

SOUL SISTERS — August

Nadia Bolz-Weber

PASTRIX: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner & Saint, “Thanks, ELCA!”

GATHERING PRAYER

The candle is lit.

A Prayer For Those Who Are Losing Our Shit Right Now

Dear God,

Please forgive me for how I acted when that Amazon truck was blocking my driveway the other day.

In your endless compassion you know my rage was really about every form of fear I am trying to keep at bay right now – how it all sort of broke through my exhausted defenses because I was coming home from the gym and was really hungry.

When I see others not being the best version of themselves, guide me to compassion for them, that in doing so I might also have compassion for myself.

You know how fragile we are.

And next time when I am that hungry, please nudge me to eat a damn sandwich FIRST, and THEN respond to whatever it is that feels like it is trying to attack me.

And when, O God, I inevitably try and control everything and everyone in my life, please have mercy upon me – for you know that what I am really doing is responding to how powerless I feel over every single thing in the news cycle every single day.

Accept O Lord, my shitty little prayer, for those are the only ones I have in me right now.

In Jesus name, Amen.

— Nadia Bolz Weber

OPENING: WHAT SPOKE TO YOU?

As we begin our discussion focused on the writing of Nadia Bolz-Weber, let's take a moment to reflect on ideas, images, and thoughts that jump out to you from the reading. Did something make you laugh, nod, remember, take a deep breath?

EXCERPTS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Excerpt 1 —

- God's grace is a gift that is freely given to us. We don't earn a thing when it comes to God's love, and we only try to live in response to the gift.
- No one is climbing the spiritual ladder. We don't continually improve until we are so spiritual we no longer need God. We die and are made new, but that's different from spiritual self-improvement.
- We are simultaneously sinner and saint, 100 percent of both, all the time.
- The Bible is not God. The Bible is simply the cradle that holds Christ. Anything in the Bible that

does not hold up to the Gospel of Jesus Christ simply does not have the same authority.

- The movement in our relationship to God is always from God to us. Always. We can't, through our piety or goodness, move closer to God. God is always coming near to us. Most especially in the Eucharist and in the stranger.

(Write out these bullet points, memorize them, and you could save a lot of money not going to Lutheran seminary. — Tenants of Lutheran faith taught by Pastor Ross Merkle in Bolz-Weber's adult confirmation class — NBW, p.49

Bolz-Weber explains, "I have been a Lutheran since then [confirmation class] because the Lutheran church is the only place that has given me language for what I have experienced to be true in my life, which is why I now call Pastor Ross Merkle the Vampire Who Turned Me." — NBW, p.49

- Do any of these faith tenants particularly resonant with you?
- Do you have any faith tenant/"language for what I have experienced to be true" outside of this list?

Excerpt 2 —

“I had never experienced liturgy before. But here the congregation said things together during the service. And they did stuff: stood, sat, knelt, crossed themselves, went up to the altar for communion, like choreographed sacredness.”
— NBW, p.46

- What aspects of liturgy do you find most grace-full?
- Bolz-Weber writes about the unfathomable mercy of God tapping us on the shoulder. Could liturgy — in text and form and structure — be God tapping us on the shoulder? Why or Why Not?
- In what ways can/does liturgy show up in our everyday lives?

Excerpt 3 —

“What happens in the Kingdom of God parable I was given is that a landowner goes out and hires laborers in the morning and agrees to pay them the daily wage. But then every few hours he goes and finds more workers and brings them in. In the afternoon he goes again to the marketplace and sees folks standing around and is like, “Why aren’t you working?” and they say, “Because no one would hire us,” and he sends them into his vineyard to work the last two hours of the day. When the work is done, he pays everyone the same thing, which pisses off the upstanding early risers who worked all day in the scorching heat because he has made the slept-till-noon new hires equal to them. The land owner is like, ‘Seriously? You’re angry because I am generous?’ and then the final line of the parable is ‘The last shall be first and the first shall be last.’ This is exactly, when it comes down to it, why most people do not believe in grace. It is fucking offensive.” — NBW, p. 56

- Do you agree with Bolz-Weber that most people do not believe in grace?
- What is the relationship between grace and greed? Grace and doubt? Grace and indifference?

