

Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

LOT'S DAUGHTERS--WHAT'S IN FAMILY?

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There are some stories which are too awful to contemplate, let alone tell--for example, stories about children having sex with parents, their own or their friend's. Such stories are neither entertaining nor edifying. They caused us to gasp in horror. When we either can't or don't want to avoid them, but when we are still ill at ease with them, we turn the gasps into giggles of avoidance. In an attempt to avoid the shock of these stories, we make them entertaining. We call them milf stories. And we smirk along with the cast of Saturday Night Live when they satirically suggest that the appeal of Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin is that of a milf. We may even giggle when they note that since she is about to become a grandmother, she is a gilf rather than a milf.

To his credit television writer and producer David E. Kelly returns the response to such stories back to gasps. In a recent episode of Boston Legal, defense lawyer Alan Shore defends a sex surrogate against the charge of being

an unfit mother by noting newspaper stories about complacent suburban mothers who brag at cocktail parties that they are the milf at their son's high school or even middle school.

The biblical literature neither gasps nor giggles at such stories. Pulling no punches, the biblical authors tell them as they are. One such biblical story is the story of Lot, a father, and his two daughters--not a milf story but a filf story.

How are we understand this story? Who is the victim, and who are the villains? Who is the victimizer, and who are the victims? Who is good in the story, and who is evil?

Let's look at a traditional understanding of the story, keeping in mind that traditional interpreters (until about 40 years ago) of the story were white establishment males with reputations to protect, their own and those of their biblical counterparts. Such interpreters make the daughters into the villains who victimize their father. So despicable are they that the tradition does not record their names. These unnamed daughters are then characterized as self indulgent, sex crazed Hebrew divas who get their father drunk so that they can have sex with him. They are so depraved that if the technology were

available, they would have even made a sex video. Clearly, according to this understanding, the daughters are the evil villains while their father is the innocent, unwitting victim.

Is this the case though? Is Lot, their father, such an innocent victim? A glance at the larger context of this story suggests perhaps not. Lot's story begins when he accompanies his uncle Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees to the land of Caanan. Prosperity follows the move and soon the land upon which the two families live cannot sustain them both. When quarrels break out between the herders of Lot's livestock and the herders of Abraham's livestock, Abraham surrenders his privilege as the elder statesman and allows Lot first choice of a new place to live. The biblical storyteller tells us that "Lot looked about him, and saw that the plane of the Jordan was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord So Lot chose for himself all the plane of the Jordan Abraham then settled in the land of Canaan, and Lot settled among the cities of the plain and moved his tent as far as Sodom." The narrator then concludes this section of the story with a rare evaluative comment, noting that "the people of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord." Abraham generously allows Lot first choice of a new

homeland, but Lot—being the greedy little creep that he is—takes advantage of Abraham's generosity, exercising his first choice option to pick what seems to him the best land.

When we next encounter Lot, God has decided to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Because of his regard for Abraham, God sends two angels to warn Lot. When the men of the city demand that Lot send out his two angel guests, Lot counters with: "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men that have come under the shelter of my roof." The ever hospitable Lot is willing to subject his daughters to sexual assault in order to protect his male guests. What are role model!

Fortunately, the angels seem to care more about his daughters than Lot did, for they intervene by blinding the men of the city, thereby bringing this crisis to an end.

Next they attempt to persuade Lot and his family to abandon the doomed city. His sons-in-law, the husbands of his two daughters, thought the angels were joking and stayed. When Lot himself lingered the angels "seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the Lord being merciful to them, and brought them out and left them

outside the city." Thus rescued, more or less against their will, the family members are instructed to flee to the hills and warned not to look back. Lot's wife inexplicably looks back and becomes a pillar of salt. Of the original six members of Lot's family only three remain: Lot and his two daughters who, following the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, sought refuge in a cave.

It is in this cave that the older sister tells the younger: "Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, so that we may preserve offspring through our father." Some interpreters then argue that Lot's daughters took advantage of their father, numbing his inhibitions with alcohol and getting him so drunk that he did not know what he was doing. Yet, if Lot was so drunk he did not know what he was doing, he also would not have been able to function sexually.

Was Lot then the innocent victim of his scheming, libidinous daughters, or was he a lifelong, self-centered reprobate who had no respect for the well being of others, including his daughters?

The narrator offers us some insight into the motivation of the daughters through a speech attributed to the oldest. She reminds the younger: "Our father is old, and there's not a man on earth to come into us after the

manner of all the world." The daughter's perception of the situation is that they are the only human beings to survive the devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah. If their family, and quite possibly the human race, is to survive; then they need to procreate with the only surviving male who just happens to be their father. Given the Hebrew incest taboo, they must get him drunk if they are to succeed. From this perspective the daughters responsibly take the initiative to survive the devastation of their known world. They are decisive, resourceful problem solvers who use the means available to them to accomplish their stated tasks.

Are then the daughters sex starved nymphets, or are they resourceful, responsible heroines who do what they need to do to survive, however distasteful and unpleasant?

Who is the hero, and who are the villains? Who are the victims, who is the victimizer? Who is good, and who is evil? In such awful stories the lines between good and evil are blurred. Though I prefer the daughters as heroines and Lot as the villain, storyteller makes no such explicit ethical judgments. As such, I do not think the storyteller authorizes us to make such judgments either.

Having said that, let me be clear about these issues: I am not condoning or excusing any of the activities in this story. If I should ever learn that any of you have

engaged in such behavior, I will personally call either the police or social services.

