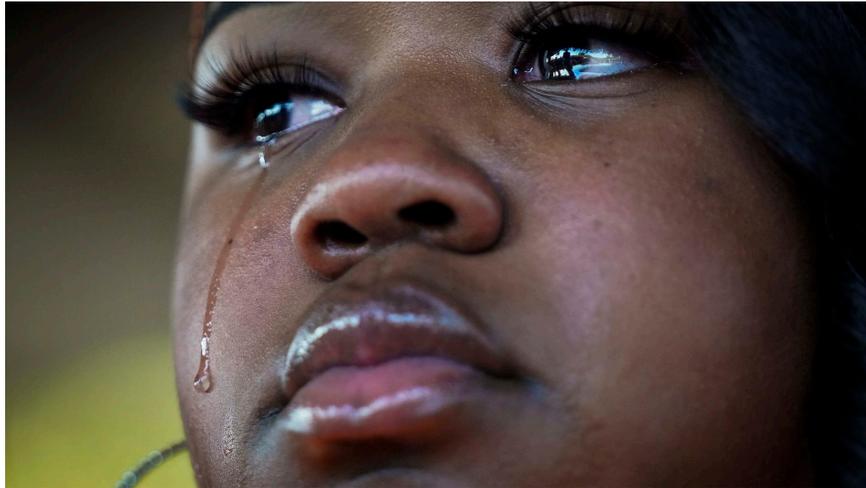


“Prophetic Tears”



“Self-control”

*“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and **self-control.**”*

Galatians 5:22-23

MacKenzie Mitchell is a recent graduate of Berkner High School in Richardson, Texas. She is also a modern-day prophet. Throughout the Scriptures, the prophets spoke for God in ways that brought hope and a voice to victims of injustice and a call for change toward those abusing positions of privilege and power. MacKenzie and a few other students and teachers from Berkner High School recently helped organize a non-violent protest in her hometown to voice her pain as a young black woman living in America in 2020. She did not give a powerful speech that inspired millions, nor did she write an angry manifesto encouraging violence. She simply wept. Her tears reflect an empathy and solidarity with victims of injustice. Her tears also represent a call for change to those who abuse their positions of privilege and power. MacKenzie’s tears are...prophetic tears.

You have to be close to someone to notice the tears in their eyes. Violence is not the answer. Neither is silence. The answer lies hidden in the stories behind the prophetic tears of the oppressed. The message of the protestors all over the world is clear, *“We want our voices to be heard. We matter. Black Lives Matter.”* It is past time for those of us in positions of privilege and power to listen, to learn and to understand the stories behind the tears of the oppressed.

The author of the book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible says,

“I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed—and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors—and they have no comforter.” (Ecclesiastes 4:1)

In my final year of graduate school in Boston, Massachusetts, I volunteered one day a week in a suicide prevention hot-line agency in South Boston called, *Project Place Hotline*. In our training sessions, the instructors taught us to say three things when we picked up the phone knowing the person on the other end was desperate: First, *“I am listening.”* Second, *“I am trying to understand.”* Third, *“I give a damn.”* No advice. No easy answers. No Bible verses or attempts to talk someone out of their pain. Just listen, try to understand and give a damn.

The final fruit of the Spirit listed in the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Galatians is...self-control. Self-control is defined as, *“the ability to regulate one’s emotions and behavior especially in difficult situations.”* We are currently living in a difficult situation in America. Compassionate listening in order to understand one another is hard work. It requires focus and patience. When we feel heard, we feel valued, appreciated and respected. It takes self-control to listen compassionately, to understand thoroughly and to give a damn about MacKenzie’s pain.

The primary form of teaching for Jesus was the use of parables. Parables were fictional stories from everyday life used to make one central point about the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. He would always end his little story with the words, *“Whomever has ears to hear, let them hear.”* Many who listened to Jesus, never really heard him. They chose not to get too close to him. Some of his words were hard to hear. He had tears in his eyes over those around him who suffered unjustly. He still does.

Jesus is the consummate prophet for such a time as this. He asked questions of people around him who were in pain. He listened compassionately and heard their stories. He saw their tears. He sought to understand their pain. He gave a damn. He made his voice known to those abusing their positions of privilege and power. He expects nothing less from his followers today. May the prophetic tears of MacKenzie Mitchell and others like her change us all. May we listen to her pain, seek to understand her story and give a damn about her life.

“Whomever has ears to hear, let them hear...”

A closing thought: I want to thank and honor the many women and men of law enforcement who personify *self-control* in these volatile times. They serve and protect with honor, respect and integrity in very trying circumstances. They step into danger for the sake of others every day of their lives. Many women and men in blue are listening, trying to understand and give a damn about MacKenzie’s tears.