

**Sunday 3 May 2026**

*A sermon preached by Bishop Genieve Blackwell at St Paul's Cathedral on Domestic Violence Awareness Sunday*

**Readings:** 1 Peter 2:11-25

Thank you for the opportunity to be here at St Paul's Cathedral for DV Aware Sunday as it is observed in Anglican churches across Australia today. And for your engagement with our Dioceses's PVAW Program. It is a privilege to serve as chair of both the national and local governance bodies.

I want to acknowledge before I go any further, that there may be people here who have been impacted by family violence. This is not an academic issue or challenging statistics. The 1 in 3 women in our country and 1 in 7 men who have been in a violent relationship are real people. Behind every number is a real person. And the women who have been murdered this year, their posters are in the laneway running between Flinders St and Lane, are the tip of the iceberg. This violence should not be normalised. Shocking, hurtful, damaging experiences and stories lie behind those numbers and they need to be heard and respected. I also want to acknowledge that you may have been failed by those around you – including the church. Experiencing minimisation of your experience or story or flat denial. Please do speak to the Succentor - Lydia

The Reverend Tracy Lauersen (our National Program Manager) will be interviewed later in the service and speak more about the Ten Commitments our work is based on. These Ten Commitments are based on the National Anglican Family Violence Project – research undertaken by the National Church Live Survey organisation.

One of the most salutary findings of this research is the way theology and church teaching have been misused in ways that enables harm. This is a travesty - because when rightly understood, the gospel offers a compelling vision of dignity, equality and love that supports healing.

I mention this finding given the readings set down for today in this Easter season.

In particular our epistle.

St Peter has been focusing on what motivates us to live as God's people in the world – the great salvation God has brought about for us through the resurrected Jesus.

Today's passage – the second half of the second chapter – is part of a block to teaching which runs from v 11 through to chapter 3 verse 12 as he moves to the pattern of Christian living.

In vv 11-12, Peter states the mission of God's people in the world – The principle so to speak.

*<sup>11</sup> Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles*

The Old Testament image Peter draws on is the image of faithful Israelites exiled in Babylon - *to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul.* <sup>12</sup> *Conduct yourselves honourably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honourable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.*

In a nutshell to abstain from sinful desires.

In fact to live such good lives that you stand out from the world around you.

That you point people to God.

St Peter then goes on to look at four sets of relationships, Four examples of what that looked like in practice in his day:

The first two are in our passage today –

Accepting the authority of human institutions,

Slaves accept the authority of your masters.

Other translations use the language of submission.

Then in 3:1-7 the relationship of

wives to husbands and husbands to wives:

The lectionary actually jumps over these verses –

too tricky with the language of submission being applied just to wives.

And goes straight to vv 8-12 which you will come to next week

- essentially a summary the whole section.

We are in danger of misunderstanding, misusing what Peter writes

when we forget the context, the time in which he was writing.

It was a world, a time, in which slaves were the property of their masters  
and wives the property of their husbands.

It does not mean in what he writes that Peter was endorsing slavery  
any more than he is endorsing a male / female hierarchy in chapter 3.

Or even when he is talking about how wives are to act in relations to their husbands,  
He is not talking generally but specifically - Christian wives and unbelieving husbands.  
Christians husbands are not to use these verses as a pretext for choosing violence.

Or as a justification for forcing submission.

No Peter urges them to be considerate, to honour them.

Or if we take the literal translation seriously - 'live together according to knowledge':  
to know and understand their wives.

Human beings in Australia today are not understood to be the property of another.

Modern day slavery is to be fought against

and the Marriage Act considers the two parties to a marriage equal partners.

Peter is writing to a suffering church about how to live as Christians

under oppressive governments,

Under oppressive slave masters

And under oppressive husbands.

He takes the element which was most likely to be abused

in these sets of relationships and stresses that:

the need for Christians to submit those in authority

for slaves to submit to their masters

for wives to submit to their husbands

for husbands to be considerate and respectful.