However, I make such a judgment about good and evil for social or even legal reasons. Such behavior is unacceptable if we are to have been ordered and orderly society which respects the personhood of all individuals. But this is a social, if not legal, assessment; not a theological judgment. The story of a Lot and his daughters does not permit us to make such definitive theological judgments. Such theological judgments about good and evil are the prerogative of God, not humans.

But wait! There is a little noticed epilog to this story. Often the best parts of stories are in the epilog. The epilog of this story notes that "the firstborn bore a son, and named him Moab; he is the ancestor of the Moabites to this day."

Fast forward a few centuries to the story of a Moabite woman named Ruth. Ruth married a Hebrew man named Boaz. The epilog of this new story observes that their son Obed became the father of Jesse who was the father of David, the greatest king of ancient Israel.

Fast forward again several centuries, this time to the prefatory genealogy of Jesus in the gospel of Matthew which records that "Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth,

and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David." Skipping now a few generations the genealogy concludes noting that "Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born who is called the Messiah." In claiming Jesus as the messiah from the family of David, the gospel writer of Matthew traces Jesus' ancestors to Ruth the Moabite and by implication to the unnamed firstborn daughter of Lot.

Think about the extraordinary claims made through this genealogy: if the daughter of Lot had not done what she did, there would have been no Moabites. If there were no Moabites, there would have been no Ruth. If there had been no Ruth, there would have been no Obed. No Obed, then no Jesse and no David. Without David there would have been no davidic messiah, who an angel tells Joseph will save his people from their sins.

Now you tell me: who is the hero, and who is the villain in the story of Lot and his daughters? Who was the victim and who was the victimizer? Can you distinguish clearly between what is good and what is evil? If you can distinguish good from evil in this ambiguous story, then you will have eaten of the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil; and you will have become like God knowing good and evil.

Significantly you will have made a judgment that the biblical storyteller does not even make. Biblical storytellers seldom make ethical or moral judgments about the actions of characters in the tales they tell. They seem to recognize that it may take millennia to work out the ultimate consequences of an action. Furthermore, they seem to respect the biblical notion that only God can distinguish between good and evil. Therefore, they withhold theological judgments that we are only too eager to make.

Yet from the ambiguity of good and evil in the story of Lot and his daughters comes the davidic messiah who is accompanied by the life giving proclamation that he will save his people from their sins. In a broken world, a world filled with stories too awful to tell, a world where it is not possible to distinguish with certainty between good and evil, there is only one unambiguous story. Instead of assuming for ourselves the status of God and making ethical judgments about what is good and what is evil, listen to the much needed theological proclamation of this story, the proclamation that through a descendant of the ambiguous coupling of Lot and his daughter, God forgives us our sins, our ambiguous actions, and even our feeble attempts to identify good and evil. Listen: through

the davidic messiah, murky origins and all, God forgives us
all our sins.

MORNING WORSHIP

Monday, October. 20, 2008

Prelude *“Prelude and Fugue in G Minor”* by Johann Krebs
Melanie Henry, organ

Welcome

**Invocation
Prayer**

Hymn *“Our Father, by Whose Name”* ELW #640

Scripture Genesis 19:30-38

Sermon *What’s in a Family: Lot’s Daughters* Rich Bowman
Stanley L. Olsen Chair of Moral Values

Hymn *“God, when Human Bonds Are Broken”* ELW #603

Lord’s Prayer

Benediction

Postlude *“A Mighty Fortress”* By Charles Ore

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

***MILLENIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL #1:** Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger.* This year we will be focusing on a different MDG each month. More than 1 billion people live on less than \$1 a day. What can we do to help?

Here are some ways that you can help:

- *bring non-perishable foods or money to the chapel for the Food Bank*
- *a letter writing campaign to representatives*
- *pray for all who hunger*

Question or ideas - contact Kayla - kerockwell07@ole.augie.edu

SERVICE TRAVEL - New York, El Paso/Juarez, and Taize, France - Sign up now for service in soup kitchens of New York City over J-term break, OR be immersed in community and service along the Texas/Mexico border at Spring break, OR pray with young adults from all across the world at Taize' France in June. Details and registration in the chapel office.

What are you doing over Spring Break? Through Cristo Rey Border Immersion, a Spring Break service learning trip will be headed to El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico. This program provides educational opportunities, learning about the issues that affect the lives of people living on the border. It educates participants about border issues through shared learning, experience, work, and prayer.

For more information, stop by the chapel or contact:

Liz Dolven-Kolle erdolvenkolle06@ole.augie.edu

Kirsten Lenander kjlenander06@ole.augie.edu.

****Confirmation and deposit is needed before Fall Break.****

SEMINARY VISIT - A group visit is being planned for the LSTC (Lutheran Theological Seminary) in Chicago on Sat., Nov. 7th - 11th. The group will be driving to Omaha and then flying to Chicago. There will be several options for housing. Travel reimbursement for seminary visits are available with prior authorization from Pr. Paul. Then return the application, which is available in the chapel office, before you travel!. Interested? Contact Beth Singleton egsingleton@ole.augie.edu or stop by the chapel.

Chapel Schedule

Tuesday (21 st)	Chair of Moral Values discussion , 10 am - 3-1 rm.
Wednesday (22 nd)	Holy Communion, 10 am - Andrew Tengwell, LVC; Chamber Choir
Friday (24 th)	Morning worship, 10 am - Amanda Korth, Sr. Spkr
	FALL BREAK - Oct. 25th - 28th