CLOSING QUESTION

- Tell a story of if/when/how grace has manifested in your life? (You could be the giver or the receiver of grace.)

LISTENING FOR THE SACRED

If time allows, sit for a moment and think of the sight, sound, taste, and feel of grace. Let grace move through you. Feel it more deeply with each breath.

KNOWING AND BEING KNOWN

As we near the end of the session, you are invited to lift up where you are on your walk.

- What joys do you bring today?
- What concerns/ prayers/ worries am I holding?

CLOSING WORDS

Beatitude Benediction

Maybe the Sermon on the Mount is all about Jesus' lavish blessing of the people around him on that hillside who his world—like ours—didn't seem to have much time for: people in pain, people who work for peace instead of profit, people who exercise mercy instead of vengeance.

Maybe Jesus was simply blessing the ones around him that day who didn't otherwise receive blessing, who had come to believe that, for them, blessings would never be in the cards. I mean, come on, doesn't that just sound like something Jesus would do? Extravagantly throwing around blessings as though they grew on trees?

So I imagine Jesus standing among us offering some new beatitudes:

Blessed are the agnostics.

Blessed are they who doubt. Those who aren't sure, who can still be surprised.

Blessed are they who are spiritually impoverished and therefore not so certain about everything that they no longer take in new information.

Blessed are those who have nothing to offer. Blessed are the preschoolers who cut in line at communion. Blessed are the poor in spirit. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are they for whom death is not an abstraction.

Blessed are they who have buried their loved ones, for whom tears could fill an ocean. Blessed are they who have loved enough to know what loss feels like.

Blessed are the mothers of the miscarried.

Blessed are they who don't have the luxury of taking things for granted anymore.

Blessed are they who can't fall apart because they have to keep it together for everyone else.

Blessed are those who "still aren't over it yet."

Blessed are those who mourn. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are those who no one else notices. The kids who sit alone at middle-

school lunch tables. The laundry guys at the hospital. The sex workers and the night-shift street sweepers.

Blessed are the forgotten. Blessed are the closeted.

Blessed are the unemployed, the unimpressive, the underrepresented.

Blessed are the teens who have to figure out ways to hide the new cuts on their arms. Blessed are the meek.

You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are the wrongly accused, the ones who never catch a break, the ones for whom life is hard, for Jesus chose to surround himself with people like them.

Blessed are those without documentation. Blessed are the ones without lobbyists.

Blessed are foster kids and special-ed kids and every other kid who just wants to feel safe and loved.

Blessed are those who make terrible business decisions for the sake of people.

Blessed are the burned-out social workers and the overworked teachers and the pro bono case takers.

Blessed are the kindhearted football players and the fundraising trophy wives.

The candle is extinguished.

Guide by Katie Steedly Curling

Blessed are the kids who step between the bullies and the weak. Blessed are they who hear that they are forgiven.

Blessed is everyone who has ever forgiven me when I didn't deserve it.

Blessed are the merciful, for they totally get it.

I imagine Jesus standing here blessing us all because I believe that is our Lord's nature. Because, after all, it was Jesus who had all the powers of the universe at his disposal but did not consider his equality with God something to be exploited. Instead, he came to us in the most vulnerable of ways, as a powerless, flesh-and-blood newborn. As if to say, "You may hate your bodies, but I am blessing all human flesh. You may admire strength and might, but I am blessing all human weakness. You may seek power, but I am blessing all human vulnerability." This Jesus whom we follow cried at the tomb of his friend and turned the other cheek and forgave those who hung him on a cross. Because he was God's Beatitude—God's blessing to the weak in a world that admires only the strong.

God Bless You, Nadia Bolz-Weber