

Oct. 6, 2019

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements - Bryce

Minute for Mission - New Bridges IRC - (Sandy or Stephanie)

Pastoral Concerns - Stephanie - Rick, home; Donna - Health Care

Remembering our Baptism - Bryce

Gathering Song - I Am the Church

I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together.

All who follow Jesus, all around the world, yes we're the church together.

Time with Young Disciples - Mark

Call to Worship - Bryce

In the midst of war and division, we wait for God:

**The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
God's mercies never come to an end.**

In the midst of devastation and loss, we wait for God:

**The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
God's mercies never come to an end.**

In the midst of change and uncertainty, we wait for God:

**The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
God's mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning.
Great is your faithfulness, O God!**

- Opening Hymn - #59 - The Steadfast Love of the Lord Never Ceases (refrain only, sung twice)

Call to Confession (not printed) - Bryce

Prayer of Confession - (unison)-

**Merciful God,
we confess that the world suffers because of our sin.
We use power against others for our own benefit.
By our habits and apathies,
others are subjected to desolation, even despair.
Forgive us for making enemies and exiles
of those you call us to love and serve.
Forgive us for being complicit in causing others to grieve
and to wander without rest.
We wait on you, O God.
We hope in you.
You alone can restore all things, even us.
We pray in Christ's name.**

Time for Silent Confession

Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness (printed) - Bryce

God, in Christ Jesus, grants us grace, mercy, and peace.

Let us hold to the sound teaching of the faith:

that God has the power to save us and has given us grace through all the ages.

**We receive the treasure of faith entrusted to us,
with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.**

Thanks be to God!

- Song of Response - #423 - Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God v. 2

Cast me not away from your presence; cast me not away from your presence;
cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

- Passing of the Peace - Bryce

Prayer for Illumination (not printed) - Bryce

Scripture: Psalm 137 (Bryce) and Lamentations 1:1-6, 3:19-26 (Stephanie)

How lonely sits the city that once was full of people!
How like a widow she has become,
she that was great among the nations!

She that was a princess among the provinces
has become a vassal.

She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on
her cheeks; among all her lovers she has no
one to comfort her;
all her friends have dealt treacherously with
her, they have become her enemies.

Judah has gone into exile with suffering and
hard servitude; she lives now among the
nations, and finds no resting-place;
her pursuers have all overtaken her
in the midst of her distress.

The roads to Zion mourn,
for no one comes to the festivals;
all her gates are desolate, her priests groan;
her young girls grieve, and her lot is bitter.

Her foes have become the masters,
her enemies prosper, because the Lord has
made her suffer for the multitude of her
transgressions; her children have gone away,
captives before the foe.

From daughter Zion has departed all her
majesty. Her princes have become like stags
that find no pasture; they fled without
strength before the pursuer.

The thought of my affliction and my
homelessness is wormwood and gall!

My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed
down within me. But this I call to mind, and
therefore I have hope:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul,
‘therefore I will hope in him.’

The Lord is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.

It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the Lord.

Sermon: "Lord, Have Mercy"

Today we celebrate World Communion Sunday. It's always been one of my favorite Sundays of the year, and it coincides with Peace and Global Witness Sunday in the PC(USA). It's an explicit invitation for us to turn our eyes far beyond our daily gaze, outward - as far as we can see. We imagine ourselves gathered with Christians of every time and every place as we celebrate this shared sacrament. We recognize our connection to the rest of the world, and the deep need for peace in our land and beyond.

Four years ago, on World Communion Sunday, Bryce, Mark and I were in worship together for the first time, along with the rest of the Pastor Nominating Committee. We were gathered at Third Presbyterian Church in Staunton as I preached at a neutral pulpit in the final stages of the call process. That was a memorable Sunday for many reasons. The sun had finally started to shine after major downpours and flooding that weekend. The PNC probably accounted for about 25% of the congregation that morning, but closer to 95% of the congregational singing.

We celebrated communion, and in a first for me, the elements were covered for the appropriate reason: to keep the flies away! Flies and stinkbugs had been dropping from the ceiling. I was 7 months pregnant at the time - and not small, cute pregnant, either. All of it was quite the sight.

