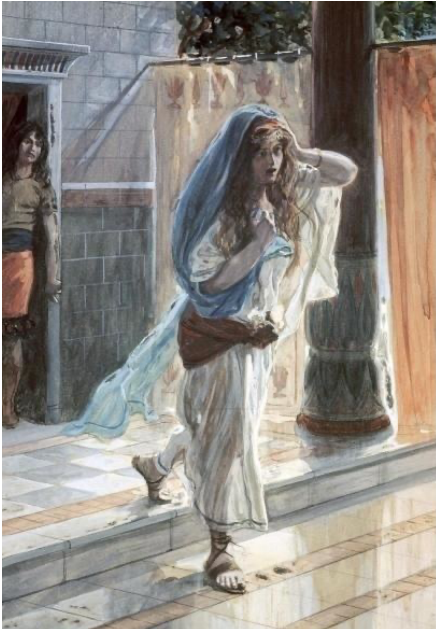


Soul Sister 4 – Tamar



2 Samuel 13:7-14

Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, 'Go to your brother Amnon's house, and prepare food for him.' So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house, where he was lying down. She took dough, kneaded it, made cakes in his sight, and baked the cakes. Then she took the pan and set them out before him, but he refused to eat. Amnon said, 'Send out everyone from me.' So everyone went out from him. Then Amnon said to Tamar, 'Bring the food into the chamber, so that I may eat from your hand.' So Tamar took the cakes she had made, and brought them into the chamber to Amnon her brother. But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her, 'Come, lie with me, my sister.' She answered him, 'No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile! As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels in Israel. Now therefore, I beg you, speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you.' But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she was, he forced her and lay with her.

The Desolation of Tamar, by artist James Tissot (1836-1902)

Tamar, the daughter of King David and Maacah, is one of the biblical women you probably will not hear mentioned in church. It is a story of sexual assault within a family, of a man taking advantage of a woman's compassion. It is not the only story of rape in the Bible – think of Dinah and Bathsheba, who were also taken against their will. In Biblical times, it was often the practice to make men who were convicted of rape marry the woman they assaulted. But Amnon refused and King David did not force the issue. Perhaps it was out of compassion for Tamar, who could not have refused to marry her rapist. However, the result was that he protected the abuser rather than the victim. Tamar lived out the rest of her life in shame and fear. No longer a virgin, she was considered of little value to the family, and tore her robes like a woman in mourning. Her brother Absalom eventually took revenge and killed Amnon. Absalom may have defended his family's honour, but it did nothing to heal Tamar's wellbeing, plunging the family into a war between father and son.

What can we learn from our Soul Sister Tamar? If we acknowledge that these things even happened in the Bible, among God's people, maybe we can remove the secrecy and shame for victims of sexual violence in our own communities.

Question for Reflection: Where do you find God in this story? How do we support those who have the courage to tell their story and raise our awareness and action?

Prayer: *O God of compassion, you who offer healing in body and spirit, we ask you to hold in special care today those who are victims of sexual violence. Give them courage, remind them of their value and dignity. Strengthen us to stand with them and to honour their stories, we pray. Amen*