Part 2 — Loneliness and the Healing Mercy of Christ Reflection

Opening Prayer: Let's pray. Lord, we come to You again tonight, this time carrying our grief, our fears, our wounds, our sense of being unseen or unwanted. You know every one of these places in us. Meet us here. Comfort us as only You can and show us Your healing mercy at work even in what feels unhealed. In Jesus' name, Amen. Let's return to our anchor verse for this series — the one we'll come back to every week." *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* — Psalm 34:18 (NIV)

Before we dive in — in one word, how is your heart tonight

Emotional suffering is different. It touches the heart and mind rather than our standing with God — grief over what's been lost, fear of what's coming, trauma from what's already happened, rejection from people who were supposed to stay, loneliness in rooms full of people. Its question isn't Do You still love me, God? — it's Will anyone truly see me in this? Will I feel less alone, less broken, less overwhelmed? And it tends to ease not through explanation, but through comfort, presence, community, and being truly known — which is exactly where the healing mercy of Christ meets us tonight.

I want to bring companions along with us again this week — voices from across the whole Communion of Saints, different centuries and different corners of the world, who did not simply survive grief, fear, trauma, rejection, and loneliness, but let Christ meet them in the middle of it. This wisdom was offered to the whole Church, and it has something to say to every one of us carrying an ache tonight, wherever we come from.

Augustine, Start with grief. Saint Monica, the mother of Saint Augustine, spent close to two decades in tears over her son — not tears of despair, but tears offered to God while she refused to let go of hope for him. Augustine himself later wrote that his mother 'wept to you for me, shedding more tears for my spiritual death than other mothers shed for the bodily death of a son' (Confessions tears to be lost' (, Book III). A bishop once told her, 'It is impossible for the son of so many Exaudi, Saint Monica) — and he was right. That is grief carried all the way through to answered hope, and we'll hear grief's own voice in Scripture in just a moment. Now trauma and rejection together, because they so o en travel as a pair.

Lorenzo Ruiz was an ordinary husband and father in Manila — until 1636, when he was falsely accused of a murder, he had no part in. Trauma struck first, and unjustly: to escape execution, he fled by sea with Dominican missionaries, not even learning until they were already at sea that the ship was bound for Japan, where Christians were being violently persecuted. Arrested the moment he landed and imprisoned for two years, he was then tortured for days by methods designed not to kill quickly but to break his faith — forced water torture, then hung upside down over a pit, a small cut made at his temple so his blood would drip slowly and prolong the agony. At every moment, he could have signaled his freedom simply by renouncing Christ. He never did. His last words were: 'I am a Catholic and wholeheartedly do accept death for God; had I a thousand lives, all these to Him shall I offer' (Wikipedia, Lorenzo Ruiz). He became the first canonized saint of the Philippines. Rejection met him even in the country he'd fled to for refuge — and centuries earlier, it met Saint Martin de Porres at home, in Lima, Peru.

Martin was born to a Spanish father and a freed Black mother, and abandoned by his father because of his mixed race. Peruvian law at the time barred people of African or Indigenous descent from becoming full members of religious orders, so Martin entered as a lay brother instead — the door society le open to him — and from that place he became one of the most beloved healers in Lima's history, tending the sick, founding an orphanage, and reportedly caring even for the animals of the street (Dominican Mission, St. Martin de Porres). He is the patron saint of racial harmony today. Rejected by the systems around them, both men became channels of Christ's healing mercy to everyone else those same systems cast aside.

And loneliness — few have named it more unforgettably than Sister Thea Bowman, who we heard from last week. Dying of cancer, addressing the United States bishops from a wheelchair in 1989, she didn't open with an argument. She opened by singing an old spiritual: 'Sometimes I feel like a motherless child… a long way from home' (USCCB, Sr. Thea Bowman's 1989 Address). Then she looked at the bishops and asked plainly, 'Can you hear me, Church? Will you help me, Church?' That is loneliness given a voice instead of being hidden — and it's the same instinct behind another old spiritual we'll return to before we close tonight: 'There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole.' Enslaved African Americans took the prophet Jeremiah's despairing question — 'Is there no balm in Gilead?' (Jeremiah 8:22 (NIV)) — and turned it, as the theologian Howard Thurman put it, from a question mark into an exclamation point (Rooted Ministry, There Is a Balm in Gilead).

