

Broken Open: A Holy Week Retreat Experience

Today is Monday of Holy Week. My name is Tayz Hernandez; I am a senior, double majoring in Psychology and Theology. Our theme today is Beloved by God.

When I look out at the world, I feel a sense of heaviness. There is a lot of pain and suffering from the divisions we have created between each other through racial discrimination, systemic injustice, and so many in our community are still yearning for their basic needs to be met. As we go through our lives experiencing these divisions, injustice, and pain, and even the stress of the last year of living in pandemic, our bodies and souls carry a lot of weight that resides within. I am not always great at taking moments of self-care, and I often feel that my stresses in life stay pent up in my body, looking for a way to be safely let out. I have tried settling my body through watching shows on Netflix or YouTube but being on the computer all day for school makes me unable to relax in front of a screen. Therefore, I started to go out for walks, primarily to a little park a block away from my house where a lot of dogs gather to play while their owners stay socially distant. As I sit at the park, not doing very much physically, I feel at peace by noticing and remembering the wholesome things the world holds. Even while our world can hold a lot of potential for darkness, I see in those moments the possibility for connection and relationships that exhibit love through people. In that special space, just around the corner, I am reminded of the presence of God residing within not only my body but in the bodies of others as well. I am also reminded of the importance of taking care of my mind and body, as a place to meet and encounter God's great love for me.

I think that our society can provide temptations to seek self-preservation in the form of obtaining social status and wealth. Our communities can be constructed in ways which teach us to look after ourselves instead of looking at the care of the whole. We often even dehumanize people in our quest for self-preservation and success. As I reflect on these tendencies in our society, I see the cross: present in the devices, rhetoric, and systems we use to separate ourselves from one another. In our potential to cause suffering and lose sight of community. Too often, God's love is obscured by our human desire for

worldly things or simply by us losing sight of God's presence in one another. Even in my own life, I find that I can get too focused on myself and on the things I have to achieve, forgetting about how I am connected to other people. However, people are not a means to attain things, we are, each and every one of us, sources and sites of God's love, which we encounter through relationship.

As I walk to the park, sit on a bench, watching the dogs run and play, the pet owners distantly socialize, I encounter the expanse of God's love. It is a form of prayer and meditation in which I see God's presence in the world. In the trees, the sounds of the birds, the joy of the dogs frolicking, the chatter of the people gathered. It is a way for me to recognize that the world is much bigger than myself. It grounds me in all the good things that exist in our world: the kindnesses between one another, our capacity for relationship, the beauty of nature, and the possibility of unity and joy. As I consider the community at the dog park, I am reminded of our enormous capacity to break out of our self-centered way of living, and instead to focus on all the various sources of God's love, which is constantly being communicated to us through creation and through one another. I see the potential to be in relationship and solidarity with one another and the power that has to begin healing the existing divisions. I am reminded that we need to care of our bodies, our whole selves, because that is precisely where God meets us in love.

What if we all connected like the animals and people do at the dog park? That place grounds me in the hope and possibility that each one of us carries in the work for justice and a transformed world. We all have the potential to break the temptation towards only seeking self-preservation, and instead to pursue a life of encounter between one another.

Are there particular places that help you experience God's love or that help you imagine a more loving world? Try to go there today, physically, or in your imagination.

What needs to break open in you so you can experience God's love today?

How can you care for your whole self and enter more deeply into relationship with others today?