He takes the element most likely to be abused by those with the authority,

then applies the principle, the mission of God's people in the world –

To live such good lives you stand out, that you point people to God –

Peter applies that principle to the world of his day.

And what we see when he does that is respect is the key to living in the world.

1. Respect for everyone – 2:13-17 – in particular for those in authority.

Today we might say live according to the law.

But I think Peter is saying much more than just live within the law.

He is saying engage with it. It is <sup>13</sup> For the Lord's sake

Peter urges his readers to *accept the authority of every human institution,*

In V 15 when he expands on doing right – or doing good –

he most probably has in mind what the prophet Jeremiah said

to those Israelites going to Babylon as exiles:

To seek the welfare of the city to which they were going (Jer 29:7)

And <sup>16</sup> *As servants<sup>[G]</sup> of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil.*

Yes we follow Jesus' example – and I will come back to that.

Jesus also sets the limits of our submission.

We are not slaves to human authorities but to God.

And we are to use our freedom responsibly.

How do we, Christians today, in the same way

seek the welfare of the city in which we are temporary residents?

How do we use our freedom responsibly?

Jesus showed in his teaching throughout the gospels

how much we can do within the law.

The good we can do

As God's people take hold of the Easter hope found in the risen Jesus -

not just for the future - but for now.

When it comes to Family Violence, as Christians today, the church, the Cathedral in particular can play our part in being part of the solution, rather than the problem.

We have an incredible opportunity – Tracy will speak more about that later.

For now I will just say we have an incredible opportunity

as the National Plan for the Prevention Violence Against Women

recognises faith communities as a key setting for prevention

And the Anglican Church of Australia

and within that the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne are recognised as leaders.

## 2. Slaves and masters – vv 18-25

As we come to the second set of relationships in the last part of the chapter,

rather than say more about slaves and masters

I want to focus on where Peter goes.

By v 20 he is generalising beyond household servants

To anyone suffering unjustly and relating it to following Christ's example:

*<sup>23</sup> When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.*

It is a tragedy when a verse such as this is taken to mean

As a Christian I must stay in my marriage at all costs.

Yes Jesus in his passion and crucifixion,

suffered violence, cruelty, humiliation and ultimately death.

But at no point in the gospels, or in the New Testament witness as a whole,

are the actions of those who abused Jesus, or who caused Jesus to suffer

or cried out for it to happen – at no point are their actions affirmed.

No the Scriptures condemn their actions – particularly those with any power.

Similarly those who stoned St Stephen – the first Christian martyr.

Yes we are to follow the example of Jesus and yes that is costly.

But v 24: *<sup>24</sup> He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross,<sup>[e]</sup> so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds<sup>[f]</sup> you have been healed.*

A victim of family violence may not feel ready to leave.  
It is very important we respect their judgement as to  
what is safe or not safe at any given time.  
But living for righteousness is the opposite of harming another.

Or to put it in terms of our Gospel,  
before Jesus claimed to be the truth, he claimed to be the way.  
We only proclaim Jesus as the truth as we first take seriously  
Jesus' way of service, love, lives lived for the sake of the common good.  
Actions speaking louder than words – as we live such good lives  
We stand out from those around us, that we point people to God.  
And the fruit of Jesus as the way and the truth is Jesus' claim to be the life –  
Abundant life as we heard last week from John 10 –  
for all who follow Jesus.

As a church, we have the opportunity to be a community,  
To be a place where victims of family violence may find healing.  
The sort of healing explored in the exhibition in the transept gallery:  
Art as Healing, Voices Against Violence.  
The artists featured come from diverse backgrounds.  
Each has been directly impacted by family violence  
And many are survivors.  
The exhibition seeks to raise awareness about violence against women  
while inviting us to reflect on the role faith communities can play  
in prevention and fostering change.  
To live such good lives that we stand out from the world pointing people to God.