

August 30, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Like last week's reading from Isaiah, today's reading from Jeremiah brings us lessons in the form of poetry. The poem begins with Jeremiah in lamentation. He is tormented in his call to serve God and speaks that frustration to God. "Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?"

Jeremiah's lamentations demonstrate the anguish of life in a broken world, broken now as then. Jeremiah, in the whole of his writing and prophecy, was trying to make sense of tragedy, trying to say an honest word while the world as he and his people had known it was coming to an end. He was trying to say something about the future when the current moment looked hopelessly grim.

The prophet does not hesitate to lay blame for nation's dilemma and forthcoming doom upon the people themselves—Jeremiah is more willing than most of us are to assign blame. But that is not the only thing that he expresses. In the course of his lamentation, the nation's grief becomes his own grief. We hear a portion of that turning in today's poem.

God hears this pain and sends a healing word. We could pare it down today to four words, "I am with you." God's healing word for Jeremiah is also God's healing word for all of us.

Later in his story (in chapter 32), Jeremiah purchases a field. He does this just as the nation, economy, and political structure are about to disappear. What action could have been more defiantly hopeful? In the midst of his people's humiliation, Jeremiah invests in the future. "Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land."

In our own time, Jeremiah calls us to self-examination, to repentance, and, yes, to the national and communal responsibility we bear for our suffering. He also calls us to a future in God's hope when "houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in the land."

Let today's confession and forgiveness invite you into the self-examination, repentance, and responsibility to which Jeremiah invites us.

Let Us Be Gathered

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
whose steadfast love is everlasting,
whose faithfulness endures from generation to generation.
Amen.

Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess our sin.
Silence is kept for reflection.

Reconciling God,
we confess that we do not trust your abundance,
and we deny your presence in our lives.
We place our hope in ourselves
and rely on our own efforts.
We fail to believe that you provide enough for all.
We abuse your good creation for our own benefit.
We fear difference and do not welcome others
as you have welcomed us.
We sin in thought, word, and deed.

By your grace, forgive us;
through your love, renew us;
and in your Spirit, lead us;
so that we may live and serve you in newness of life.
Amen.

Beloved of God,
by the radical abundance of divine mercy
we have peace with God through † Christ Jesus,
through whom we have obtained grace upon grace.
Our sins are forgiven.
Let us live now in hope.
For hope does not disappoint,
because God's love has been poured into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Gathering Song

"Come, Follow Me, the Savior Spake" (ELW #799) is our gathering song this week. Nick Galinaitis, Music Direct at Zion Lutheran Church in Glen Rock, Pennsylvania, leads us in singing the gospel call.

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/0vlzVslrVFk>.

- 1 *"Come, follow me," the Savior spake,
 "all in my way abiding;
 deny yourselves, the world forsake,
 obey my call and guiding.
 Oh, bear the cross, whate'er betide;
 take my example for your guide."*

- 2 *"I am the light; I light the way,
 a godly life displaying;
 I bid you walk as in the day;
 I keep your feet from straying.
 I am the way, and well I show
 how you should sojourn here below."*

- 3 *My heart abounds in lowliness;
 my soul with love is glowing;
 and gracious words my lips express,
 with meekness overflowing.
 My heart, my mind, my strength, my all
 to God I yield; on him I call.*

- 4 *Then let us follow Christ, our Lord,
 and take the cross appointed,
 and, firmly clinging to his word,
 in suffering be undaunted.
 For those who bear the battle's strain
 the crown of heav'nly life obtain.*

Prayer of the Day

Let us pray.

O God, we thank you for your Son,
who chose the path of suffering for the sake of the world.
Humble us by his example,
point us to the path of obedience,
and give us strength to follow your commands,
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

Let Us Hear God's Word

A reading from Jeremiah:

¹⁵O Lord, you know;
remember me and visit me,
and bring down retribution for me on my persecutors.

In your forbearance do not take me away;
know that on your account I suffer insult.

¹⁶Your words were found, and I ate them,
and your words became to me a joy
and the delight of my heart;

for I am called by your name,
O Lord, God of hosts.

¹⁷I did not sit in the company of merry-makers,
nor did I rejoice;
under the weight of your hand I sat alone,
for you had filled me with indignation.

¹⁸Why is my pain unceasing,
my wound incurable,
refusing to be healed?

Truly, you are to me like a deceitful brook,
like waters that fail.

