Although it may not seem obvious at first, we all know the characters in this story. It is easy to come up with comparisons for Amnon and Tamar—abusers and victims, yet there are Jonadabs in our society as well—men and possibly women who encourage power and control. Some do so in sinister ways—a bartender gives a slip's extra alcohol into a woman’s drink in exchange for a bigger tip from the man who has been hitting on her. Other Jonadabs in our society a more subtle and do not realize that they contribute to violence against women. They make jokes about men beating their wives. I’ve heard, and probably in my youth told the joke—“what do I do when the dishwasher stops working? Slap her and tell her to work harder.” Jonadab.

What about the Absaloms? Tamar’s brother Absalom asked her what had happened, even though he already suspected that Amnon had violated her. Absalom heightened her shame by saying, "Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother; do not take this to heart." (13:20) Like Job's so-called friends, like our culture's minimizing of violence against women, Absalom all but said to his violated sister,

"Don't worry so much."

"It ain't so bad."

"Boys will be boys."
“Too bad you are so good-looking, maybe this wouldn’t have happened to you if you were uglier or maybe if you hadn’t dressed so nice.”

“you must have done something to deserve this.” He is angered by his brother’s action, but he keeps the silence.

There are Davids out there too. David is furious at what his son did, but because of his love for Amnon, he does nothing. He lets the silence continue. The only character in the story who refuses to accept the silence is Tamar. A final injustice is done to her because she is ultimately silenced by the author of Second Samuel who does not mention her again.¹

The fact is that Amnon abused Tamar by raping her.

Jonadab abused Tamar by his callous regard for Tamar and what she wanted at the expense of Amnon.

Absalom abused Tamar by not listening to her cries of pain.

David abused Tamar by his silence and unwillingness to hold Amnon accountable.

Her society abused Tamar by saying that a man can get away with rape and a woman who is an innocent victim must bear the shame and disgrace for the rest of her life.

¹ The above exegesis was inspired by Rev. Douglas Donley’s sermon, The Abuse of Tamar, preached at Spiritual Speakout for Violence-Free Families, Initiative for Violence-Free Families/FCS, Minneapolis, Minnesota--2003
Her religion—our religion—abused Tamar by supported all of the men and ignoring the women.

And the scariest part of all of this is that three thousand years later it is still happening.

If our church in any way reflects the statistics for our nation, there are Tamars in our congregation who are being abused by our silence.

- By anonymous reporting, 1 in 5 teenage girls report suffering physical abuse at the hands of a significant other before graduating from high school—this statistic does not include those who endure verbal abuse or sexual abuse.
- By anonymous reporting, 1 in 4 girls report being sexually assaulted before they graduate from college. This statistic does not include those who endure verbal abuse or physical violence that is not sexual.
- Studies performed by the Center for Disease Control consistently show that church-going women are no less likely to be victims than anyone else in the population and that church-going men are no less likely to be abusers.

We, the church, have given power to violence by our silence.

Although it may bring us peace and it may bring us calm, silence is very often much more an enemy than a friend.
Will you break the silence? For far too long the church has let the silence be cut by abusers and their actions.

The sound flesh hitting flesh penetrates the silence
The sound of sobs as wives are pushed, held down.
The sound of children whimpering in fear.
The sound of a door slam.
The sound of a toy breaking.
The sound of a glass shattering.
The flood of sound that comes as one enters the Emergency Room.

We have allowed the abusers to dictate how the silence is broken and in so doing we have given up one of our greatest gifts from God—the ability to make noise.

I have been a part of several training events for clergy persons about domestic violence. There are usually about thirty clergy at such events and they are asked hoe many have preached sermons about domestic violence. About five hands usually go up. For a long time, my hand was not one of them. We, the church, have given the power of our silence to domestic violence.

Although it is common for abusers to isolate their victims from a support network of family and friends, he rarely will limit access to the church. People in the church rarely stop an abuser. We have given the power of our silence to domestic violence.
Few clergy ever ask the woman in pre-marital counseling if she has ever been hit by her partner. We have given the power of our silence to domestic violence.

Many of us have known people who we suspected were abused. A look their husband gives them, an overwhelming fear she has of getting home late, an unexplained bruise or fear of doing something without her husband’s permission. We have suspected but we have not spoken up, we have not spoken out and we have not asked the woman we claim to love if she needs help. And yet we remain silent. We have given the power of our silence to domestic violence.

