



What is Truth?

An Embodied Lenten Series

By Katie Ernst and Hazel Monae

Part of “A Toolkit for Reparations in Community: A Resource for the Body of Christ” www.diomass.org/reparations-toolkit

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Session 2: Moving with Tension

Overview

The practice of telling the truth requires us to view tension as healthy and a productive part of the process. This is particularly hard in Christian spaces and predominantly white spaces where we have too often replaced the goal of “being nice to each other” for the Gospel imperative to “speak truth to each other in love.” How far can the collective or individual stretch before something breaks? What boundaries need to be put in place? Session 2 dives into practices that will enable the group to build capacity to be in and move with difficult conversations.

Preparation and set-up

Each participant will need a rubber band for this session. You may also want to have a Bible at hand.

Centering breath (five minutes)

As a group, breathe in for a count of three, hold for a count of three, and exhale for a count of three. Do this three times.

Opening prayer (five minutes)

God who is found in tension, be with us as we tear down false notions of either/or binaries. Help us to move beyond our fear of conflict and sit in the tension that cultivating healthy relationships isn't always easy. Give us courage to name when harm is done and the grace to tend to that harm. For you, through your child Jesus, gave us a living example of tension enfolded between the divine and the human. May we walk in your way. Amen.

Creating the container (20-30 minutes)

Read the poem one time through. Sit in silence for one minute. Read the poem again. Sit in silence for one minute. For the final time, read only the line in bold type. Reflect on the question provided.

*There is no such thing as a "safe space" —
We exist in the real world.*

We all carry scars and have caused wounds.

*This space
seeks to turn down the volume of the world outside,
and amplify voices that have to fight to be heard elsewhere,
This space will not be perfect.*

It will not always be what we wish it to be

But

*It will be our space together,
and we will work on it side by side.*

— By Beth Strano [Used here with permission]

- How does it feel to hold the tension within yourself that you “carry scars and have caused wounds”?
- Is there a difference between scars and wounds? How might they manifest differently in conversations like these?
- How will you as a community tend to the scars you carry and the wounds that will inevitably be inflicted in doing this work together?
- If your group has created group agreements or expectations, revisit them and adjust as needed. If you haven't put in an agreement about addressing harm done in the group, now would be a good time to do so.

Embodied exercise: Rubber band play (20-30 minutes)

In this work, we expect there to be tension. Tension is natural. It's primal. As we dig into this conversation and ongoing work, we are invited to name where tension shows up, then hold and move through that tension together.

- Take five minutes on your own and play with the rubber band, twisting and stretching it.
 - Really pay attention to the way the rubber band reacts, moves, and feels in your hands.
 - Notice what is happening in your body as you play with the rubber band.
 - Do you feel the tension in the rubber band?
 - What is evoked when you twist and stretch the rubber band?
- In the large group spend 15 minutes reflecting on the following questions:
 - Share with one another what you noticed when you were playing with the rubber band.
 - What did the rubber band teach you about tension?
 - What is healthy tension? How do we know it's healthy? What ways can we navigate that tension?
 - What is unhealthy tension? How do we know it's unhealthy? If tension is inevitable, how do we tend to it so that it doesn't just snap or break us? (Think of the rubber band snapping back when pulled too far or breaking when stretched beyond its capacity.)

Scripture and reflection (30-40 minutes): Luke 13:31-35

Before you read the Scripture, take three collective breaths as a group, coming back to your center and to your breath. Read the Scripture and review the image. Listen for a phrase or word that stands out to you. Try not to think too much about why the phrase or word stands out—simply listen for what does. When the reading is finished, speak into the space those phrases or words. After a concluding moment of silence, read the Scripture a second time. Then read the reflection provided and reflect on the questions that follow it.

Just then, some Pharisees came to Jesus and said, "You need to get out of town, and fast. Herod is trying to kill you."

Jesus replied, "Go tell that fox, 'Today and tomorrow, I'll be casting out devils and healing people, and on the third day I'll reach my goal.' Even with all that, I'll need to continue on my journey today, tomorrow, and the day after that, since no prophet can be allowed to die anywhere except in Jerusalem."

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often have I wanted to gather your children together as a mother bird collects her babies under her wings—yet you refuse me! So take note: your house will be left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is the One who comes in the name of our God!’”
(Luke 13:31-35, *The Inclusive Bible*)



[Jan Luyken depiction of Luke 13:31-35](#) (copyright public domain)

Tension is inherent in the season of Lent and in this particular Scripture passage. Throughout the passage, we read that prophets are killed in Jerusalem, yet we know that Jesus is on his way there. We remember that performing miracles on the sabbath was unlawful, yet Jesus performed cures and cast out demons. In this passage, we see the tension between death and life, between healing and destruction. Through this story, we are brought face to face with the possibility that sitting in the tension gives us room to hold the multiple truths—making space for what the desert mothers, fathers, parents call “the third way” and moving us away from either/or thinking. Jesus and the Jesus story hold so much tension. We have centered our faith around a being that was both human *and* divine, that was both loved *and* hated, that fought for our lives *and* died painfully. We are sitting in tension and are invited into the “third way.”

- How do you feel reading this reflection, listening to the Scripture, gazing at the image? What came up for you?
- What truths are you holding about Jesus? How are they informing your faith?

- Does the community hold similar truths? How do they inform our community's faith?
- How can we simultaneously hold the miracle of Jesus' ministry, the pain of his demise, and the glory of his resurrection?
- How might we practice the "third way" as we navigate conversations around reparations?

Closing prayer (five minutes)

Invite one of the group members to offer the following prayer to close.

God, we thank you for inviting us into the tension of the Jesus story, allowing us to deepen our practice of the "third way." Bless us with the courage to stretch and twist to expand what we know to be true. Bless us with the audacity to hold and move through tension just as your Son, our savior Jesus Christ, did on the road to Jerusalem. Amen.

Going deeper

Suggestions for individual and household follow-up reflection, study, and action:

- Listen to this two-part episode from the podcast series *Unlocking Us* with Brené Brown called "I'm Sorry: How to Apologize and Why It Matters, [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)." Note what feelings come up for you and what learnings stay with you.
- The 2022 Lenten Preaching Series hosted by the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Boston—"The Spiritual Practice of Truth"—will follow the session themes in this series. You are invited to reflect further on each session theme by watching the corresponding sermon from the preaching series, which will be available at <https://www.stpaulboston.org/sermon-index>.