

Thursday after the Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 23, 2023

Recommended readings: p. 310, "1932," pp. 311-312, "Bad Blood," pp. 316-323, "Medicine"

In her essay "Bad Blood," Yaa Gyasi describes how Black Americans are mistrustful and even fearful of the medical establishment. "When she was growing up in Alabama, people still talked about their grandfathers, fathers, and brothers who had died of bad blood.... The six hundred men who were enrolled in the Tuskegee Syphilis Study were told they'd get free medical care. Instead, from 1932 to 1972, researchers watched as they developed lesions on their mouths and genitals. Watched as their lymph nodes swelled, as their hair fell out. Watched as the disease moved into its final stage, leaving the men blind and demented, leaving them to die. All this when they knew a simple penicillin shot would cure them. All this because they wanted to see what would happen. For years afterward, her grandmother refused to go to the hospital. Even at eighty-nine, perpetually hunched over in the throes of an endless cough, she'd repeat, 'Anything but the doctor.' Bad blood begets bad blood."

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? (Psalm 22:1)

Suffering when you are sick is bad enough. But suffering when you are sick, and being ignored by people who are charged with helping you? That is a level of abandonment that few of us can imagine. Or at least, those of us who enjoy privileges can't imagine. But for those who weather racial inequality day in and day out, life can feel like one long series of tortuous abandonment. As our Lord hung dying on the cross, he cried out in physical pain but also in the pain of abandonment. And in his dying cry, we hear echoes of the pleas of countless brothers and sisters of color: Don't ignore us. Don't abuse us. Don't abandon us.

Prayer

God of healing, we confess our utter depravity in allowing the systematic abuse and abandonment of people we have deemed "less" than ourselves. We humbly dare to ask for forgiveness, but also for strength to try to do what we can to change things. We ask this in the name of the One who felt abandonment on the cross but who nevertheless offered his love to all, Jesus the Christ. Amen.