

Hello everyone! And welcome to our Wednesday Word devotion for today, March 24, 2021. Thank you so much for tuning in and for taking this time out of your day to focus on God and focus on your faith.

For today's devotion, I'd love to piggyback on part of my sermon from last Sunday, because a key theme in my preparation for that sermon has really stuck with me over the last few days. And that theme is the connection between honesty and lament. I still think back to that quote I shared from Dr. Kate Bowler, the Duke professor and author, one of my absolute favorites, talking about how lament opens up a bigger emotional bucket for truth - that there is a beholdenness of just resting in how we are honestly feeling, doing, coping, being - that Lent is a good season for honesty. Lent gives us permission to embrace the feelings that are difficult and uncomfortable in a unique way. Lent can seem depressing on the surface, remembering Jesus' torment and the journey to the cross, but this deep honesty is actually an important part of the new life that comes from and after the suffering.

We are no strangers to suffering, especially in this year of pandemic, but also in this past week, as we grieve and lament the deaths of the Asian-American women killed in spas in Atlanta, and the 10 people, including a police officer, who died due to gun violence at a grocery store in Boulder, Colorado. Two places where people go to nourish their bodies, with healing touch and food, were the places of deadly gun violence. That's an incredibly hard truth to reconcile. It's necessary to lament the deaths of these people and also the cultural forces at hand that contributed to these tragedies. And I don't think we can really lament until we look at the honesty of the thing. That's what Martin Luther told us in his theology of the cross - the importance of naming a thing for what it is.

When we embrace honesty, and all the human complexities and that emotional bucket of truth, this is where the seeds are sown for new life. We name what the thing is before we can wrestle with it towards a path of growth and healing. And ultimately growth is what leads to life being new - with new perspectives, new coping, new relationships, and new ways of being in the world.

So friends, let's embrace one another in our lamenting, and in our process of honesty. Let's encourage each other to be truthful in what we witness and feel in our bodies, minds, and spirits. And let's know that God is still with us, in the inmost parts of ourselves, loving us through the challenges of both lament and honesty. And in God's great love, God will journey with us in the new life as well. It's in His love through Jesus Christ that we have that hope and assurance of new life too, that though there are important seasons for lamenting, that darkness and pain will not have the last word.

For our scripture today, I'd love to read a bit about how God shows up for us in lament, and I pray that you take some time and space to breathe and let God in as you lament whatever is hurting, whatever needs a revealing of truth, and whatever you need this unending love for. Fittingly, our scripture today comes from Lamentations 3:1-9;19-24

1 I am one who has seen affliction

under the rod of God's wrath;  
2 he has driven and brought me  
into darkness without any light;  
3 against me alone he turns his hand,  
again and again, all day long.

4 He has made my flesh and my skin waste away,  
and broken my bones;  
5 he has besieged and enveloped me  
with bitterness and tribulation;  
6 he has made me sit in darkness  
like the dead of long ago.

7 He has walled me about so that I cannot escape;  
he has put heavy chains on me;  
8 though I call and cry for help,  
he shuts out my prayer;  
9 he has blocked my ways with hewn stones,  
he has made my paths crooked.

19 The thought of my affliction and my homelessness  
is wormwood and gall!  
20 My soul continually thinks of it  
and is bowed down within me.  
21 But this I call to mind,  
and therefore I have hope:

22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,  
his mercies never come to an end;  
23 they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.  
24 "The Lord is my portion," says my soul,  
"therefore I will hope in him."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Let us pray:

Lord God, meet us here, now, in our lament and in our journey to the truth. Remind us that your Son Jesus is indeed the way, the truth, and the life. As we grieve, as we lament, as we honestly name our realities and dare to find hope within them, hold us closely. Surround us with your unending love, and may we find pockets of your joy and faithfulness each and every day. We give you thanks and praise for the gift of your Son Jesus. United with Christ and the Holy Spirit we pray, Amen.

Go in peace, dear friends, have a beautiful day. Amen.