Lament and Healing

Psalm 130, Acts 8:4-8

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“Out of the depths, I cry to you, O God!”

I don’t know about you, but those words really resonated with me as I watched that video. It’s still hard to fathom the losses of this pandemic year. And 500,000 is only the tip of the iceberg. People who have been sick, those who are the “long-haulers” whose symptoms persist months after they are technically “Covid-free,” people with illnesses of body not related to Covid, but whose ability to get care is impacted by the virus, people who suffer from mental health struggles due to the pandemic, economic struggles, unemployment, strained families, kids trying to learn remotely and parents trying to help them while trying to work, medical staffs at the breaking point all over the world, and the list goes on. Then there are all the “smaller” losses, which are not small to those who experience them. Lots of students like my youngest son lost their high school or college graduations. People lost the ability to visit distant family and friends or folk in the hospital or nursing homes, postponed weddings, and funerals.

Out of the depths, which have been very deep indeed for so many, we cry to God. We’re going to take a moment now to offer up those laments, just in a great cacophony of loss. Feel free to unmute yourself and speak whatever loss you have felt this year, large or small. Don’t wait, just talk. Those of you on FB, feel free to put it in the comments if you wish. And if you are watching this later, on FB or YouTube, feel free to go ahead and shout it out in your home.

Laments

The most common psalms are those of lament because the people trusted that God would hear and receive their pain, hold it, take it seriously, and then surround them with love. Most lament psalms end with words of trust, like Psalm 130, “O Israel, hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is steadfast love.” The Hebrew word for “steadfast love” is the word used to describe the love of a mother for the child in her womb. Love that brings life and healing of body, mind, and spirit.

While we certainly need to lament this pandemic year, we might also acknowledge that there have been blessings in the midst of all this. Many of us have remembered and had reinforced the importance of relationships in our lives, of community, perhaps of family, certainly of teachers, medical workers, grocery store workers, delivery people, and all those, too-often-underpaid “essential” folks in our economy. Many of us have learned new technologies and discovered new ways of keeping in touch that will continue to bring blessings long after the pandemic is over. Goodness knows many of us have learned patience over this year, and many of us have re-discovered the power and need for prayer.

Now as we just did with laments, we’re going to ask you to unmute yourselves and share a blessing or two you have found in the past year, and again, those on FB can put in comments and if you are watching later, pause the video a moment and speak your own blessings.

Blessings

“For with the Lord, there is steadfast love.”

From the beginning, the Christian church immersed itself in ministries of healing and hope, as this little story about Philip (remember Philip?) illustrates. There was, we are told, “great joy” in the city as Philip reached out in healing to those who suffered. If we have learned anything over the past year as a church, I hope we have learned about the importance of our role as a place of healing in every way possible. We may not have the gift of Philip, but we have the gifts of love that enable us to reach out to one another, to receive the pain of others who suffer not only from physical or mental ills, but those who suffer from the ills of our society’s prejudices and inequalities. One thing surely this pandemic has reminded us, or taught us if we didn’t know it before, is that all kinds of suffering are connected. And that we need to be connected with one another more intentionally than ever before. And bear in mind that this pandemic’s one year mark does not mean it is over. People are still getting sick and dying. Lament and blessings go on.

I have been baffled more than once as we have lived through this pandemic at how little I have ever learned about the pandemic of 1918/1919, a pandemic in which, I recently discovered, my great-grandmother died, leaving several small children. I remember in school learning about World War I and a bit about the roaring twenties and far too little about Jim Crow and the Great Migration, but I honestly don’t remember ever learning about changes made in this country and the world as a result of that terrible pandemic. What lessons were lost to history that might have helped in our time? I am wondering what my yet-unconceived grandchildren will learn about this pandemic. More, I wonder if **we** will remember both the laments and the blessings, so that this experience is not lost in the near future. What do you hope to remember for yourself? What do you hope we remember as a society? What would you tell generations not yet born, so that, when the next pandemic comes, and it will, they do not repeat the mistakes of the past? In our great joy that we anticipate coming as more are vaccinated and we can come together again as families, neighbors, and a church, let us not forget what we have learned. Let us continue to be a healing community, even for generations to come. Amen.