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# Godforsaken: On the Possibility of Black Faith and Black Care

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Nick Peterson

Assistant Professor of Homiletics and Worship  
Christian Theological Seminary  
Indianapolis, Indiana

Where there is no care, there can be no grief. Where there is grief, there is care. The etymology of the word “care” points to the Old English word *carien*, meaning “be anxious or solicitous; grieve; feel concerned or interest.”<sup>1</sup> Grief and care are inextricably linked. Where there is one, there is the other. To have an interest in a thing is to recognize some form of value. Value recognized, then, is the relational foundation supporting expressions of grief and/or care. The cries, screams, hugs, and embraces that express grief and care testify to a thing’s significance. One grieves and cares for those things that are full of meaning. Still, there is a fourth concept worth noting—vulnerability. Vulnerability is the possibility of exposure to danger, risk, or wounding. To be vulnerable is to be able to be struck down or assailed. Realized vulnerability begs a grief or care response. Grief and care can show up on either side of a vulnerable encounter. Grief may arise when loss occurs, and preventive care may try to mitigate or prevent the injury all together. On the other side, anticipating a wounding event, grief can surface as anxiety and fear of danger. Capacities to grieve and care flow out of our ability to ascribe value and recognize vulnerability. Within this matrix of grief and care, I posit trauma as an interdiction of recognition along the axes of value and vulnerability. Trauma is the event, and its afterlives, that disrupt the very logic by which grief and care cohere. By throwing relationality and sociality into disarray, trauma renders value and vulnerability illegible, thereby, threatening, and possibly foreclosing, grief and care. Trauma *disorients* its victim’s personal interiority and sense of self in the world. It is a *metaphysical* injury. In a theological register, trauma is a form of violation that injures toward profanation—the deprivation of sanctity. It is to be godforsaken.

The racial order, finding its worldmaking power through the Transatlantic Slave Trade (TST) and colonialism, persists as trauma. The name of the world’s second largest continent emerged in the sixteenth century alongside the dreadful Trade. Medieval scholar al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazan, noted that

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the Romans called what is present-day Tunisia, Africa. Believing the term to be of Greek-origin, he suggested it meant, “without cold or without horror.” As the Portuguese explored the Atlantic Western Coast of the continent, they called the region Guiné, a term borrowed from the Berbers meaning “black or burned skin.” By the end of the seventeenth century the term “Africa” was common among European nations, and the region most populous with slave trading ports was called the Gulf of Guinea.<sup>2</sup> If Africa was a black place without horror, the TST as it took black bodies captive, gave rise to unfathomable forms of horror. The afterlife of racial slavery, expressed in the ongoing trauma of antiblack violence at the hands of police and vigilantes, the ever-expanding prison industrial complex, and disparities across socio-economic, health, and educational outcomes, requires redress. This article is a theological gesture in that direction.

## Godforsaken blackness

It was never the case that black lives did not matter. The issue has been and remains an honest reckoning with how, to whom, and for what reasons black lives matter. And while black affect and

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1. <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=care>

2. “Africa: What’s in a Name? | South African History Online,” accessed April 14, 2023, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/africa-whats-name>.

aesthetics are widely revered at present, few, if any, are seeking to embody the trauma that structures black existence. The TST, spanning from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, violently brought an estimated 12 million black people from the coasts of West Africa to the Americas and Europe. Their presence as slaves built personal, familial, communal, social, political, national, and psychological power, wealth, and status for everyone but them. By the nineteenth century, there was no part of the Americas, Europe, Africa, or Asia that the TST did not impact. From the sugar in British tea to the Yemeni coffee beans transplanted to Brazil, the subjected slaves' flesh, blood, sweat, and tears made such commerce and cultivation possible.

To carry out the Trade for so long required untold power and collective justification from European nations and the participation of indigenous tribes to supply black bodies from the African interior. Paradoxically, as the Enlightenment increased European interest in personal liberty, it did so as Europeans perfected black captivity. The captors, African first, then European, had no regard for familial ties, the preservation or recognition of dignity, or the impact of relentless violence. The Trade, and plantation life in the Americas, categorically desecrated the captive's physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. Known as the "voyage of death," the journey alone resulted in an untold number of fatalities, maimings, and illnesses.<sup>3</sup> Survivors (and I use that term loosely) landing in the Americas or Europe found themselves without any claim to their personhood on or off the slave ship. How does one calculate the trauma of severing one's humanity from one's body? To be a slave meant having no right, no claim, and no entitlement to one's own body. The slave was an object for another's use.