It is not enough, my brothers and sisters, to have safe sanctuaries. No, no we cannot stop at that. Our safe sanctuaries must translate into healthy homes. We are called to love as if the needs of the other person are our own. This—and this alone—will breed healthy homes of the kind of love that Paul talks about…the kind of love that Jesus embodied…The kind of Love that is kind and not crushing

Love that is patient and not patronizing

Love that is affirming and not disturbing

Love that casts out fear and pulls in comfort.

We are called to love that insists on God’s way and not one’s own way

Love that heals and does not harm

    Heightens and does not hold down

    Respects and does not force sex

Love like this will take more than safe sanctuaries.
Love like this will take the combined voice—the mighty roar of the church that sends vibrations through the doors of our homes and into our families. It is a roar of accountability and love. Love like this will take accountability and it will take care. Love like this must shatter the silence. Will you shatter the silence with me?

We have given the power of our silence to domestic violence and I say no more. It is time to roar. Will you shatter the silence?

We have been called to shatter the silence and we have been called to speak out. When we, as a faith community, fail to act for justice, then God asks us who will? God chastises the Israelites, through Amos, not because they don’t worship God enough. They do lots of that. We praise God and yet we do not let justice roll like a mighty water.

We are washed in the mighty waters of our baptism and yet mighty waters roar with the sound of justice. Will you shatter the silence to incite the waters of our baptism to roll down over this community?

We must lift our rams’ horns to our lips to wear down and wrestle the oppressive walls of silence that protect the abuser and isolate the victim. In so doing, we claim the power of our voice. We take away from domestic violence the power of our silence by deciding to be silent no longer. Will you shatter the silence?

And so now I want to shatter the silence with some people in this room.
To those of you who are being abused. I want to first tell you that it isn’t your fault.

There is nothing you could possibly have done to deserve what you go through.

   It is not because you aren’t thin enough
   It is not because you aren’t obedient enough
   It is not because you don’t enjoy sex enough
   It is not because you aren’t smart enough

Christ suffers with you, but I am here to tell you that this is not your cross to bear.

   Not for your children
   Not for your spouse
   Not for your church and certainly
   Not for your God

Jesus says that he came to give life so that you would have it abundantly. The abuse you face prevents you from the abundant life to which you are called. As long as you are abused you cannot be the best mother, worker, church member that you could be. Will you break the silence and talk to me, a friend, Rachel, Nancy, Bobby or a Domestic violence center? Abuse is not your cross to bear. The challenge of getting out of abuse may be. The difference? Salvation of your body lies at the other end of one cross and not the other.

To those of you who abuse or think that some of your behavior may be abusive. I love you. God loves you. Your spouse loves you. But something is wrong and it isn’t her. It has to stop. Will you break the silence? Will you do the bravest thing you perhaps have ever done in your life, admit that you may have a problem and find help? If you look
deep enough, you will see that control is part of how you feel loved, yet you have taken
that love away from your spouse. You have removed any control they had over their life.
There is a more excellent way. Will you allow others to show it to you?

To those of you who suspect a friend may be a victim. I ask you to listen to your friend.
Ask her questions. Believe what she has to say. The consequences of admitting you are
a victim are so great that almost no one makes it up. Believe her. Tell her she is strong.
Tell her that what she’s going through is evil, without saying that her spouse—whom she
surely loves—is evil. Tell her that God does not want her to suffer. Tell her that you will
be there for her no matter what. Will you shatter the silence and tell her? Will you break
light into your friend’s nightmare of darkness?

Do not live in silence. Silence is our enemy because it attempts to thwart the
proclamation of the truth. We must shed light into the dark corners of abuse—we have to
be willing to engage the darkness.

I wish that I could promise that everything will come out okay if we break the silence.
Whether it be glass or silence, nothing shatters neatly. We avoid the darkness and the
silence because they are unknown and dangerous. To shatter the silence means to risk.
But we, as Christians, cannot afford to be in the business of “playing it safe.” The God of
truth is not the God of “playing it safe.” We risk for the sake of freedom from oppression
and violence, we risk for the sake of justice, we risk for the sake of salvation. May we, as
a community, risk for the salvation of the bodies and souls of the victims in our community and in the world.