

Today I would like to start with a blessing by Kate Bowler... Written for Friends Who Hold Us Up...

Let us pray... "God, you called me to love, but people are inherently risky. Telling my story, being known, asking for help, complaining again about the thing I worry might sound cliché by now. Shouldn't I be over it already?"

But something is happening when I am known. I am becoming stronger somehow.

I am reminded of the pillars I've seen holding up cathedrals. Flying buttresses, engineered to provide support for a fragile wall, allowing them to be built taller, more stunning, more covered with ornaments or filled with stained glass, letting all the colorful light dance in. The walls would collapse without them there, but strengthened, they create something beautiful.

God, when I am no longer quite so tall and strong, give me those who hold me up and remind me of who I am and that I'm loved.

Yes, I'll get back up again today. Yes, I'll get those kids cereal and help my parents with an errand. Yes, I'll go to work or come up with something better to do with retirement hours.

I will try again. I know I will, because someone else's absurd faith in me is fortifying.

So, blessed are our flying buttresses. For they hold us up when everything seems ready to come apart, allowing us to face today—not because we're doing it alone—but precisely because we aren't.<sup>1</sup> ... Amen...

I love the images brought to life in this blessing... Pillars, flying buttresses, and sturdy walls come together and support that what is fragile, or what needs to grow, and in doing so something beautiful is created...

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie *The Lives We Actually Have*

A place filled with stained glass, letting all the colorful light dance in...

A place that allows for the uniqueness of each person to shine while honoring the strength found in unity.

But how do we get there? How do we become pillars without crumbling?

How do we accept support without feeling weak?

Especially since people are inherently risky... They can take back what was promised, they can let you down, they can be manipulative and cruel...

People disappoint one another, misunderstandings happen, and communication all too easily breaks down.

And in this messiness, in this pain, or frustration, Jesus calls us to love others...

And that is a big ask, especially if we are being honest with ourselves.

Because it is much easier to talk about love when things are going well, or when you see eye to eye with someone... When you know that they have your back and you have theirs...

But what about all of the not so pleasant situations you find yourself in?

How do you find love in the midst of disagreement or conflict?

Without ignoring the issue, or becoming subordinate, or backing down from your viewpoint to simply keep the peace.

Because this is not what Jesus was getting at...

Jesus wants a community that lifts up the fullness of each person...

A community built with healthy boundaries, not harmful borders...

As harmful borders are created by closed mindedness... Whereas healthy boundaries invite curiosity and wonder, while preserving sense of self and honoring self-care.

And boundaries are so important when it comes to love... So that each individual is acknowledged for who they are, both independently and dependently...

Like Kate Bowler's description of pillars, flying buttresses, and fragile stained glass... Each are unique and independent of the other, and yet they are held together in tension through unity.

An image that also ties in beautifully with our theology... As we believe in a Triune God... A God who is three in one... A God who is distinct and separate as well as one and united...

Because that is how God has revealed Godself to the world... Lifting up the uniqueness of the three persons... And this uniqueness is meant to be preserved and held up throughout creation...

Because every person is entitled to feel safe, seen, and heard.

For example, when I was in seminary, a professor said... There are students in this classroom who will need to be reminded that there are other students in this classroom...

And there are students in this classroom who will need to be reminded that they are in the classroom.

And my friends... That classroom is extended to the world... To all the places we go...

And love lives and thrives when we find a healthy balance with one another... By offering opportunities and invitations... Giving and receiving grace.

Grace that we have come to know through Jesus Christ...

Who gave of himself completely... And who commands us to love...

Because loving one another allows God's love to continue to permeate into the world.

As Dr. Karoline Lewis explains, "God cannot love the world without the love we take into the world."

As it is our love that continues to live on... Love that humanity first experienced in the body of Jesus Christ.

Love he had for his disciples... Love that Jesus taught, cultivated, and shared so that his disciples could share it with others—even after Jesus ascended into heaven.

Passing Christ's love through the generations... So that you may also know and experience Christ's love.

This is how you know God's love... Because it has been passed on through love from the time Jesus walked this earth...

That is a powerful thing.

And this is an embodied reality for you to lean into... Especially when you don't feel very tall or strong...

You have this community to hold you up... To remind you of who you are and that you are loved.

Because that is what a loving community does—they come together to offer love and support especially when it is most needed... When there is a funeral, when you are sick, when you need a little extra umph to get through the week... Or to simply be reminded that you are loved, just as you are...

"So, blessed are our flying buttresses. For they hold us up when everything seems ready to come apart, allowing us to face today—not because we're doing it alone—but precisely because we aren't." Amen...