

Bridgeway Community Church
Dr. Elona Prroj
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2022 Winter Guest Speaker Series

Dr. Elona Prroj

John 16:33 NIV84

[Jesus speaking to his disciples] “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

3 truths in this passage:

1. In this troubled world the only place to find peace is Jesus.
2. You WILL have tribulation
3. Take heart because Jesus has overcome the world

“As I share my story this morning, I want you to focus not on the tragedy of the event, but I want you to focus on the presence of Jesus in the valley of death.”

“It’s all about choice. It’s a choice that you do to obey the word of God or to continue your own ways.”

She was raised in Albania one of the most atheist country.

In 1991 when communism came to an end many missionaries came to Albania preaching the gospel and she became a Christian at 11 years old.

She married young and pastored a church with her husband where many women came looking for aid because they were suffering because of the “blood feud.”

“This [blood feud] is a phenomena happening in the north of Albania and it is about 500 years old. It is based on the Old Testament “eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”

Exodus 21:22-25 NIV

[God speaking] If people are fighting and hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows.

²³ But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, ²⁴ **eye for eye, tooth for tooth**, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

“And if somebody of your family kills somebody of my family, all men of your family has to be present in the house in six generations because anyone that will be found in the street, he will be the target of revenge. And for you to be the target of revenge you have to be a man, because a woman is not precious enough to wash out the blood of a man and you have to be related to the first murderer.”

The uncle of her husband killed a man.

The issue of blood feud was not really a concern of her “until blood feud knocked on my door.”

25 men in her husbands family had to be “prisoned in the house” or they would be targets of revenge.

“The worse part of the strategy is that they never kill the killer...they try to find the best and the youngest of the family to cause the deepest pain.”

Her husband was unable to go to church for 4 years.

“We were praying, ‘God what is your calling in this valley we are going through?’”

“If you will ask me about the definition of life, to me the definition of life is the sum or the amount of the top of the mountains and the deep valleys. Many times...we are so afraid to go into the deep valleys because it is dark, it is cold, it is loneliness. But walking through the valleys might be an opportunity for allowing God to work in your life.”

“My challenge to you is make sure you not stuck in the valley. Keep walking! Keep walking because ahead of you there is the top of the mountain.”

God spoke to us through Genesis 28:15

Genesis 28:15 NLT

[God speaking to Jacob] What’s more, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. One day I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you.

They found out that her husband, Dritan, was the blood feud target of the other family. But Elona found that if she was with her husband, he was less likely to be killed so she

went with him everywhere for a year, but the first day she was NOT with him he was shot dead at the door of the church, 34 years old.

“Now you may ask, ‘Is this the calling of the Lord? Is this what God has called us to go through? Is this the cross that everybody should carry?’ I can say today, for my husband, yes.”

“My first prayer when I found out what happened was, ‘God, put an angel in my mouth that I will never speak against you.’ “

“But what I understood in the middle of the pain is that pain gives you...a megaphone...you will not speak out of what you know but you will speak out of who you are.”

Luke 23:34 NIV

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

3 things I Have Learned in My Valley of Death

1. “Nothing that happens around you changes this attribute of God: He is a good father.”

We often want to know why! Why God? We were serving you!

2. We are not called to understand; we are called to obey.

“As children of God we don’t have the capacity of putting God in our little box of understand. He’s God! He’s infinite!”

“The best way to answer to your trial is to obey God step-by-step.”

We are not called to say ‘why Lord’ we are called to say ‘yes God.’

3. We are commanded to forgive, it is not suggested.

We are commanded to forgive our enemies

Matthew 18:21-22 NIV84

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”²² Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Matthew 5:43-45 NIV84

[Jesus teaching] You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’⁴⁴ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Forgiveness does not come from the outside. It is a process of the heart.

“God, give me one reason why I should forgive the killer?” I was bitter in the forgiving because it was not just, it was not right. God told me, “Who told you there was justice in the world? Who told you there would be righteousness in the world? Are you going to give the right to be God over your right?”

Elona was confronted by her 10 year old son about forgiving the man who killed his father. “We are told to love our enemies and the only enemy we have is him! Why keep bitterness in our hearts?” That was a divine moment, like news from heaven. That was the moment she chose to forgive.

“Forgiveness is NOT a feeling. Forgiveness is a decision...it was covenant I did with my [heavenly] father. ‘Father, today I decided to forgive. Please help me.’ ”

“Forgiveness is NOT a one time event. It is a process that gets all your life. If you will ask me have you finished forgiving, I will say to you, ‘No. I wake up everyday and I take the decision that I will forgive today.’ ”

Revenge is a one time event, but forgiveness takes everyday of your life. Not because you feel it but it is because you have decided.

Forgiveness is NOT a natural reaction to the event around you, but it is a divine activation of the reality inside of you.

“You will set yourself free when you focus into forgiveness inside your heart and not connect and condition forgiveness from the people that around you.”

Forgiveness is a process.

Forgiveness is a decision.

Forgiveness is a divine gift.

Forgiveness is not forgetting.

I cannot forget all the trials that this event brought to my life and my children's life but I can choose not to remember.

Forgetting is something we do unconsciously. Not remembering is a choice we make fully and willingly.

Matthew 6:12, 14-15 NIV84

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors...For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins

If you choose to have an unforgiving heart, you are choosing unforgiveness from your Father.

"An unforgiving attitude is not a luxury we can afford."

Luke 23:34 NIV

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

The only moment you can forgive is right now.

"You have a choice this morning. You have a choice to be a victim and raise your finger against God and say, 'Why, Lord? Why me?' But you have a choice to be victorious and to say, 'Yes, Lord. Here I am. I choose to forgive, I decide to forgive.'"

The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is living inside of you.

Romans 8:11 NLT

The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.

Give him your crosses so he can replace them with crowns.

God, how can I bring your glory to your name even in the valley of death?

If you allow him to transform who you are in your heart, he will make you an instrument of transformation in your community.