In the New World, the slave was the master's blank slate, a canvas ready to absorb whatever the master applied. Any form or hint of resistance to the master's will or desire could result in death, beatings, or sale.<sup>4</sup> Historical sociologist Orlando Patterson describes this condition of enslavement as *social death*.<sup>5</sup> Standing in the place of total death, the slave is socially dead, yet physically alive. The slave's experience as socially dead is one of natal alienation, general dishonor, and violent domination. Natal alienation marks the absence of birth rights. The slave has no claim to citizenship and no kinship ties that citizens are required to recognize.<sup>6</sup> The absence of rights did not make the

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slave an outcast. Instead, it made the slave the master's sentient object. It was the master's claim over the slave that gave the slave's existence meaning. Because the slave had a master, the master's desire determined the fate of the slave. The meaningfulness of the slave to the master reflected the inverse relationship between the master's honor and the slave's dishonor. Society consented to affirm the slave's dishonor, thus making the master's honor visible. The slave's powerlessness supplied the master with total power. Violence crystallized alienation and disgrace, and the slave had no recourse against the master's rage. The slightest infraction, real or perceived, could result in beatings, bills of sale, dismemberment, and death. Local and international communities sustained these patterns and practices of trauma as socially acceptable, theologically sound, and economically necessary for centuries. The slave who was black was the living dead, with no rights, no honor, and no protection against unfettered violence.

Humanitarian movements emerging in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, led by Quakers and members of the Clapham Sect, called for abolition. They argued that slavery was a moral stain and unbecoming of European nations and an exploitation of African despotism. As countries abolished slave trade and slavery throughout the mid- and late-nineteenth century, the tides seemed to turn. Even the United States had a period—Reconstruction—when blacks were elected to the U.S. Congress from Southern states. But Emancipation and Reconstruction gave rise to evolved forms of antiblackness—Jim and Jane Crow, the repealing of Civil Rights, forced segregation, minstrelsy, sharecropping, lynching, surveillance, police brutality, and mass incarceration—to name a few.

On the surface, physical violence and incapacitation seem to be the primary force linking these various forms of antiblackness. But

*Sanford* case ruled that blacks had "no rights which the white man was bound to respect." For a comprehensive analysis of the decision see, Mark A. Graber, *Dred Scott and the Problem of Constitutional Evil* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

3. Ramesh Mallipeddi, "A Fixed Melancholy': Migration, Memory, and the Middle Passage," *The Eighteenth Century* 55, no. 2 (2014): 235–53, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecy.2014.0025>.

4. Many were willing to take this risk and without doing so the Underground Railroad would not have been successful. Additionally, covert forms of resistance emerged with coded language and other sophisticated acts of signification. These practices of resistance were often deeply connected to the retaining of pre-enslavement aesthetics and modes of meaning-making. For a classical text on the spirituals see, John Rosamond Johnson and Lawrence Brown, *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (Viking Press, 1925).

5. See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study, With a New Preface*, 2 edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018).

6. In 1857, the Supreme Court decision in the *Dred Scott vs*

If we register these practices as black trauma, then we are dealing with acts of profanation of metaphysical consequence. The logic of antiblackness established from the start aimed to normalize and cement the negation of civil rights and the denigration of personhood. Subtle and overt forms of antiblackness extend black trauma across time and space.

if we register these practices as black trauma, then we are dealing with acts of profanation of metaphysical consequence. The logic of antiblackness established from the start aimed to normalize and cement the negation of civil rights and the denigration of personhood. Subtle and overt forms of antiblackness extend black trauma across time and space. The legal repudiation of slavery did not change the centuries-in-the-making orientation society had toward black bodies. This orientation insisted the black body must be kept in a place—the hold of a ship, the auction block, the plantation, the field, the noose, the ghetto, the projects, the jail, the ground. The aftermath of slavery was not the making of a new New World sans black trauma, but a recapitulation of the one that already was and still is—a “second crop” of black social death.<sup>7</sup>

