

“...and Being Reformed”
By Rev. Katrina Pekich-Bundy
2 Timothy 4.6-8, 16-18
Luke 23.33-43
October 30, 2022

Last Sunday I immediately began reading the Amanda Gorman book that you gave me. It speaks to our lives, and our souls, and I thoroughly enjoyed what I have read so far. As I started this book, I felt a bit guilty – I have about three other books I need to be reading right now. And of course, I had two other things I needed to start. Poetry is fun not work, so I thought. I was quickly proven wrong. Gorman’s words struck me and reminded me of the truths that must be spoken, often only revealed through art. That for some people poetry is the only way their voices can be heard.

I messaged my good friend Jill, who is an English professor, and a poet. I said, “I’m learning that poetry is not a luxury!” And she said, “oh, you’re reading Audre Lorde!” And I was confused. No, I was not reading Audre Lorde. She directed me to Lorde’s 1985 essay: “Poetry is not a luxury,” and said what I couldn’t put into words. Lorde wrote: “For women, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence... Poetry is not only a dream or vision. It is the skeleton of our lives.”¹ Then, by sheer luck, or divine providence, the next poem by Gorman that I read was called Cut. She writes: “Some days we just need a place where we can bleed in peace. Our only word for this is *poem*.”²

I’m not a poetry expert, but I enjoy reading them, especially if they are not too abstract. Not that abstract poetry isn’t important, but my brain has difficulty wrapping around it. My view of the necessity of poetry changed when I read, Lorde’s essay and read Gorman’s poem. Sometimes a poem is just a poem, but more often than not it is survival. It is an expression of deep joy, or deep sorrow in the world. It reaches us in a way nothing else can. It has a way of speaking to us through music, dance, and writing. It can cross borders. Somewhere along the way while traveling in Ireland one of our hosts mentioned art as a way of connecting those in conflict. We can all see beauty. Maybe that is a place to start.

Our scripture passage today shows Jesus forgiving. It might seem a little out of context because it is usually used during holy week, but as we approach Christ the King Sunday in November, this helps us examine what it means to be the Messiah or the king. At that time the idea was that the Messiah would be a military leader, and someone who would lead like King David. But that was not who Jesus was as he broke social norms, he wandered from place to place and ate with sinners, and was houseless. Rather than triumphantly, defeating the enemy, Jesus is the one who is killed. When we say that Christ was a king, we don’t mean that he was a colonizing king of an oppressive empire. We mean that he was a king who ruled in a different way – he ruled with compassion and love.

¹ Audra Lorde, “Poetry is not a luxury”

https://www.poetrypedagogy.com/uploads/8/9/3/8/89385582/poetry_is_not_a_luxury-lorde.pdf, 1985.

² Amanda Gorman, “Cut” in *Call Us What We Carry*, (New York: Viking Press, 2021), 26.

Here he is between two criminals. One recognizes that he is the Messiah and asks for forgiveness. Dr. Nancy Lynne Westfield, is the director of the Wabash Center and I had the joy of hearing speak at a Wabash Pastoral Leadership gathering. She mentions that this passage reveals the forgiving nature of Jesus as some of his last words speak to reconciliation.³ She goes on: “Part of our inability to believe and trust the forgiving power of God’s grace and mercy is our inability to believe that other people deserve mercy.”⁴ When we villainize others, we cannot forgive, and therefore cannot comprehend mercy. We lose the beauty of the other person. We lose what Christ sees. Here in Jesus’ last moments Christ asks God to forgive this person when others only see him as a criminal. He asks those putting him to death to be forgiven: “Forgive them for they know not what they do.” Is Jesus asking them to be forgiven because they are ignorant, because they aren’t paying attention, or because they can’t see the full impact of their actions? Jesus sees what they can’t and seeks forgiveness for them.

As we think about forgiveness, about conflict and how we interact with one another in the world, I think the term conflict resolution is misleading because it makes us think that conflict can be finally resolved. Yet, as I learned through conversations in Ireland, that it is never resolved. We are constantly returning each week to worship and asking to be forgiven. God knows that we are constantly in need of forgiveness, and that conflict resolution is ongoing. And God walks with us on that long path happily. If God sees this, why do we expect one another to be perfect and not nurture the ongoing reconciliation happening in the world?

Atonement is another word we use in theology, such as atoning for our sin or within conflict. Atonement came up in my reading of Gorman. She writes, “The word *atonement* comes from the Middle English meshing of *at* and *on(e)* literally “at one,” “in harmony.” By the second half of the seventeenth century atonement: to reconcile and thence, to suffer the pains of whatever sacrifice is necessary to bring about a reconciliation.”⁵ We don’t want to go through those pains. Perhaps because it is anticipatory anxiety or we already feel that we have gone through enough. And who makes the first move and reconciliation? Our group in Ireland spoke about this at length. Usually it is the person who is most vulnerable that makes the first move and speaks up out of necessity. Yet it should be the one in power. The burden of reconciliation should not be the one who has suffered most.

Today is Reformation Sunday. It is a day in which we celebrate that the Word is accessible to all people and we remember the reformers that began the process of shifting theology. Today is a celebration because we are grateful that the Bible is accessible to everyone and that we have shared leadership. At the same time there was plenty of oppression along the way. There was much fighting for this to happen. And our faith must be repentant. We can acknowledge our history and move into the future with a reformation state of mind. I always like to remind everyone that the phrasing is “reformed and always being reformed.” It is often quoted as “reformed and always reforming,” but we are not the ones reforming. It is God who does the reforming of us, and reformation and transformation must always start within if it is to move outward.

³ Nancy Lynne Westfield, “Luke 23.33-43” in *Feasting on the Word: Year C., Vol. 4.* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 332.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 334.

⁵ Gorman, 54.

How is God reforming us this day? How is God reforming us for the future? The passage in second Timothy is one of reflection. The author is at the end of their life and is sharing with the faith community that their work is done, but the community must go on. What are your reflections on where this faith community has been and where it is going? We are far from finishing the race because I believe that God is not done with us. God is still at work and invites us into deep love and forgiveness in community. Thanks be to God amen.