

Search the Scriptures and you will find  
the voice of a love-filled God crying out to his children,  
crying out in pain at the violence we inflict on each other.

Search the Scriptures and you will find  
the sobbing of a love-filled God watching her daughters Tamar and Rahab and Hagar,  
watching as they are not treated as the precious children they are.

Search the Scriptures and you will find  
the desperation of a love-filled God longing for the suffering to end,  
longing for that day when his children inflict pain on each other no more.

Search the Scriptures and you will find  
the support of a love-filled God comforting her children,  
comforting those whose grief has been caused at the hands of another.

Search the Scriptures and you will find Christ.  
You will find Christ listening to the voices of those who have been silenced,  
You will find Christ speaking for those who would not have been heard.  
You will find Christ proclaiming good news to the poor,  
proclaiming freedom to the prisoners,  
setting the oppressed free.  
You will find Christ blessing those whom society neglected.  
teaching us to love one another,  
treating each and every person with dignity and respect.  
You will find Christ calling out injustice in all its forms.

Search the Scriptures and you will find  
a Christ who expects us to do the same.

Today, we come before God and one another in Christ-like solidarity and support of those who have suffered violence and abuse by another human being, to hear the cries of those 1 in 3 women. We listen, we pray, we campaign, we lament, and we hope. We hope that the charities we support, like Berkshire Women's Aid, can bring light to the lives of women who have not been treated as the precious and beloved children of God.

Abuse against women isn't new, and it also isn't the way that God intended us to live, domestic abuse, coercion, disrespect, silencing... these are all things that go against the love that God has shown us and has consistently asked us to demonstrate in our own lives.

Earlier, these paper chains were put together as prayers, each third chain being marked with an x to symbolise the harrowing fact that 1 in 3 women will experience abuse in their lifetime. We pray to the God who made us and loved us and who weeps with us,

that the chains of silence and oppression may be broken

that we may truly live as people who love their neighbour as themselves

that all of God's children may be free to sing your praise.

We break these chains in the hope that by raising awareness and by speaking words of truth and love, we may live Christ-filled lives, calling out abusive behaviour, burning with the holy fire of justice, bringing light and love and hope.

Amen.