Slaveness<sup>8</sup> in the present moment marries the plantation to the penitentiary.<sup>9</sup> Black criminality, then, emerges as witness to black depravity and not a vestige of the State’s foreclosure of black subjectivity. Society values blacks negatively through criminality and profitably through capital-driven incarceration. Nowhere is this connection more clearly seen than with the Thirteenth Amendment, which yoked criminality to re-enslavement. The former slave, through imprisonment, could become a slave again. Such an association revealed that part of slavery’s logic obfuscated trauma by justifying punishment and violence across generations of black flesh. Today, black people are five times more likely to enter the penal system than whites.<sup>10</sup> The black body in the age of mass incarceration produces value through state correctional

enterprises that sell goods and services using prisoners’ labor.<sup>11</sup> Blackness, at best, has a tenuous relationship with humanity. In the world, black people are in human form and likeness yet abject and monstrous. Black *is*, ontologically speaking, bad.

At the turn of the twentieth century, black sociologist William Edward Burghardt Du Bois posed a question regarding blackness that still lingers—how does it feel *to be* a problem?<sup>12</sup> How do we contend with the psycho-ontological impact that such an ever-present history has on those who inherit bodies and a world where they are *a/the* problem? The asymmetries of power that normalized, from the start, antiblack violence, sustained that violence with ingenuity and spirit, and over time denied the range and depths of its lingering impact, remain opaque and elusive, because black trauma renders black personhood and black vulnerability illegible at the societal level. As a society, we can neither properly grieve nor care for the trauma that is blackness, because black trauma is sign of the country’s original sin and black flesh is the site of sacrificial offering. Grappling with the generations-long trauma that is the constant refusal, the eager dismissal, and the trite justification of black pain and suffering, would mean reckoning with a sacrificial system that requires black people to bear the griefs and sorrows of an entire world.<sup>13</sup> A genuine reappraisal of these provocations, at the societal level, would require black life to mean something other than what it has. More directly, it would require those who are not the issue (offspring) of black trauma to also *be* something other than what they have been. All bodies would have to signify something other than the sedimented accumulation of negatives or positives, and the embodiment of all that is evil/good and monstrous/beautiful. Here, I am not suggesting that one simply include black within those things society has deemed possible. My provocation is a radical charge to abandon society’s construction and enforcement of such categories altogether and consider what it may mean to take up one’s cross and follow.

## Godforsaken

In my mind, the miracle and terror of the incarnation is that God would subject God’s son to humans and that Jesus would endure

7. <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=aftermath>

8. By this term I mean the logic of slavery and not the institution of slavery.

9. See the title track as it narrates with haunting vocals the impact of antiblackness across time and place in America. Wynton Marsalis, *From the Plantation to the Penitentiary* (Blue Note Records, 2007).

10. Ashley Nellis, “The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons,” The Sentencing Project, October 13, 2021, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/the-color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons-the-sentencing-project/>.

11. All states except Alaska have Correctional Enterprises where prisoners labor to produce saleable goods whose proceeds benefit the state. Lilah Burke, “Public Universities, Prison-Made Furniture,” *Inside Higher Ed*, February 14, 2020, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/02/14/public-universities-several-states-are-required-buy-prison-industries>. For more on the connection between slavery and mass incarceration see, Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black People in America from the Civil War to World War II* / Douglas A. Blackmon, 1st ed (New York: Doubleday, 2008). And, Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Tenth anniversary edition (New York: London: The New Press, 2020).

12. Emphasis mine, W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Dover Thrift Editions (New York: Dover, 1994), 2.

13. Taken up from a womanist’s lens, this notion of sacrifice can be intoned as black women’s surrogacy, see Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, Anniversary Edition (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2013).

it. All aspects of Jesus' personhood and divinity were rendered vulnerable by how he was recognized and misrecognized. If the expectation was for the Messiah to show up as a political force, Jesus was a disappointment. He never amassed an army, and he never marched off to war. He never killed those who set out to kill him and never avenged the death of his friends. Jesus failed if the expectation was for him to establish an earthly kingdom of justice and peace for Israel. Yes, he healed, fed, taught, and encouraged many; but none of that amounted to the formation of the nation-state or kingdom many expected and desired.

