



**WITNESS
FOR JUSTICE**

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A Love Letter to the Church: Releasing Martyrdom

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Dear Church,

We need no more martyrs; we need each other.

The root of what we know as martyr comes from the ancient Greek word “mártys” (μάρτυς), which meant “witness” or “testimony.”

Alanis Morissette’s lyrics, “Isn’t it ironic,” seem appropriate here, when considering how the word martyr now equates to distress, suffering, and isolation. Those experiences seem quite far from the intention of witnessing one’s humanity, don’t you think?

We need no more modern martyrs; we need a return to witness and testimony with soft hearts.

There are two sides to martyrdom I’ve experienced in my life, especially as a queer person. I’ve witnessed marginalized communities, including my own queer body, hold a deep belief that someone must be anointed to suffer publicly, or privately, to pry the circle wider. I’ve also witnessed power constrict and contort faithful voices into isolated echo chambers where no one can hear testimony.

Both fracture the body of Christ into pieces and cause reverberating harm.

Martyrdom, in the modern sense,



equals a sacrifice of body, mind, and spirit. And, Church, we know in our faith, how Christ has already covered this “sacrifice.”

Strength in Christ, and in our faith, does not equal sacrificing our bodies through suffering narratives in silence or in public. Strength in Christ, and in our faith, can come from our soft embrace of God’s resilient love already overcoming the burden of being a living witness through martyrdom. Through resurrection we were liberated from such an existence. There is no need to continue isolation of self from the body of Christ.

I wonder how we can act through God’s love, first, when we witness someone in distress because of martyrdom? What if we slowed down to listen to differences? What if we asked ourselves if power was hardening our hearts to the soft God we walk with? What would happen if we saw the lost sheep of our communal flocks and invited them in?

Perhaps, we would return to the root word of martyr; maybe we would grow in Christ’s likeness even deeper as a living witness of love, instead.

May it be so.

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