

## Sharing Christ in a brWOKEn World

### Sermon 2 – Sharing Christ When Everyone’s a Victim

How did Donald Trump win the 2016 presidential election in the United States? He entered as a long shot, he was rude, he said some terrible things about immigrants, and women, and a whole lot of other people, no one predicted he would win, and on the night he did win, even Donald Trump seemed surprised that he had actually won. So how did he win?

He, or someone running his campaign came up with the perfect strategy for the modern era.

Donald Trump, the billionaire Hollywood star, the shrewd businessman with hundreds of properties to his name, made a campaign decision that won him the election.

**Donald Trump told the world that Donald Trump was a victim.** During the election campaign he routinely claimed to be the victim of the Mass Media, his own party, the Republican establishment, rigged elections, you name it, if something went against him, if someone argued or disagreed with him, Donald Trump was a victim of an unfair world. In interview after interview, and debate after debate, Trump would comment that he was treated “unfairly,” and “unjustly” while other candidates were let off easy by news and media outlets. On at least 18 different occasions during the election, Donald Trump officially complained about being treated unfairly. He often referred to debates as “very unfair,” he called the coverage of the debates, “unfair,” and in the primaries when one of his opponents would win, he would call the process “totally unfair.”

It worked like a charm – even to his own surprise, he won the election. But why?

You see, Trump had tapped into the *zeitgeist*, the mood of the day. And that mood is best defined by the term, “**Victimhood Culture.**”

Was Trump a victim? No, of course not, but that didn’t matter, because today, the word victim doesn’t mean what it used to mean. And a whole lot of people today, believe that they are victims of all kinds of things.

It is said that in America there are two cultures, the coasts, and the middle. The middle states are often overlooked by the media, by politicians, and the corporate economies who focus most of their attention and investment dollars on the American coasts - New York and L.A.

And that middle America, the farmers, the blue collar works, whose income is far below the national average, they all saw themselves in the victimhood that Donald Trump was selling. Middle America voted for a billionaire New York / LA mogul named Donald Trump, because Donald Trump gave voice to their “victimhood.”

Not to be outdone, in another bizarre case of false victimhood, a young man named **Jussie Smollett** actually hired two men to dress up like Donald Trump supporters with MAGA hats on and “fake beat him up” so that he could claim to be the victim of a hate crime. Smollett is a gay black man who was a rising star in Hollywood, and at that time was an actor in the hit show Empire. His plan didn’t work so well. The police eventually found out that the whole thing was a hoax, the men he hired turned on him and sang like the proverbial canary, and Smollett was charged with public mischief and convicted and sentenced to 150 hours of community service. This young man was a successful Hollywood star! He was rich and famous! Why on earth would he do this? Because he, like Trump understands that we live in a victimhood culture where, if you do it right and say it right, and people believe you, then your victimhood can bring you a great deal of status and power – **That’s Victimhood Culture.**

This is bad news for people who are genuine victims of harm today, because in a culture of victimhood, often the voices of the contrived victims drowned out the voices of those who are truly being hurt, oppressed, or put in danger. This broken and fallen world is filled with real victims; people who have been harmed by other people, harmed physically, mentally, and emotionally, people who, because they lack the power to fight back have been and continue to be systematically discriminated against, abused, and treated deplorably.

That is why our culture has become so difficult to navigate, because today, we have a new idea of victimhood that seems hard to understand, because it seems like a whole lot of people with a whole lot of privilege do a whole lot of crying about being victims of this or that.

And since the people of God are clearly called to set the captive free, to care for the poor and needy, we must respond to real victims whenever we can. But how do we find them in a world where victimhood has become a badge, often for those who really aren't victims of anything.

In their 2018 book entitled: "The Rise of Victimhood Culture", two Moral Sociologists, which means they study the moral cultures of society, define victimhood culture as follows:

***Victimhood culture is a culture in which individuals and groups display a high sensitivity to slight, have a tendency to handle conflicts through complaints to authorities and other third parties, and seek to cultivate an image of being victims who deserve assistance.***

They go on to say that: In a victimhood culture, being a victim can bring both moral status and public support because in a victimhood culture, it's more noble to be a victim than someone who is not. We see this idea everywhere today in Canada.

In its extreme form, currently adhered to the University and College systems of Canada as well as many governments and corporate cultures, it equates minuscule slights, offences, or disagreements to hateful actions of victimization. So if you say the wrong thing to the wrong person, you might be victimizing them, even if you didn't intend any harm or offence.

It's important to note that this is neither a right wing nor left wing phenomenon. It is a human tendency that in most previous cultures was frowned upon, but now is seen as a way of getting noticed, etc. I personally have heard right wing people claim victimhood at the hands of the left, left wing people claim victimhood at the hands of the right, Christians claim it at the hands of the government, and so on.