It is probably easiest to make sense of Jesus' vulnerability by tending to how the Gospels present Jesus' antagonists.<sup>14</sup> Jesus is vulnerable because whatever kind of entity he is or claims to be troubles the authority or challenges the honor of the established religious leaders.<sup>15</sup> The writers structure the Gospels so that we hear Jesus' honor emerge as a threat to local religious leaders' honor. And because the Gospel writers are sympathetic to Jesus, he is often presented as the victim of their hubris. In Mark 1:21-28, Jesus exorcizes an unclean spirit from a man on the sabbath leaving the crowd amazed at the fact that unclean spirits obey him. Subsequently, the fame of his name spread throughout the region. Mark 2:13-17, when Jesus calls Levi to be a disciple, narrates how local leaders wonder why he breaks tradition by eating with tax collectors and sinners. Immediately following that, in Mark 2:18-22, both John the Baptist's disciples and the pharisees want to know why Jesus' disciples do not fast like they do. By the end of the chapter Jesus and his disciples are accused of breaking sabbath law. In the third chapter, the local leaders set Jesus up to see if he would heal on the sabbath and when he does, they conspire how to destroy him. And in Mark 3:22, the scribes pronounce that Jesus is possessed with Beelzebul. In chapter 7, Mark has the first thirteen verses as a heated conversation between Jesus, the scribes and pharisees about ritual handwashing that Jesus' disciples don't do. Mark's plot thickens as local leaders antagonize Jesus with questions about his authority, his practices, and his validity. They challenge his divine birthright and his and his disciples' actions

14. I use antagonists as a literary term noting how religious leaders are structured narratively in the gospels. I do not deploy this term to perpetuate the long history of interpretation that uses the gospels' narrations as justification for antisemitism. For a comprehensive treatment of anti-Jewish interpretations of the gospels see, William R. Farmer, *Anti-Judaism and the Gospels* (New York: Trinity Press International, 1999). For recent scholarship detailing the impact of Martin Luther's antisemitism see, Jarrett A. Carty, "Martin Luther's Anti-Judaism and Its Political Significance," *Antisemitism Studies* 3, no. 2 (2019): 317-342.

15. The synagogue as a Jewish cultural, religious, educational, and civil center allowed Jews, even in diaspora, to maintain continuity with the historical temple-based tradition while also responding to the particular needs and concerns of the local synagogue's context. So, a challenge to norms and customs of a local synagogue could mean placing an already marginal community in greater danger. For a more nuanced understanding of the various roles the synagogue played in antiquity see, Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/emory/detail.action?docID=3420078>.

Since his death, Jesus' followers have tried to answer the question—what did he die for? The collective body of the New Testament writings wrestle with the reality of Christ's death and the cross being a reflection of God's love, commitment to humanity, and plan for redemption.

are placed under a microscope. The local leaders cannot enact the violence they want against Jesus because the public stands with Jesus. The crowds affirm his authority and welcome his demonstrations of power. Jesus winning over the masses made him a threat because his practices were attention-grabbing, which could potentially put the entire community at risk if Roman authorities interpreted him as a threat. We see this come to a head in John 19:21, when the chief priests request that the epithet on the cross be changed from "King of the Jews" to "he claimed to be King of the Jews." Again, the narrators of the Gospels structure it such that his increased popularity requires his antagonists to develop more sophisticated and definitive attack plans. When given the choice between crucifying a known revolt-leader (Mark 16:7 and Luke 23:19) or Jesus, they elect to crucify Jesus.

At the same time, Jesus, assured in his divine identity, kept doing what he was sent to do. He traveled widely and took time for himself when he needed it. It was never the case that his antagonists controlled his every move or even his self-perception. Their attempts at denying and disregarding his divine birth right, dishonoring him, and violent domination were all just that: attempts. They called him demonic. They accused him of breaking religious customs. They questioned his character based on the company he kept. For all intents and purposes, Jesus was a problem that needed a solution. In time, a solution would come, and it would require betrayal with a kiss from one of his own. But even this would not be a surprise for Jesus. The Gospel writers indicated to their readers from the beginning where things were headed with Jesus. And Jesus, in all the Gospels, was unafraid to tell his disciples where things were headed. Even though they could not believe it or make sense of it, Jesus demonstrated care for his disciples by cluing them into the grief that was to come. In his humanity he refused haughtiness, and in his divinity, he welcomed humility. To preemptively deny his executioners a total satisfaction in his death, he claimed that no one can take his life, but that he would lay it down. He chose death, and endured death on a cross.

