not resist, I could not argue, I could not talk. I was frozen in a state of complete dissociation. What could I do? I did not have the emotional, psychological, physical or spiritual 'skills' or 'tools' to stop him. I had already been sexually abused as a child. I was a troubled 30 year old adult in counselling. Often overdosing on drugs, drinking, cutting my wrists. Yes, already profoundly traumatised. I could not deal with further violation.

This predator, not just of me, there were other students also, another is here today, was intent on one thing only; using me for sex. Overpowering me, violating me, and then going his way as if nothing had happened.

This was not a 'one-off' occasion.

There were consequences. Negative and lasting, painful and confusing, chaotic and despairing. And I felt very alone.

Ashamed, guilty, and believing I was the only one. and that it was my fault.

Kum Ba Yah...

I cried, I drank, I was angry, hurting, cutting my wrists, lonely. After college I sought further therapy and was blessed with a gorgeous, kind, sensitive patient therapist; Paul Vernon, who for nigh on 20 years supported me as I put my shattered life back on track. Paul died last year of leukaemia but I am so pleased his wife is here today. I'm happy that Paul witnessed my life's achievements. Especially after he told me. "I didn't think you'd make it."

In 1993 at a conference in America, for the first time I met other victims of clergy sexual abuse. abused as adults and the scales fell from my eyes. I was suddenly not alone.

I learned one important lesson, a lesson that would change me from victim to survivor, from victim to campaigner, what happened me...was NOT my fault.

I reported him to the bishop in the UK, who paid for me to go, in 1995, to confront my abuser with a therapist in America.

There he admitted abusing three of us, but there was probably more.

After meeting him the diocese had him assessed by psychiatrists and he was deemed unsuitable for ministry, but they did not remove him. After a fight of years I succeeded in having him removed from ministry and only this year, finally, he has been removed from teaching young students. Twenty eight long years for justice.

In 2000 I began my doctoral research into clergy sexual exploitation of women. 63 women shared their experiences with me.

One woman was made pregnant by her Anglican therapist clergyman, another Anglican clergywoman was assaulted and stripped naked, as was a catholic nun.

Several women were violently attacked, and assaulted. A nun was subjected to 'sex lessons' in spiritual counselling. Women were raped/assaulted on the missions, healing ministries, in clergy training. Women seeking help with bereavement, marriage violence, depression, all were targeted.

Women's marriages broke down, they lost jobs, and were humiliated in the press. both church communities and leadership re-framed these violations as 'affairs', or 'consensual'.

What have I learned?

I learned that clergy are three times more likely to sexually assault a vulnerable adult than a child.

I learned that the Christian church and even the law, condemns us because we were over that magical marker - age 18.

From this magical age onwards we are seen as complicit in some way in our own violation. It is assumed once adult, we can protect ourselves and if we don't, or cannot, we are STILL questioned as to the role we played.

Age

Age

Age

Is seen as the marker of culpability not the role of the clergyperson, not the power of the clergyperson.

Even our vulnerabilities, emotional, psychological distress, our reasons for seeking care and help of clergy is not considered.

Everything rests upon our age.

What happened to me, to others is not about how old we were. It's not about whether we were a child or an adult.

It is not about US. It is about predatory clergy...men, largely, targeting women largely in their congregations, chaplaincies, and universities.
[It also includes religious sisters, and female clergy who can and do, also abuse though the numbers here are a fraction of the numbers of male clergy abusers].
And it includes male clergy sexually exploiting adult male victims.

Clergymen with a 'duty to care' , clergymen because of role, power and status, are wholly responsible for their actions.

I was a victim, targeted, assaulted and left. This is what I remember. I survived to proclaim, here in this 'house of God' this should never have happened to me. It should never have happened to us. It should never have happened to others.

I ask here today that it never happen again.

This service is not about my 'healing', or making me 'whole', or a 'comfort' , or 'drawing a line under it' as many have suggested to me. It's not about 'reconciliation'. It is about 'remembering', never forgetting what happened to me. It is about 'proclaiming' the truth. It is about our demand for justice.

It is about other things too, precious things...the part other victims and survivors have played in my life

Our friendship,

our solidarity,

our anger

our fight for justice,

our liberation is in truth-telling,

our calling to account,

our protesting

our remembering

our proclaiming

The Truth...

Makes life worth living. My life over the last 28 years has been blessed . That blessing from fellow survivors made my life worth living.

We will survive ... to bless others.

Margaret Kennedy, November 2011