



Leaning Into the Heart of the Holy

2016 Lenten Devotions

Wednesday

March 16, 2016

Leaning In To Be Involved

By Elizabeth Edwards

Each spring, Lakeside does what thousands of congregations all over the country do: We say farewell to our graduates. It is a sacred moment for a family of faith—to remember, to celebrate, to share stories, to laugh and cry, and to bless these young lives it has nurtured, often from birth. It is significant opportunity to *be* the church to families who are both excited and frightened about the changes that lie ahead. It is an important occasion for congregations to acknowledge the depth of the ties that bind us and to be the Body of Christ.

But last May, I was struck that on the same day we praised and blessed these young lives that are so dear to us, we also prayed for other young people who will never have the chance to celebrate such achievements or dream about fulfilling God's purpose for their lives. We prayed for a 12-year-old boy who, just months before, was critically wounded in a drive-by shooting only two miles from our doorstep. We prayed for three young men who, just two days earlier, were killed when their car struck a building. We prayed for girls in Nigeria who were kidnapped from their school, for victims of a terrorist attack in the Middle East, for young lives lost in the turmoil in Ukraine, and for workers killed in a mine explosion in Turkey.

On a day like Graduate Sunday, it is good and right that we celebrate, and it is good and right that we pray, but I am haunted by the contrast and left grieving for the families who will never have the chance to celebrate. I am also left wondering how our faith in Christ might be calling us to ensure that all families can know the joy of milestones like graduations and the hope of dreaming about the future. I am left asking how the Church might be the voice of peace and justice in a world where our young people are so vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Our world needs these young lives—all of them—with their energy and ideas and creativity. When violence or injustice cuts any life short, we are all harmed by its effects and robbed of the potential that will never be realized. Our faith in Christ demands that we pray and cooperate and work and give so that each young life is valued and nurtured.

It is good and right during this season of Lent, and in every time and season, that we lean into the heart of God as we worship and pray and reflect, as we journey with Jesus through the wilderness, and as we prepare to celebrate his resurrection. Now may our celebrations and prayers inspire us to lean into working and giving, learning and doing, not only within the walls of the church, but also in our community and world, so that all God's children have such reasons to rejoice.

Prayer:

Loving God,

Be in my thoughts like a beacon to illumine the darkness.

Be in my heart like a child full of joy and wonder.

Be in my body like a graceful dancer.

Be in my soul like a life-giving river.

Be in my speech like a poet's verse.

Be in my spirit like a wind of change.

Take all that I am, make me a channel your grace,

And accomplish in and through me

More than I have dared to ask or imagine.

Amen.

Jeremiah 29:11-14

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations

Philippians 1:6

I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 3:14-21

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.