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cross being a reflection of God's love, commitment to humanity, and plan for redemption. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul comes straight out and calls this whole scene for what it is—a stumbling block, foolishness, but also the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:20-25).

In reviewing the New Testament literature, what is notable is the way Jesus lived his life made his death valuable for different reasons. For his followers, his death emerged as the precondition for resurrection which would further establish his divine mission. For his detractors, his death would mark a return to business as usual. How one reads Jesus' life alongside his death tells us a lot about how we navigate and negotiate the relationship between dignity and body. Jesus' passion and death are remarkable for the way they dishonor his personhood. Barabbas, a notorious prisoner (Matthew 27:16) was released instead of him, even when the regional authority could find no fault with him. The ominous crowd fed off his dishonor by shouting "crucify him." The Roman head mocks both Jesus' and his community's identity by attaching a crown of thorns on the King of the Jews whom they are crucifying—making clear the Empire's general disregard for the self-determinacy of the occupied region. And the penultimate act of dishonor happens when one of his fellow crucified brethren questions why he's on a tree like them if he is in fact who they say he is. Jesus' testimony is his refusal to capitulate in the ways people expect. Instead of saving himself and running from death, he walks right into it, and from the midst of it posed the question that even his divinity could not save him from—"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34, cf Psalm 22:1a)"

Ultimately, it is not his antagonists' denial of his divinity that traumatizes Jesus, but his God's. The truth of Jesus' witness as a human was his willingness to act and live on God's terms, to allow his personhood to manifest and materialize his Father's honor. Jesus was not a slave to his antagonists' perception, but a slave to his Father. It was through Jesus' body, blood, sweat, and tears that God's agenda went forth. It was Jesus' dishonor on a cross that set the stage for God's honor as savior and resurrector. God's forsaking of Jesus on the cross denied Jesus his birthright. It was the fact that in every way and in every mode, Jesus had to tend to what his Father wanted. When he was separated from his mother as a child, it was because he was taking care of his Father's business. He healed and taught, prayed and grieved because he did the work his Father sent him to do. The trauma of Jesus' story is that his own Father sent him to earth to die at the hands of the people his Father intended to save. Jesus was vulnerable not because he was only flesh, but because he was God in the flesh. And in his flesh, he experienced God's abandonment. We know that his words came from the psalmist, but unlike the psalmist, Jesus does not sing a song of redemption and triumph. Death follows his cry. Even as God's care is absent for Jesus on the cross, Jesus recognizes and names, even if from borrowed words, what it is to be forsaken. Jesus on his cross grieves and cares for himself and those who also ask God, "Why have you forsaken us?" What may be more telling is the fact that God forsaking Jesus simply meant leaving

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him in the hands of humans. Jesus' passion is wrought at human hands, some that may think he is deserving, others that are just doing their jobs, and still others who may be acting in complete ignorance. The violence and trauma he suffers in his body is of human design, and the existential injury, profanation of being godforsaken is in God not saving him from those he came to save. Jesus' vulnerability on the cross is demonstrated in God's refusal to thwart human violence by taking Jesus out of that situation. The grotesque exploitation of Jesus on the cross may tell us less about his endurance per se, as he was the first to die (John 19:32-33), but instead, provide a mirror to show the lengths humans will go to protect, secure, and justify their power.

