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Into Your Hands, O Lord

Many of you took part in the post-worship conversations after Evening Prayer on Wednesdays during Lent. They were a place for people to talk about what they heard in worship and how those words connected to what was going on in the world and in our lives. Those gatherings made space for us to acknowledge lament and joy, to support and pray for one another.

Many of us have felt weary in these last months, and that time helped sustain us.

“What is saving your life today?” I remember a couple years ago when Ole had a medical emergency. He ended up having to spend a week in the ICU. I’m so grateful he recovered so well. There were moments in the midst of that experience when I didn’t know what was going to happen next. When time seemed to stand still. Stuck in a daze. I’m sure you are familiar with that disorienting geography. Driving down the Eisenhower words came to me. They saved me. Words from a theology book I had read.

Not words about an invisible deity pulling strings. Words about a God who is never far away. A God none other than Jesus Christ. God born deep in our vulnerable flesh. God who always, in our depths and lostness, at our limits, meets us in Christ. Not with a prescription or plan but a promise of a future beyond our today because God's love never ends.

When most words fail- other words can sustain the weary. Those words did.

What words have sustained you? How has the word been made flesh for you in a weary land?

M. Shawn Copeland writes about the faith of enslaved folks. For them it was the crucified word with whom they could identify. No one knew them like Jesus. No one could understand them like Jesus. The suffering servant. Only in Jesus could they see a future beyond their present. No God could be trusted but Jesus. They could hold onto his words even as he held on to them. Sustained them.

People the world over have found sustenance in the Word of the cross. It’s honest. Vulnerable. Real. This might be the most jarring Sunday of the church year. In the span of our liturgy we travel from the shouts of “hosanna” to the cries of “crucify him.” All of the sudden we hear words of betrayal, cross, suffering, and death. Realities we know too well.

Jesus is the one who empties himself. The one who bears our sin and joins us in our deaths. Does not hold onto power or his own life but gives it away. Travels in the perpetual direction of God. Down. All the while entrusting himself to the one who never abandons us. Not at the grave and not anywhere.

Today we are celebrating the fourth graders who participated in the communion retreat.

We share with them that there will come a time in their lives when God seems a million miles away. When that time comes, we tell them, find a church, and go to communion. Put out your hands. There- God does not withhold anything from you but gives you Jesus' own body and blood. God's presence in the palm of your hand. Gift and promise. Hear these words, the body of Christ given for you. God insists on finding God's way to us. That has saved my life more times than I could count.

This is what the cross proclaims. A word that has sustained the weary for generations. A word that can be trusted amid all that is broken in this world. We know what it looks like. God's cruciform signature. It sounds like forgiveness. Grace. Relief. Resurrection. Salvation. The peace that passes understanding. The word that can hold it all even as he holds you and never lets you go. The hands that reach out to receive the bread and wine are held forever by the arms that stretch out wide upon the tree. It's okay. He's got you.

From this ending, God is opening up a future for all creation. God's word will not be silenced. The journey goes on up ahead.