What I remember most clearly was the opening image from my sermon that morning. It was an image I couldn't get out of my head, then or now. It's a memory that still brings me to tears today: the lifeless body of three year old Alan Kurdi, washed up on a Mediterranean beach after a fatal

third attempt to reach the shores of Greece. That picture had gripped the nation. We felt so helpless, and so far away. If those had been our shores, surely we would have done more, right?

Four years later, those shores are our borders. Just a few months ago, we saw a very similar picture: the bodies of Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez, age 25, and his 23-month-old daughter, Angie Valeria, lifeless on the banks of the Rio Grande. This image, along with the many reports of the dire circumstances on both sides of the

border, seem worlds away, but here they are. Lord, have mercy on us.

For the more than 70 million people who are displaced from their homes across the globe, today's Biblical readings couldn't be more relevant. The book of Lamentations is perhaps the most searing depiction of suffering in the Bible. The writing is beautiful and intricate, utilizing a number of poetic devices that get lost in translation. Imagine the most mournful nocturne or symphony. These are the lyrics.

While the book of Psalms contains many laments and even celebrations of violent retribution against the enemies of Israel, none is as brutal as this one. Dashing children's heads against rocks? Is this the word of God? These are the words of the wounded, the angry, the devastated, the bitter, those who have lost everything. As Parker Palmer says, "Violence is what we do when we don't know what to do with our suffering."

When the terrorist attacks happened on September 11th, the world rallied around us. The anger and hatred towards the United States,

expressed in those attacks, was isolated, and dwarfed by the outpouring of love and sympathy, prayers and support. But since then, hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians - many children - have been killed in wars of retribution. Would it be any wonder if grieving children, parents, communities - wanted similar retribution? Lord, have mercy.

These passages are all too resonant for too many people today. They are also particular. Central to both passages is the city of Jerusalem.

The city is a prominent character in the book of Lamentations - “daughter Zion.” The united Kingdom of Israel had a relatively short lifespan. There was internal division, and the fall of the Northern Kingdom, but Jerusalem remained as the Holy City. It was home to the Temple of Solomon, the permanent dwelling place of God’s presence. As long as Jerusalem stood, God was still present and with the people. Then came Babylon.

The Babylonian invasion was brutal and relentless. It began in 597, with the first attack and wave of deportation.

It targeted the leaders, the educated, the rich. The royal court and many in the king's family were taken, along with the military, the craftspeople, and the symbols of temple and palace. The second invasion ten years later coincided with a famine in the land. King Zedekiah tried to flee. He was caught, his sons killed before his eyes, and then his eyes were gouged out. As brutal as that is, it was made more devastating by the symbolism: an end to King David's line. A third invasion five years after that saw everything burned, the walls torn down. Only the very poorest people in the land

were left behind. Everything else was destroyed or carried away.

The atrocities and suffering experienced by the people are perhaps impossible for most of us to begin to comprehend. As are the conditions in so many places that send people fleeing for their lives, on journeys they may not survive, to places that will not take them in. So many are displaced, rootless, and wandering. For them there appears to be no way forward, no way back. They are stuck, and traumatized. There is wailing and lamentation, and there is silence. There isn't much song.

Their lyres have been hung in trees long forgotten.

The Psalmist cries out in lament. The agony and trauma of the exile are palpable. But also in there is a thread of remembrance. “There we wept when we remembered Zion... If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.” This suffering and agony one might want to forget, but Jerusalem itself - the place seen as God’s dwelling place - Jerusalem must never be forgotten. Remembrance is a powerful thing.

Each time we come to this table, we are exhorted, in Jesus' words, to remember. Do this in remembrance. Memory is powerful. It holds together that which otherwise disappears or dissipates. At this table, we remember, and we remember. That is, we come together once again - members are brought back together - and healing begins.

This table reminds us that we are all connected. Our hearts break when we see the pictures of Alan, Oscar, and Angie because we are connected. It is so easy for us to forget that connection,

but when we come together here, we must remember. We must re-member. From this table, we cry out for peace and healing.

The book of Lamentations is full of remembrance of Jerusalem, and the Psalmist urges remembrance, too. Recognizing the deep religious, social, and political conflicts around that particular city, we aren't trying to recapture what has been, but we look forward to what will be. The New Jerusalem. The true City of Peace. We aren't there yet.