This is not a telling of the gospel story that leaves us feeling empowered and satisfied. This telling, even if it fails, tries to hear, in the gospel story, Jesus' trauma as God's refusal to thwart human action when death is imminent and even when one's life was in service to the needs of others. The character Jesus demonstrates throughout the story is a refusal to abandon care. And even in his own articulation of being godforsaken, he neither forsakes God nor those God sent him to love. This dance between weakness and wisdom, stumbling blocks and foolishness is a re-orientation. It neither glorifies trauma nor denies the heft of being godforsaken. If the cross does anything, it gives hope for profanation's failure through the first-person possessive declaration of *my* God. Even when forsaken and left to human depravity, from trauma's grip one can cry *my* God. James Cone says, "faith is born out of suffering, and suffering is faith's most powerful contradiction."<sup>16</sup> The suffering that is metaphysical for Jesus in this cry is the silence that follows. Faith is suspension in that silence, it is tarrying in the contradiction, and it's vulnerable.

### Grief and care

God's silence during Christ's passion is only more striking when one considers the presence of Jesus' mother. Standing at the foot of the cross with Jesus' beloved disciple, John, is his mother, Mary

16. James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Rev Sub edition (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), x.

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(John 19:25). Mary bore Jesus in her own female body. She risked her own life and reputation to agree with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18-19). Mary treasured the things she learned about his work and his mission (Luke 2:19), but none of them could prepare her for witnessing his public humiliation and scorn. Even if Mary is powerless to save her son, she bears witness to his death. She refuses to turn away. In John 19:26-27, Jesus speaks from the cross to his mother while in physical and existential pain. But he does not address her as one would address kin; he calls her Woman (John 19:26). Here we catch glimpses of Jesus' own recognition of natal alienation. He is alive but near death and neither his privilege as the son of God, nor his responsibility as his mother's eldest child cohere in this moment. On the cross, his birthright is not to familial recognition. Mary, his mother, is 'woman.' He tells her to behold John as a son. Refusing his own sonship while death is imminent, Jesus creates a new relational dynamic that precludes and intones a different order of kinship. He reclaims responsibility by inaugurating John as the one who will stand in his place. Jesus, even in his foreclosure, demonstrates care to intervene in Mary's fate. If Jesus' cry to his God was his declaration of fidelity to God amid suffering, then his words to Mary very well testify to his capacity to intervene upon her grief beyond the events she is witnessing in those moments. Even as he does not say *my* mother, the action of placing her in good care mimics the work of the Spirit placing him in Mary's womb.

The writers do not give us Mary's words, only her presence. That she is there testifies to her own sense of fidelity and Jesus' meaningfulness to her. The tradition recognizes Mary's courage with her veneration as Our Lady of Sorrows. She, too, is Jesus' parent, but there is no accusation of her forsaking him. There is no accusation of her having a part in his death. Jesus sees that Mary,

too, is a victim because she must live with her sorrows. He knows that Mary will be present in the aftermath of his death. And when he dies and they place the body in the tomb, the Marys come, in their grief, to do what care requires. They set out early in the morning with spices and ointments to properly bury their dead (Matthew 27:56 and Luke 24:1). They want to tend to his flesh and bones because their grief compels them to acts of care. Yet when they arrive, there is no body. Terror. How do you grieve and care when your best attempt is met with an absence? How do you pick up the pieces when the pieces are gone? Even as faith requires hope in the resurrection, the death that comes first, invites taking responsibility for what will remain, in Jesus' case this was not a looking forward to his own progeny, but a looking back to his predecessor. From his own grief, he intervenes upon his mother's grief. Even when resurrection is an absence or at least displacement of his body (Matthew 28:6, Mark 16:6, Luke 24:3), Jesus does not leave Mary displaced as a mother without a son.

As we consider blackness in this register, we can both think about the grief the mother carries when losing a child at the hands of human trauma and her own inability to protect her child from hurt, harm, and danger. Yet Jesus points to an expanded witness of kin that fills in the gaps by redeploying the community's resources to the place they are most needed.

### **Black faith: A parable**

In Mark 4:30-32, Jesus shares this parable:

“With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

Black trauma is not salvific, it is symptomatic of a form of reductionism that would leave black people so small as to render them insignificant. Yet faith is good ground to sew what the world deems worthless. Black faith and the practices that emerge from within black communities do not have to save the world. It is enough to provide shade for the blackbirds and room for their nests. It does not mean that the seasons won't change, or the weather will always be fair and bright, but if there are glimpses of a kingdom that is capacious enough to be sanctuary, it is without question worth every seed we can muster. May we live toward the reality of such a kingdom, or die trying, just as Jesus did.