

Naming it enabled people to see it was wrong

Rain poured down in Ithaca, New York, but the women who streamed into the Greater Ithaca Activities Center on May 4, 1975 weren't daunted by a bit of weather. Hundreds of women packed into the modest room. Then they began to speak about their experiences being groped and sexually exploited at work.

For journalist-turned activist Lin Farley, the event was life changing. "The solidarity that women felt for one another was contagious," she later wrote. "No longer did they have to explain to their friends and family that 'he hit on me and wouldn't take no for an answer, so I had to quit.' What he did had a name."

Attendees spoke of professors, restaurant guests, factory workers, executives—men who turned their workplaces into private hells. They talked about how their bosses pinched them, groped them, and how their coworkers looked the other way when they were harassed. Humiliated, intimidated and bullied, many of these women had lost jobs when they turned down their bosses' sexual advances. And they were fed up.

As they spoke, these women used a new term: sexual harassment. Until just a few weeks before, the term didn't even exist. But thanks to Farley and the consciousness-raising efforts of the 1970s women's movement, the newly coined term would not just help women give voice to their experiences: It would change U.S. law and life in the workplace.

“Working women immediately took up the phrase, which finally captured the sexual coercion they were experiencing daily,”

The Rev Walter Brueggeman:

The Ten Commandments begin with the identification of the God who liberated Israel from Egypt: I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt...

The word "Egypt" refers to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh is the abusive, brutalizing king of Egypt who practiced and exploited a concentration of power and wealth. You will notice that we do not know Pharaoh's name and that is because Pharaoh keeps turning up in our history time after time. So, Pharaoh is the right name for every brutalizing concentration of wealth and power that acts in violence against vulnerable people. The Exodus is the powerful acknowledgement of that brutalizing domain of human history from which we have been emancipated.

At the outset, the Ten Commandments named this emancipatory God:

I am the Lord your God.

I am the Lord of the Exodus.

I am the God who emancipated you.

I am the Lord of new promises.

It is an announcement that the world is under new governance. That new governance is detailed in the Ten Commandments. They are rules for freedom and justice that contrast with the bondage and injustice of Pharaoh. The covenant at Sinai is a warning that if you do not keep these commandments, you will be back in the grip of Pharaoh and his insatiable demands.

Back to having to produce on demand,
Back in the rat-race of production and consumption,
Back in fear and anxiety and alienation,
Back in hostility toward the neighbor.

Thus, the Ten Commandments are strategies for staying emancipated once you get away from Pharaoh. This new strategy, first of all, says you have to honor God - that's the first three commandments - to the exclusion of every idol, every "ism" such as racism, or sexism, or nationalism, or the worship of stuff that is rare or precious or attractive or beautiful or empowering.

The new strategy means in the Ten Commandments to take the neighbor with utmost seriousness. So, the last five commandments are all about the neighbor and treating neighbors with legitimacy and dignity and viability and especially disadvantaged neighbors - not to violate the neighbor for the sake of greed.

And between these two commandments of honoring God and taking the neighbor seriously, at the center of the Ten Commandments, is Sabbath day. Keep Sabbath: take a break from the rat-race of busyness and exhaustion and do not let Pharaoh define your life.

If we think about these three strategies in the Ten Commandments, each of them contrasts with the way of Pharaoh. Pharaoh believes that there are many loyalties all of which enslave. Pharaoh believes that there are no real neighbors and Pharaoh never stops for Sabbath. It's 24-7. Moses at Mt. Sinai declares that there are new possibilities for life beyond the pressures of anxiety and fearfulness and greed.

I need to listen- White Allies

I'm guilty of hearing friends talk about the experience of racism and rather than just listen, really take in what they are saying, I have found myself being dismissive because I don't want them to dwell on something I find painful. I've just wanted to 'fix' the situation with well meaning advice and what I thought was words of solidarity. I hadn't until the BLM movement took hold of myself and asked myself if this kind of white saviour complex wasn't just another form of un-examined racism.