We come to this table aware of all that is broken and hurting in the world, and we cry out, “Lord, have mercy.” We come to this table, aware of our complicity in that suffering and oppression, and we confess and pray, “Lord, have mercy.” Is there any hope?

In the midst of Lamentations, we read this: “My soul...is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. God’s mercies never come to an end...”

These words are very familiar, but often recited apart from the context of deep lament. But it is the context of that pain and suffering that gives depth to that hope. Even in the worst of all circumstances, God's mercy is abundant. Our cries for mercy are not in vain. God is faithful still.

We are all displaced from the City of Peace. It is the reign of Christ that we proclaim, and to which we point. We remember Jerusalem not by looking back, but rather by looking forward. Remembering, coming together, recognizing our connections and our shared humanity,

and working for peace, justice, and righteousness
for all people. May it be so!

- Hymn of Response: #340 - This Is My Song
- Affirmation of Faith: from A Declaration of Faith

We worship God in the world by standing before the Lord in behalf of all people. Our cries for help and our songs of praise are never for ourselves alone. Worship is no retreat from the world; it is part of our mission.

We affirm that the Lord is at work, especially in events and movements that free people by the gospel and advance justice, compassion and peace.

Offering (Call to offering not printed) -

- Doxology - #36 - For the Fruit of All Creation v. 2

In the just reward of labor, God's will be done.

In the help we give our neighbor, God's will be done.

In our worldwide task of caring for the hungry and despairing,
in the harvests we are sharing, God's will be done.

* Prayer of Dedication (Ushers)

Hymn of Preparation: #784 - By the Waters of Babylon (sung in Canon as led)

Invitation to the Table

We remember, and we come together. They shall come from north and from south, from east and from west, to sit at the table of the Lord. Gathered here by Christ, we remember the body of Christ. All are welcome!

The Lord be with you...

It is indeed right to give you thanks and praise. In love, you created the world and all people in it. You set us in a garden of peace, you provided all that we needed, but we chose separation from you.

You continually rescued us from ourselves, bringing us out of oppression and into freedom, and we continued to rebel against you.

You sent us prophets to call us to faithfulness, but we persisted in the pursuit of other gods. Even when we were in exile, you were faithful still. Your mercies are still new every morning. And so we pick up our instruments, and sing once again, joining in the chorus with people of every time and every place, who forever sing to the glory of your name: **Holy...**

You are Holy, and did not forget us. Loving us, you sent your son, Jesus Christ, to call us to remembrance once again. Jesus showed us the path to peace, justice, and righteousness.

We responded to this good news in the ways most familiar in the world: fear and violence. And so in his life, and in his death, Jesus showed us a new way of being, a path forward from our displacement from the City of Peace. We struggle to understand, and we struggle to follow, but we recite and we remember that great mystery of faith:

Christ has died...

Gracious God, we pray, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us. Enliven this table, this bread, and this cup, and enliven this body as we re-member, as we come together, and as we share this holy meal, that the bread we break, and the cup we bless, may be Christ's very presence with us here.

Though many, make us one. Unite us in Christ so that we may be bound together in the holy work to which we are called, working for that final reign of Christ,

when we will again experience the fullness of God's realm,
where all may find peace, security, justice, and love.

Recognizing our shared communion, we offer now the
prayers that are on our hearts...

Receive our lives as a living and joyful sacrifice, receive
our prayers, heal our divisions, and make us one with you.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the
Holy Spirit, all glory and honor are yours, now and forever,
amen.

We continue our prayer as Jesus taught us, saying....

We remember that on the night Jesus was betrayed...

Communion of the People

Prayer after Communion - Stephanie

God of grace, you renew us at your table with the bread of life, reminding us that we are one body, sent into the world to share your love. May this food strengthen us and help us to serve you in each other. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen.

- Final Hymn: #769 - For Everyone Born v. 1, 3, 5

* Benediction (not printed) -

- Sung Benediction - #538 - Hallelujah! We Sing Your Praises

Hallelujah! We sing your praises; all our hearts are filled with gladness.

Hallelujah! We sing your praises; all our hearts are filled with gladness.

Christ the Lord to us said: I am wine, I am bread.

I am wine, I am bread: give to all who thirst and hunger.

Hallelujah! We sing your praises; all our hearts are filled with gladness.

Hallelujah! We sing your praises; all our hearts are filled with gladness.