

OK so that was quite a long reading, let me quickly recap on the story of Tamar.

She is a twice daughter in law of Judah

And let's not forget who Judah is, beloved son of Jacob, great grandson of Abraham, heir to the promise from God, from you I will make great nations

So Tamar's story is entwined with the story of God's chosen people.

As a woman in her society and culture she did not have many rights or choices in her life, happiness was not a birth right.

To be content was maybe as good as many women could hope for. This might depend on having a good, fair, generous husband.

You will hear this evening how heirs and inheritance were very important in her culture so having children was always going to be a big part of Tamar's life, if she was successful it would provide for her own future.

So Tamar is acquired for Judah's eldest son, Er.

Er dies rather quickly in this story before they have any children. The story teller says he is struck down by God for a wicked act.

According to the law Judah then gives Tamar to Onan his second son. This means a couple of things for Tamar, she is allowed to stay in the family, also any child she has with Onan will be counted as Er's son and therefore will take a larger part of the inheritance from Judah.

This could work out well for Tamar, all is not lost.

According to the inheritance customs, the estate of Judah, who had 3 sons, would be divided into 4 equal parts with the oldest (or his heir) receiving one half and the others receiving one fourth each.

As you can imagine Onan was not so impressed..

if Tamar now gets pregnant by him, she and her child will take a half of the inheritance and he gets only a quarter

but

if Tamar remains childless the estate would have then been split into thirds with Onan receiving 2 thirds. A far better deal for him.

So he does his best to make sure she won't become pregnant. The story tells us that Onan is put to death by God for this behaviour.

Are you with me?

Tamar, no children, two dead brothers, one younger brother to go and Judah getting worried.

Tamar, the bargaining tool, the pawn, the hidden person, unloved and unwanted in this game of power between men.

As I said Judah is getting a bit worried,
maybe he thinks that Tamar is somehow killing off his sons,
or that anyone who sleeps with her is destined to die.

So Judah who is too scared to give Tamar to his youngest son Shelah.
acts, he uses his power.

According to the law Judah could have kept Tamar for himself and become the surrogate father for his sons child, which is way too complicated

Or he could have let her go free, free to marry someone else.

But he does neither,
Instead he does something that traps her, he tells her that she must go home to her family and live as a widow and wait for Judah to call upon her to mate with his third son Shelah.
She must live chastely in waiting, she is not free to meet other men or think about her future, that's Judah's job.

So she goes home, bottom of the pile, probably the laughing stock.
unwanted
unusable,
ashamed

She is waiting and after a couple of years it becomes clear that Judah is not going to call. He has quite conveniently lost her phone number.

So she takes her future into her own hands,

She is determined to secure for herself what is hers by right, a child, an inheritance and a stake in Gods chosen people.

I wonder if she knew exactly what family she was messing with?

She hatches a plan to get pregnant by Judah in order to lawfully regain her status, respect and position, her rights.
And she goes to quite unconventional means to do it.
She puts on a veil and puts herself in a position to be taken advantage of by Judah.

He finds on his way back from a trip, He sleeps with her and in lieu of payment for this leaves her with his staff and seal.

A few months later she starts to show,
she is pregnant! Uproar ensues

remember if she does not stay chaste while she waits for Shelah then she can be
put to death...

A mob brings the unfaithful women to be judged, they are there bristling, ready
to help with her execution, this, they think is unacceptable behaviour, it must be
punished.

But as Tamar reveals the staff and seal, Judah knows what has happened. 'She is
more righteous than I, he says
I have let her down

How can I throw the first stone...

She is more righteous than I

A hidden story of a women who fights for her rights in a male dominated society.
A hidden story of a women who breaks into the politics of men and humbles
them all.

From this sordid union comes the line of Jesus, the king of kings the son of God

How human and how broken is the line of people from which Jesus descends.

God of the unexpected weaving through our lives revealing his glory through
humility, love and welcome for all to get involved.

I don't like how Tamar does it, but God uses it for his glory. God is not afraid of
the dark.

Tamar who is written off by Judah, cast out of the story of Gods people is
redeemed, and end up producing Jesus's great great great great great etc
granddad. Perez.

As we reflect on Tamar's story perhaps we should ask ourselves

Who do we write off? Who do we dismiss?
Who does our culture, laws and society discriminate against?
How can we be the vessels through which God breaks into our world
that is afraid of the unorthodox.