To understand this better, think about it this way. In most cultures in human history there have been two main ways to deal with conflict: Honour Culture and Dignity Culture. **Honour Culture** is basically what we see in the Old Testament “*eye for an eye*” way of dealing with things. In this culture small slights and offences are taken seriously, but they are dealt with on a personal for family level. So, if someone offends you or insults you, you reply in kind in order to save your honor. This type of culture still existed today in many countries where family vendettas, feuds, and other such personal retributions continue to be played out when solving conflict. **Dignity Culture**, which was the predominate culture of Canada for the past 150 years, looks at conflict in a different way. In Dignity Culture, people don’t get upset about small slights or insults, they brush them off, as if to say, “I won’t dignify that insult or small infarction with my attention.” But when something unjust does occur, something more akin to physical harm or property damage, in Dignity Culture you call upon a third party to correct the situation, you don’t deal with it personally – you call the police, or take someone to court. That’s Dignity Culture – where you let most things go, but when needed call on a third party to deal with the issue. This is the culture of old adage that many of us were taught, “Sticks and stone may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.”

The new Victimhood Culture, which comes from both Honour and Dignity Culture, seems to take the sensitivity to insult from Honour Culture and combine it with the appeal to a third party from the Dignity Culture to create a culture where every time someone feels the slightest offence, they complain about it to a third party, which might be an HR department, or a School Administration, or the police, or it might be Twitter or Social Media.

Now when you add to this idea, some of the big ideas from last week’s sermon, namely Critical Theory, which puts people in groups of oppressor and victim, and you combine that with the bubble wrapped child of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then it becomes clear why this new Victimhood Culture has become so prevalent in our day.

This Victimhood Culture has also given rise to a mine field of words and actions that are seen as harmful, violent, and victimising – even if they are not. In the Universities, the government

sector, and the corporate world, Victimhood Culture is thoroughly adhered to, and people are routinely trained to identify words and actions that might “victimize” them. These are known as microaggressions.

**Microaggressions are defined as** - *The brief and common place daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, or sexual orientation and religious slights and insults to the target group or person* – Derald Wing Sue.

(Sue is a psychologist at Columbia University and is considered the “godfather” of microaggression theory – he has made it his life work.)

So what we used to think of as a simple comment, or an small slight or insinuation, or even an honest question with no harm intended, today is considered to be the building blocks of inequity and discrimination, and people use words like “harm” “trauma” and “violence” because someone said something they didn’t like or took the wrong way. Thus, Victimhood Culture, as it has become mainstream, has drastically changed the meaning of important terms. A case in point would be the ever expanding definition of the word “trauma.”

In the 1970’s the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic Manual defined the word trauma to mean severe physical or mental wounds associated with terrifying and horrifying experiences. (i.e. a car crash, or witnessing someone being killed). In 1980 the term had been expanded to include situations or events outside the range of usual human experience such as life-threatening danger. By 1994, the definition was again expanded to include indirect experiences such as learning that a friend or family member had a life-threatening illness. In recent years, some psychologist has been expanding the term to include such things as childbirth, sexual harassment, a partner cheating, or the sense of abandonment, and on University campuses today, the term Trauma is defined to include something as simple as a very upsetting or negative event, or just the sense of feeling threatened or out of control.

So, in the course of about 50 years or so, the word Trauma has gone from meaning, great physical or mental harm as in war or severe physical violence or mental abuse, to meaning anything that causes you discomfort.

This type of diluting of such an important word (one which helps us identify true victims) is hallmark of a Victimhood Culture, because it allows just about anyone to claim victimhood. Now, before we search the scriptures for ways that we can preach Christ into a Victimhood Culture, one more explanation is needed – the difference between being victimized and living as a victim.

**Being victimized** refers to experiencing harm, mistreatment, or injustice inflicted upon you by someone else or external circumstances. It involves being subjected to actions, behaviors, or events that cause physical, emotional, or psychological harm. Being victimized is not a choice; it is an unfortunate circumstance resulting from the actions or behaviors of others. It is important to acknowledge and address instances of victimization, as it can have significant consequences for the well-being of individuals.

**Considering yourself a victim** goes beyond the experience of being victimized and relates to the personal perception and identification with victimhood. It involves adopting a mindset that defines one's identity primarily or solely in terms of being a victim. This perspective often entails a sense of powerlessness, self-pity, and a belief that the world is against them. Considering oneself a victim can have negative implications, as it may hinder personal growth, resilience, and the ability to take responsibility for one's own life.

So today, the good people of HPBC are left with a challenging situation. First, we must find the real victims amongst the contrived victims of Victimhood Culture, and then we must first care for those who need us, and then we must also find a way to witness Christ to those who think the world or at least some part of the world is against them.

