

Lenten Devotional March 26, 2018

Scripture

2 Corinthians 1:1-7

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia: ²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, ⁴who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. ⁵For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. ⁶If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. ⁷Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

Devotional

The Rev. Karen Rohrer, Director of the Church Planting Initiative

*The leaves are falling, falling as if from far up,
as if orchards were dying high in space.
Each leaf falls as if it were motioning "no."*

*And tonight the heavy earth is falling
away from all other stars in the loneliness.*

*We're all falling. This hand here is falling.
And look at the other one. It's in them all.*

*And yet there is Someone, whose hands
infinitely calm, holding up all this falling.*

(Rainer Maria Rilke)

We know the reality of suffering. We know that pain is all too real, injustice all too prevalent, cruelty all too common in a fallen and seemingly endlessly falling world. The wounds of affliction are deep and abiding. In the midst of Lent, we acknowledge the reality of death and limitation, of pain and affliction. We sit with and lament the way that our world crushes the vulnerable and exploits the weak. We admit and remember the reality of death—the ones we have lost, the ones we will lose, even the life we will one day leave behind. We take time to recognize that those losses are real.

This passage in 2 Corinthians, in its repetitive, clunky style, bears witness to the fact that suffering, pain, and affliction are no less real for those who follow Christ. We don't live on a continuum between affliction and consolation as though hoping to stay closer to the consolation side and avoid affliction by luck or divine favor. No, the world this spiraling text offers looks more like concentric circles—when affliction is closing in, the truth beyond our affliction is the God who consoles, the God who holds us up beyond all falling.

Prayer

God of all things, uphold us as we recognize all the ways we and those we love are afflicted. Console us amid the pain we cannot move through on our own. Dwell within us and grant us strength, stand guard

with your gentleness on every side of us. Make us brave and make us kind as we walk through your hurting, beloved world. Amen.