

Love Is as Strong as Death

This picture is called an African Pieta. It comes from an unknown artist in Kenya. It depicts Mary holding her dead son Jesus as his lifeless body is taken down, off the cross. Injustice, evil, chaos, and suffering always have ripple effects. Numerous people bear the repercussions. As Mary bears the weight of her son's lifeless and abused body, the weight of her love for her son cannot be released. Her love cannot be extinguished by death.

Many of us have faced this same moment too many times. We bear the repercussions of injustice, evil, chaos, and suffering. Our loved ones suffer, and we suffer. We are left to pick up the pieces. Somehow, we are told that we have to go on, and move on. Life has no rewind button. And yet, the orientation of our heart is the same as Mary's. We want to hold our loved one forever. How can we ever let them go? We hold the gift of people and memories closer to our heart than ever. If only there was a way to go back; to receive the gift of one last conversation, one last embrace? We tell ourselves we would give anything to see their face one last time, to hear them laugh, to share one last conversation.

The poet of Song of Songs writes, *"Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it would be utterly scorned."* Song of Songs 8:6-7

When we grieve, people often try to change the way we feel. They want us to feel better, but what we feel is unyielding love. We clutch to memories we cannot regain, relationships we cannot get back. It isn't that we want to live in the past, it's that our love is stronger than death. How will our love ever be healed?

3-5 minutes: Feel what Mary is feeling as she embraces Jesus. Does Mary think she will ever hear her sweet Jesus laugh again? Feel the repercussions of her loss. Who is it you have lost? Do you actually consider the possibility of ever laughing with them again? Feel your love for them, unyielding as the grave, burning and blazing like a fire. Wrap your arms around them. Feel the goodness of that love for those you cannot reach right now. Feel the hope. Imagine what Mary felt the first time she heard her sweet Jesus laugh again. What would it do to you if you could hear your loved ones laugh again? What if resurrection will one day be possible?

Open Reflections: Share about your experience of listening to God through this picture.

"Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross." African Pieta based on the work of Engelbert Mveng. Artist unknown.