¹⁹Therefore thus says the Lord:

If you turn back, I will take you back,
and you shall stand before me.

If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless,
you shall serve as my mouth.

It is they who will turn to you,
not you who will turn to them.

²⁰And I will make you to this people
a fortified wall of bronze;
they will fight against you,
but they shall not prevail over you,
for I am with you
to save you and deliver you,
says the Lord.

²¹I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked,
and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless. (Jeremiah 15)

*The Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.*

A reading from the Psalms:

¹Give judgment for me, O Lord, for I have lived with integrity;
I have trusted in the Lord and have not faltered.
²Test me, O Lord, and try me;
examine my heart and my mind.
³For your steadfast love is before my eyes;
I have walked faithfully with you.
⁴I have not sat with the worthless,
nor do I consort with the deceitful.
⁵I have hated the company of evildoers;
I will not sit down with the wicked.
⁶I will wash my hands in innocence, O Lord,
that I may go in procession round your altar,
⁷singing aloud a song of thanksgiving
and recounting all your wonderful deeds.
⁸Lord, I love the house in which you dwell
and the place where your glory abides. (Psalm 26)

A reading from Romans:

⁹Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12)

Word of God. Word of life.

Thanks be to God.

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

²¹From that time on, [after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah,] Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²²And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." ²³But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

²⁴Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

²⁷"For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. ²⁸Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." (Matthew 16)

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Reflection on the Readings

The year 2020 brings us yet another week of deep tragedy, pain, and grief. In front of his children, a young man is shot in the back seven times by a police officer and is paralyzed. As part of the aftermath, another, even younger man takes it upon himself to wield an assault rifle to kill two people and nearly a third. Facebook and other social media channels continue to stoke contributing division and hatred while their executive leaders blame “operational errors.” Looters leave wakes of violence and damage in communities throughout the country. Protesters struggle to be heard. The pattern of intensifying storms arising from climate change continue with Hurricane Laura hitting the gulf coast with category 4 winds. Wildfire damage to thousand-year-old trees is still unmeasured in its extent. Meanwhile, in the midst of returning students and teachers to classroom settings, incidents of COVID-19 infection continue to rise sharply around the nation. Right here in Joplin and our surrounding area, the daily count of confirmed infections has nearly doubled since the beginning of August and shows no signs of slowing down as the community abandons healthful practices that would support disease suppression and mitigation.

The prophet Jeremiah speaks to us in such times. The lamentation and pain that he expresses is neither remote nor unfelt by us. When Jeremiah says to God, “you are to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail,” it is not difficult to imagine an echo of those words resonating strongly in our own thoughts. But in that echo, we must also hear God’s response to Jeremiah’s pain: “I am with you and will save you and deliver you.”

Heard alongside today’s gospel reading, Jeremiah anticipates Peter, and each of us, in both experiencing the cross and receiving the comforting words of the saving God. Indeed, Jeremiah’s words condemn the wrongful teaching that those who trust in God will have an easy life.

Instead, as we hear from Jesus, the life that Christ offers is opposite of how many of our human instincts would lead us. As baptized children of God, we can be mindful that we carry the cross on our foreheads, wet in baptism and traced in ash at the beginning of each Lenten journey through the wilderness. Yet it is the cross of Christ, not our own, that saves; and our salvation entails the death of our selves. It is a complex reading.

How might we make it a little less complex? Perhaps we can be opened to the death of our selves in recognizing that we do not exist apart from Christ or apart from one another—that we share in responsibility, that the cross is laid on each of us. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it very well in these words:

The cross is laid on every Christian. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins: the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. But we do not want to die, and therefore Jesus Christ and his call are necessarily our death as well as our life. As Christ bears our burdens, so ought we to bear the burdens of our fellowman. The law of Christ, which it is our duty to fulfill, is the bearing of the cross. My brother’s burden which I must bear is not only his outward life, his natural characteristics and gifts, but quite literally his sin. The call to follow Christ always means a call to share the word of forgiveness—the Christlike suffering which it is the Christian’s duty to bear.

Can we really give our lives to such death? Can we really lose ourselves to such an understanding of the cross and community? Can we see another’s pain and burden as something that we all bear? With the help of God, the answer is, “Yes.” And perhaps it can begin in recognizing that, as sung in this 2018 music video by the gospel and contemporary recording artist Mandisa and featuring fellow artists Kirk Franklin and TobyMac, we all “bleed the same”: <https://youtu.be/HVKuA1s5I3o>.

