

ON REDEMPTION (by Nadia Bolz-Weber)

I once sat on a death bed of a woman dying of emphysema in need of a priest. And I'm unclear of the fact that the priest that was me was just poetic or ironic since twenty years earlier, it was the same woman who saved my ass. I was a messed up kid trying to get sober and Suzanne offered that I could live for a while in her spare bedroom while I got my act together. She believed that I was not irredeemable: that I was more than the sum total of my mistakes. And two decades later I would sit by her bed in a senior high rise to give her space to confess her own brokenness.

"Suzanne," I would say, "Would you like to tell me the things that weigh on your conscience?"

She gave a raised eyebrow and spoke the things that she had done that troubled her. Some were funny, some were sad and one was particularly painful. I heard her secrets while holding her bruised papery hand, and then asked her if she believed the word of forgiveness I was about to proclaim to her was Sacred. And she said she did.

And I just told her that she's forgiven. I had assured her that she had assured me that she's not the sum total of her mistakes. And that the powerful sacred force of love in this universe has the ability to redeem all of our crap.

As we sat there, Suzanne wiped away her tear and adjusted her oxygen tube, and said, "I feel unbelievably lighter," in a whisper.

She was so beautiful in that moment, so free. I too felt comforted by the knowledge that no matter how much of a distracted ingrate I had been, she took me in. That this powerful and sacred force of love could somehow redeem me, or redeem her, and redeem our stories, and all our broken mess of a beautiful life.

This is the life we get here on earth. We get to give away what we receive. We get to believe in each other. We get to forgive and be forgiven. We get to live imperfectly, and we never know what effect it will have for years to come. And all of it, all of it is completely worth it.

