

*Lord God, who calms the troubled waters, we bless you for your presence in the midst of all our fears, all our trials, all our worries. We release to you the things we hold too tightly, and we trust your words of peace. Be among us in this hour and may we lean into your everlasting arms of love, secure that we are yours, now and always. ... May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing and of you, who are ROCK, REDEEMER, and COMFORTER of us all. Amen.*

Our theme these next few weeks is UNRAVELING...seeking God when our plans fall apart. Each week we will spend time looking at our lives in partnership with a biblical narrative where God meets us in the spiraling, unraveling our plans and our lives... and weaving us into something new.

Today we are working with a narrative that may not be very familiar... looking at Rizpah and her response to the killing of her sons.

What's unraveling... what's being separated, sorted or untangled... what mystery is being revealed? How should this inform our lives?

The setting of this narrative is early in the establishment of David's reign as king of Israel & Judah... after defeating Saul. There is a famine which is linked back to mistreatment of people during Saul's time as king.

David has made a promise not to harm the Gibeonites because Saul slaughtered them. David prays and seeks to make things right with the Gibeonites.

The children of two women connected to Saul, Rizpah (a wife) and Merab (a daughter) were given to the Gibeonites, offered as human sacrifices to end the famine.

For Rizpah, her world falls apart. The seven sons are lynched on a mountain and left to rot. In response, Rizpah publically laments their death and protects their bodies from harvest season (March) til the rainy season (September), about 6 months.

King David gets word of Rizpah's public display of grief and retrieves the bones to provide a proper burial with Saul's family. Rizpah takes care of the dead. Though silent, Rizpah protested the only way she could against the system of men (the patriarchy) and the power they held over people without care for the living or the dead.

Let's be clear, theologically... that God did not require human sacrifice. The famine ended when David listened to the cries of Rizpah!

What are we to do with this narrative? What are we to do with this narrative in this season of COVID19 and disproportionate black and brown lives that are impacted by this virus? What are we to do with this narrative in this season of public protests of lives that matter when it seems those in power have no regard for their lives?

There are many Rizpahs, it seems to me. There's the mother of Emmitt Till, who insisted her son's wounds be seen...there are the cries of people asking the questions 'why don't you get off him?' or 'what are you doing?' when Rekia or Sandra or Eric or John or Walter or Alton or Philando or Trayvon or Jordan cry out.

What are we to do in this season? Can we not hear the cry of injustice? Can we listen to the cries for justice? Can we examine the facts around the cries for justice? Can we not confess that there is work for all of us to do to respond to the cries for justice?

We must, as God's people hear the cries... We must, as faith communities create space to listen, to lament, to examine, to take action to turn the tables on injustice.

What does this look like? It looks like, protests, prayer vigils, listening conversations with one another, reforming policy, reforming power structures, access to education and healthcare.

It looks more like listening and learning and working in partnership to untangle the ways of injustice that are engrained, and engage in prayer for the ability to see how we can come together to weave in ways of support for those persons

too long devalued, discounted, and dehumanized. We are stronger together...blest be the ties that bind.

....Let us pray... ..

O God, you have shown me the path of life.

I trust in your unfailing love.

I trust in your forgiveness and grace.

I trust that you love me.

I trust that you see me, and I trust that you see all others, too, as your children, equally precious in your sight.

May the life I live be a light that reflects your love to everyone I meet.

This I pray, in Jesus name.

Amen.