Grief, trauma, rejection, and loneliness are all real tonight. So is the balm

Grief. Even Jesus, standing at the tomb of His friend Lazarus, did not perform composure: "Jesus wept." — John 11:35 (NIV) And the psalmist gives grief its own long, honest cry: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God… My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'" — Psalm 42:1,3 (NIV)

Fear. God's answer to fear in Scripture is never 'don't feel it' — it's 'you're not carrying it alone': "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." — 41:10 (NIV) Isaiah

Trauma and rejection. These go together — the wound of what happened, and the wound of being cast aside for it. The psalmist knew this in the most personal way possible, rejection from his own parents: "Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me." — Psalm 27:10 (NIV) And the prophet Isaiah, describing the suffering servant who is Christ Himself, names rejection directly: "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain." — Isaiah 53:3 (NIV)

Whatever face of emotional suffering you're carrying tonight — grief, fear, trauma, or rejection — Christ has already stood exactly there. Not from a distance. From the inside."

Two questions.

You can journal, or simply sit with them in silence — whatever helps you be honest

1. Which of these four faces of emotional suffering — grief, fear, trauma, or rejection — am I actually carrying if I haven't said it out loud?

2. Where have I mistaken someone's silence, distance, or rejection of me for God's rejection of me?

Loneliness and the Healing Mercy of Christ "There's a fifth face we haven't named yet: loneliness. It can sit underneath all the others or show up entirely on its own — in a marriage, in a crowded room, in a season of life nobody else seems to understand. The psalmist names it as directly as anything else in Scripture: "Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted." — Psalm 25:16 (NIV) Notice what he does with it — he doesn't hide the loneliness, and he doesn't manage it alone. He turns it toward God as a request. That's the movement we're at tonight. Because here's the good news underneath everything we've named: emotional suffering, of every kind, has a name in Christ, and that name is mercy. Jesus doesn't wait for us to arrive composed: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. "*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* — Matthew 11:28–30 (NIV) And grief specifically is not a spiritual failure — Jesus calls it blessed: *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."* — Matthew 5:4 (NIV) Paul goes further and tells us where comfort is meant to travel once we've received it: *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."* — 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 (NIV) And whatever ground was lost to grief, fear, trauma, rejection, or loneliness this year, Scripture promises it isn't the final word: *"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."* — Lamentations 3:22–23 (NIV) This is exactly what Isaiah promised about Christ — not just that He suffered alongside us, but that His suffering became the very source of our healing: *"Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering… he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."* — Isaiah 53:4–5 (NIV)

That's the balm. Not a technique, not a timeline, not even other people, though God o sends those too — it's Christ Himself, wounded and risen, meeting our grief, fear, trauma, rejection, and loneliness with a mercy strong enough to actually heal them. 'There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole, there is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul' (Wikipedia, There Is a Balm in Gilead) — that old exclamation, sung by people who had every earthly reason for despair, is simply the gospel put to music. It is true for you tonight, whatever face of emotional suffering you walked in carrying."

"Let's pause once more. Same as before — journal or sit quietly." Ask yourself:

3. Where in my life have I been managing emotional pain on my own that I actually need to bring to Christ, or to someone He's placed in my life, instead?

4. What would it look like this week to receive comfort — really receive it — rather than deflect it or explain it away?

What questions, pushback, or 'me too' moments came up for you tonight as we talked about grief, fear, trauma, rejection, loneliness, and the healing mercy of Christ?

Closing Prayer "Lord Jesus, You wept at a friend's tomb, You were despised and rejected, and You still call the weary to come to You for rest. Tonight we bring You our grief, our fears, our wounds, our sense of being unseen. Apply Your healing mercy to whatever we carry home tonight. Let Your compassions, which

are new every morning, meet us again tomorrow, and every day until we gather again. In Your holy name we pray, Amen."

Here is the prayer that was shared in our chat box during the session:

You're as young as your faith and as old as your doubt, as young as yourself confidence and as old as your fear as young as your hope and as old as you despair.