“We’re more beautiful when we come together—we were made to carry one another,” as Mandisa proclaims in her song. In truth, the words simply echo Jesus’ call to deny ourselves and take up our cross to follow him.

*So Father God, I pray
that our families will come together right now
and seek your face.
You will forgive our sins
and you will heal our incredible land.
In the name of the only savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen.*

Hymn of the Day

“Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song” (ELW #808) is one of the last hymns we were able to sing together this year back on March 1. It was the first Sunday in Lent, right after our foreheads were traced in ash with the cross, as we embarked on a journey of fasting and prayer and carrying the cross that continues even now. Today, the Mennonite *a capella* singers known as the King Family lead us in singing again this song of hope in a time of sorrow and grief.

Here is the video link: https://youtu.be/QHBMl_UdIoA.

- 1 *Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey;
I'll tell ev'rybody about you wherever I go:
you alone are our life and our peace and our love.
Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey.*
- 2 *Lord Jesus, I'll praise you as long as I journey.
May all of my joy be a faithful reflection of you.
May the earth and the sea and the sky join my song.
Lord Jesus, I'll praise you as long as I journey.*
- 3 *As long as I live, Jesus, make me your servant,
to carry your cross and to share all your burdens and tears.
For you saved me by giving your body and blood.
As long as I live, Jesus, make me your servant.*
- 4 *I fear in the dark and the doubt of my journey;
but courage will come with the sound of your steps by my side.
And with all of the family you saved by your love,
we'll sing to your dawn at the end of our journey.*

Prayers of Intercession

As we gather separately and together in the Spirit, let us pray for the needs of the world, responding to each petition with the words, “In your steadfast love, receive our prayer.”

Caring for the church around the world, we pray —
for a spirit of ecumenical cooperation,
for the health of congregations during this difficult time,
for bishops, pastors, deacons, and lay leaders...

A brief silence.

Hear us, God our Savior; In your steadfast love, receive our prayer.

Seeing before us your good creation, we pray —
for the repair of what we have harmed,
for polar ice,

for lands dealing with oppressive heat,
for fields and forests ravaged by storms and fires...

A brief silence.

Hear us, God our Creator: In your steadfast love, receive our prayer.

Facing so many international problems we pray —
for the strengthening of democracies,
for peaceful resolutions to conflicts,
for the people of Belarus, Lebanon, and Yemen,
for researchers seeking a vaccine,
for racial justice within our nation,
for our legislators to assist the lives of the poor,
for an ethical election campaign...

A brief silence.

Hear us, God our mighty Fortress; In your steadfast love, receive our prayer.

Surrounded by people with great and hidden need we pray —
for families frightened by the uncertain future,
for those whose homes have burned down,
for students deprived of effective education,
for refugees and for prisoners...

A brief silence.

Hear us, God our Hope, In your steadfast love, receive our prayer.

Aware of all who are sick and suffering we pray —
for all who are facing the coronavirus,
for those without medical care,
for Martha, Pat, Valetta, Paul, Vallie, LaVaune, Kathy, Frank, Lisa, Rita, April, Bev, Bob, Beth, Marlene,
and all those we remember here before you...

A brief silence.

Hear us, God our Healer; In your steadfast love, receive our prayer.

Confident of your love for us, we pray also for ourselves:

A longer period of silence.

Hear us, God our Friend; In your steadfast love, receive our prayer.

Mindful of all who have gone before us in the faith, we offer our thanks —
for all the saints famous and forgotten,
for medical workers who have died of the virus,
for friends and family we have loved,
for the promise of everlasting life with you...

A brief silence.

Hear us, God our Homeland; In your steadfast love, receive our prayer.

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Offering Prayer

Let us pray.

God of goodness and growth,
all creation is yours,
and your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.
Water and word are signs of your abundant grace.
Nourish us through these gifts,
that we might proclaim your steadfast love
in our communities and in the world,
through Jesus Christ, our strength and our song.
Amen.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever.
Amen.

Let Us Be Sent in Service

Sending Song

We are sent from our worship devotions today with the song “Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus” (ELW #802).
Monika Carney (vocalist) and Barbara Bulger Verdile (organist) lead our singing from Resurrection
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Arlington, Virginia.

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/QQh2dd6kDbk>. (Words are included in the video.)

Benediction

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

God, the creator, † Jesus, the Christ,
and the Holy Spirit, the comforter,
bless you and keep you in eternal love.
Amen.