

The Black Quilt  
By Eliberto Mendoza

Imagine with me. Imagine that all the oppression, problems, losses, alienations, trials, and temptations in your life are pieces of black material. The kind of material used to make a quilt. However, don't think about just your life, imagine the problems that face the people in your community. Now, don't stop there, keeping thinking about these problems, losses, alienations, trials, and temptations on a larger scale and think about all the problems in the world. The pieces keep growing and I know it's depressing but something and someone is coming to help. Ok, I hope you have all of these pieces – small to gigantic – in your mind, now put them together. But don't worry about sewing them up, imagine that there are hands out there beyond the pieces with needles and thread working as hard and fast as possible to put your quilt together to make sure it is as strong as it can be so it will never rip or tear. Your quilt is now as large as the cosmos and it is blacker than space. It is so heavy that it could crush you instantly if it fell upon you.

Jesus appears in response to this gigantic quilt made up of evils held together by powerful thread that is wielded by powerful hands. The first thing he does is come between us and the oppressive weight of the quilt freeing us from its immense pressure. He takes onto himself the crushing weight of the quilt of darkness, to which you have added the problems of your own life. Yet he does not blame you, or the world for that matter; instead he forgives and then frees us and the world from guilt and shame for creating such an evil reality that crushes and oppresses its creators as well the creation. The crushing weight of the quilt is upon him even though he did nothing to create the quilt. He faces the blunt force of pressure but does not break. He suffers its smothering oppressive weight and does not give in or give up.

However, the story does not end with Jesus' suffering the weight of the quilt. Jesus' action of stepping in between us and immense weight of the oppressive quilt tears an immense hole in the quilt, a hole that we could never accomplish on our own power. Its own weight was too much for the thread holding it together. As Jesus lifted it up it tore apart. The hole in the quilt reveals the hands and needles and even the thread for who and what they really are. The hands belong to the powers and principalities that have rejected God's plan for creation and have been actively engaged in a battle against God's plan for eons. The needles are the systems and institutions created by the hands to enslave and oppress all of creation. The thread is created out a combination of humanities actions and attitudes that are used by the hands and the needles to hold the quilt together. At times even the church has acted as a needle and we as individuals through our alienating actions and attitudes have provided material for the thread. The powers and principalities believed that the quilt was impenetrable and demonstrate it to God they attempted to crush Jesus. Yet, Jesus ripped through the quilt. He tore through the material made up of the vilest of evils, and then faced the powers and principalities. He did not lash out with vengeance or violence to defeat them, but in standing against them and tearing the quilt apart he has forced them to show themselves for who they are: oppressive and malignant forces. Forces that are not only sewing the quilt together but pressing down on it just to make sure we can never escape. Jesus defeats them and they now know that they will never have the same stranglehold on creation anymore. They know they are defeated but they don't stop sewing. They want to repair the gigantic tear that Jesus made in their quilt. They will continue to work as long as they can; trying to repair the quilt so their oppressive smothering of creation would continue for eternity.

Out of this selfless and courageous act come several invitations. First, we are invited to experience freedom and liberation. Jesus' taking onto himself the weight of the quilt has given us an opportunity to be free from its weight. We have been offered freedom to renounce attitudes and actions that in times past may have been used as thread to hold the quilt together. The weight of the quilt no longer oppresses us and we can now help Jesus pick up the quilt, this means lifting the affects of oppression off of our shoulders. Evils like consumerism, racism, and avarice are no longer pieces of the quilt so heavy that we cannot come out from under them. Addictions are no longer so heavy that we cannot overcome them. Life is no longer so oppressive that we must constantly seek escape mechanisms like them media or even theologies centered on heaven. Jesus in helping us lift the quilt allows for us to live in the here and now.

On this truth our second invitation comes. Jesus has ripped the quilt and has made it lighter so that we can handle it when we lean on him, but he has also unmasked and exposed the forces and materials used to make the quilt and keep it together. In doing so, Jesus invites us to join him in his liberating endeavor. Our freedom from the oppressiveness of the quilt allows us to labor alongside Jesus in bringing liberation. Jesus has ripped a hole in the quilt and has given us the freedom to live work alongside him.

This reality is the basis for our third invitation. As we work and live alongside Jesus in the struggle against the powers we are invited to not do this on our own. Jesus has opened a huge hole in the quilt and our invitation is to join Jesus as the Church in his mission. The Church stands with Jesus against the powers and principalities. Admittedly, at times the Church could be accused of standing with powers in trying to repair the quilt, but when it is faithful to the labor, the Church is Jesus' fellow laborer. Jesus' work in picking up the quilt and tearing the hole has empowered the Church to stare down the same powers and principalities with the same confidence found in Christ.

In conclusion Jesus' taking up and tearing the quilt that we are partially responsible for creating has brought to all of creation an opportunity for freedom and liberation. It has also brought an invitation to join in the liberating activities of Jesus. For the powers and principalities, Jesus' actions have not only brought defeat but also his actions have exposed them as the incompetent and impotent powers they really are. Yet, the powers continue and even though they are impotent, humanities cooperation with them gives them renewed strength and ability. Our invitation to all of creation is to come and join not only in our freedom but in our struggle for the freedom of all of creation.

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