

One of my daily practices during Lent this year is watching and praying over a daily video devotion put out by one of my favorite authors and theologians, Dr. Kate Bowler.

In a video earlier this week, as she lamented and grieved the death of the Asian-American women who were killed in Atlanta, and denounced the sin and brokenness surrounding their deaths, she spoke profoundly about the truth that comes in lament.

She said, “Lent gives us the permission for lament, to say, to feel a little more able to speak honestly about the world. The world’s brokenness. The world’s not yet redemption is something that feels a little more honest than just thoughts and prayers, you know. Yes, thoughts. Yes, prayers. But also just the ability to create, like a bigger emotional bucket for the truth, I guess. And also just like the role of silence in lament that sometimes things are unspeakable and we see things in our world and in our lives that just, they need a minute. There’s a word for that that we have, it’s just behold. Like let’s just look at it for a second and allow the truth of it to speak to us... it’s a good season for honesty.”

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus is incredibly honest about his impending death, and I cannot help but feel lament coming from him too, especially as he spoke to God at the end of the passage.

In the course of his speech to the people gathered at the festival, Jesus teaches in a parable, a metaphor, even while speaking and anticipating his own death. He tells us of the single grain of wheat - if that single grain just keeps on keeping on without any change or transformation of being planted in the earth, it will die a single grain. But if it is planted, if it is tended and transformed and indeed buried in the darkness and richness of the ground, it will bear much fruit. The grain will grow and multiply and feed many and provide greenery, newness, and hope from the very ground. The grain’s fruit comes only from the grain’s sacrifice of being buried in the earth - but the burial is not its final act. The burial is the foundation from which the good fruit will grow. The burial is the first act of many that will span its life. The burial is only the beginning.

So Jesus uses this powerful image to tell us what kind of death he was to die. He knows He is about to be killed - this story takes place after his arrival in Jerusalem, but before the Last Supper. The death Jesus was to die was only the beginning of the new life He would bring to all people. Jesus' burial was the foundation for much good fruit - the fruit of meeting us in our humanity and from that dark and challenging place, giving us hope. Jesus' burial is indeed the foundation for our faith. From that burial comes his rising, and the everlasting life we find alongside Christ Jesus comes first from the death he was to die. New life grows from the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus.

There is certainly comfort to be found in the seed bearing much fruit after its burial, but there is also comfort in hearing Jesus say, "my soul is troubled." Weird, I know, but it's Lent, so let's roll with it.

In the original Greek language, the word for "soul" used here is *psyche* - which, of course, we know as the root of the word "psychology". But this particular word means life, self, as much as it means, soul. The *psyche* is what makes each of us unique, the particular force and part of ourselves that makes us an alive person. It's deeper than character, or the constructs of type inventories, but the very essence of our life, the deepest part of ourselves that is fearfully, wonderfully made by God and is the part of us that is so loved and claimed by our Creator.

So it's this deep part of his human self that Jesus claims is troubled in this text. And this particular word of "troubled" is only used one time in the Bible - in this particular verse, as Jesus speaks to God about his impending death. There is an incredibly specific honesty that comes from Jesus in this one particular word. He does not shy away from the reality of what he is about to do, death for God's sake, for the sake of the whole world, and not for his own sake. There is a heaviness that comes from the honesty, but we also find a specific kind of freedom and healing in deep honesty.

Oftentimes, the deepest and realest honesty we can and need to find comes from within ourselves. And in his humanness, Jesus meets us in these deepest fears, these tenderest places, these moments of seemingly

insurmountable challenge that threaten to hold us captive. Jesus knows exactly what it is to be troubled on the deepest levels of who we are. Jesus knows what it is to have nowhere else to turn except upward, on our actual or proverbial knees, and cry out to God. Because Jesus has been there, we find him there too. We find Jesus in these moments of being troubled, when we are buried underneath unknowable weight and darkness and heartbreak, and Jesus, in his own death after these moments of being deeply troubled, still rises, still sprouts forth out of the ground, still creates new and beautiful things even from the dust of the earth.

Jesus says to us, “whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.” This call to follow Jesus, and go where Jesus is, is a call to not ignore the troubling parts of being alive, but ultimately a call to resurrection and new life. New life is found when we are honest about where we are now and where we are headed. New life is found when we repent of the sins that have caused pain in ourselves, in others, in our community and culture as a whole, and instead turn to the unending, sacrificial love of God in Jesus Christ.

There are times where something has to die in order for new life to rise. The promise of baptism is a death to the sin that separates us from God and the assurance of new life each day. Every day we die to sin and rise to life in Christ. It's only from a burial that a new sprout can burst forth and grow into something greater. Loss is an inevitable part of living, we will always have to manage the grieving and pain that can come from losing what we know, what is familiar. But in the story of Jesus, we know that sometimes these things must happen in order to progress into new life. The loss may never truly leave us, we certainly will never be the same or be able to ignore whatever loss we cope with, but the promise of life, new here on earth and everlasting in the heavenly kingdom with God, is so good. It's the hope of that life that keeps us going through the loss and hardship. It's never an ignorance of the suffering, but rather a joining in with the suffering that makes these statements and promises and actions of Jesus so powerful for us, even now.

So friends, know that Jesus meets you, in your fear, in your loss, in the moments of your soul being troubled. Know that God still loves you even when you feel buried under the hardships of keeping on, and that new life can certainly come from that burial. So many seeds are planted each and every day, and in the nourishing of those seeds, new life springs forth, and we in turn are nourished too. When we follow Jesus, we follow his calling to be fully human, and trust in God for the hope and resurrection that is to come. May you be met in your soul, the deepest part of who you are by the God who created and loves you, with an eternal, covenantal love, and know that new life will spring forth within and for you, each and every day. Thanks be to God, Amen.