Let's have a look into the Bible and see how the Bible both speaks about, and addresses, real victims and false victims – both can be found in the Word of God.

## **The Strange case of real victims who became fake victims:**

In the beginning of the book of Exodus, the people of Israel are real victims of abuse, oppression and slavery...

*The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them. Ex 2:23-25*

And in God's concern, He was moved to act and to save them, thus we have Moses and the story of the Exodus. But then a strange thing happens. This group of people, just saved from slavery, where their children were being killed and they were being worked literally to death, once they were free – well let's just say they didn't seem to like the arrangement that God made for them, and they decided they were victims of God's divine plan.

So, as Moses moved them from EGYPT to the Promise Land, they began to complain that God was not fair, and Moses was not a good leader, and basically, this group of people whom God saved from their victimization decided they were now victims of God salvation. He had given them water, and manna, and they still weren't happy.

*The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!" Num. 11:4-6*

This statement would be hilarious if it wasn't so sad! They are reminiscing about being slaves and actually saying that situation was better than trusting in God for their future. They complained about everything, they contrived victimhood in their lives.

And they did this over and over again – they claimed to be victims of Moses and God – it didn't please God, and as we read in Corinthians last week, their bodies littered the desert.

But while the Israelites were a perfect of example of Victimhood Culture, there was another man in the Bible who exemplified a life lived above victimhood – a life lived in victory.

**Joseph: Never a Victim, always a victor.**

If there ever was a man who had the right to claim victimhood it was Joseph.

- Beaten and sold into slavery by his own brothers.
- Falsely accused of a crime and put in jail.
- After helping a fellow prisoner, he was forgotten and left to die in jail.
- He was finally brought out of prison and given power and authority over all of Egypt.

Joseph had every right to claim victimhood, and, by our standards he had every right to seek revenge on those that victimized him once he had the power to do so – but he did not. His words to his brothers at the end of Genesis are very powerful, and teach us an important lesson about living in the victory of God.

*But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. Gen 50:19-21*

Joseph knew what we here today must also know if we want our lives to be a witness to the world:

***Those who trust in God, see God in their hardships.***

***Those who don’t see only victimhood.***

***In all these things we are more than conquerors***

***through Jesus Christ our Lord.***

***Rom. 8:37***

Paul knew this as well, and told the New Testament Church the exact same thing. Once when he was in prison he said in Phil. 1:12-14.



*Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guards and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.*

So with these examples, how then can we share Christ to a world of victims – both real and contrived?

### **A Strategy for witnessing to a Victimhood Culture:**

Our witness to real victims:

1. Compassion – listen first, offer our gifts and talents to empower them and help them.
2. Truth – share the truth that Christ brings victory even in hardship.
3. Judgement – show them how to love their enemy without condoning the harm.
4. Advocate for them before God and earthly authorities.

### **Our witness to the false victims of our culture:**

1. Compassion – listen first and speak kindly to them. If we write them off, we will have lost the opportunity to share Christ with them, so learn to listen with compassion, even if you disagree.
2. Truth – share the truth about Jesus' words in Matt. 7:1-5. In this passage Jesus told us not to judge others, and not to be concerned with small issues in other peoples' lives before we have examined our own life and removed what he called "the plank" from our eye. We must carefully tell false victims that they are judging others too harshly, and if they are not careful they will be judged by the same standard with which they judge others.

3. Judgement – show them how their judgment of others will cause them harm in the end. It is a psychological fact that people who live in victimhood live less productive, less happy and less empowered lives. Combine this with the fact that God tells us we must forgive others if we want Him to forgive us, and we have something important to say to those who take issue with every little thing someone else does.
4. Teach them that joy and hope come from victory in Christ. We are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ.

If we approach the world in this way, we may be able to open doors in our Victimhood Culture and be given the opportunity to share Christ, but in the end, we must remember that the best solution to victimhood will always be Jesus!

Jesus of Nazareth was born into a people that were under the brutal oppression of the Roman empire. He was taxed unfairly, He was oppressed by Roman soldiers and a puppet king, He had no legal rights in His own country, and He faced the ultimate form of victimhood and oppression when He was tortured and killed on a roman cross.

And yet, you can search the scriptures and not find one instance, not one word out of Jesus' mouth where He claims to be a victim. Not once, did He criticize the Roman Empire, not once did He resist its unjust power, not once, even as they killed Him, did He utter a word that indicted the Roman soldiers, the Roman governor, or the Roman people as unjust oppressors.

Jesus taught us how to live a victorious life – go and do the same for a world that is being taught a culture of victimhood! Go and show them a better way to live. Go and show them Christ.