

## Morning Meditation - Friday June 26

un·rav·el (ən' ravəl) ~undo (twisted, knitted, or woven threads) OR to investigate and solve or explain (something complicated or puzzling)

Sometimes the unraveling in our lives is intentional and desirable. I think about Christmas lights tangled and twisted that I need to unravel, all the while wondering why this happens every year. Or I think about a knot in my shoelace that I work at so that it is easier to tie. Or I think about topics that come up at church that we need to investigate and ponder the puzzle for possible solutions. Then...there are things we don't want to unravel. Relationships that come apart at the seams because of something said in the hast or in the heat of the moment. Vexing issues of discrimination that no matter how many book conversations we host, or pieces of legislation are passed don't seem to ever unravel fully. There is a hardness of heart and a stiff-necked, stubbornness of persistent prejudice.

Often, if we are honest, we really don't want our lives to be unravel...too much. We would be okay if it was things on our New Year's Resolutions ~ things we can control ~ like losing weight or being more adventurous or live our best life. But there are other things...the things we tightly cling to and try to control while white knuckling life that we don't want to unravel.

This is true for us individually and it is true for us collectively. Why we fight fiercely is because what one person/group wants to unravel...another person/group is benefiting from and will resist any attempt to investigate or explain. Tale as old as time.

There are moments in the last twenty years when things have unraveled. 9/11 unraveled our sense of security and awoke a fear we still have yet to full grieve. The Great Recession unraveled our belief that economics could just keep growing - as could the gap between the rich and poor - it would all be okay. The harder question is how do we respond? What do we do in the unraveling - individually and collectively?

That is where we find ourselves...in the messiness of that question. Unfortunately, often our desire to put things back together; our anxiety - like when the people of God formed the Golden Calf as we looked at in the prayer service yesterday- causes us to be rush and race back to normal. But to sit with Job in the ash pile of life. To lament with the people in pain painting their wounds and wants on the canvas of life. To listen to our friends who are hurting and not be pushed away - like Ruth. To be comfortable with discomfort is a spiritual muscle and prayer practice I pray that I might continue to develop in these difficult days.

**Prayer:** Revealing and renewing God, restore within me a willingness to see Your presence at work in such a time as this. Amen.

## Morning Meditation - Thursday, June 25

un·rav·el (ən' ravəl) ~undo (twisted, knitted, or woven threads) OR to investigate and solve or explain (something complicated or puzzling)

Whichever meaning you prefer...these are days when life is being unraveled. The ways we have woven together our lives with threads of things we do; places we go; people we interact with and the ways we are accustom have been pulled apart. This has happened personally and communally. Pause for a moment to ponder the threads of your life that have been pulled apart?

The second meaning is also helpful. To unravel means to search for what is being revealed in the unraveling. In times of crisis, the cracks that have always been part of the system are seen clearer

for the pressing problems they pose. In many ways, the coronavirus is the light shining through the cracks of brokenness that were already there in our fragile economy and medical system that were chugging along. It is like when my car starts to make a noise, but I just turn the radio up a notch and pretend to be blissfully unaware. But the radio only goes so loud...and the car is making that noise for a reason. The unraveling is both unnerving and an opportunity to pay attention.

It is time to unravel the ways we have knit together society. It is time to unravel the ways we have become complacent. It is time to unravel my own bias and prejudice...that I don't have everything all figured out. It is time to unravel so that I might see anew and afresh. We can unravel by reading, listening, leaning in, putting ourselves in situations where we are uncomfortable, admitting our own brokenness. The tension that we feel is that this is hard work in good times but during the heightened fear of what is safe as the number of cases rise here in Florida...our own vulnerability...and the enormity of the problem makes the work that much more difficult. But once we see the cracks that have always been there - we cannot unsee. To pretend or turn the radio up louder will not cause the problems to go away.

And yet, our hope is always that we don't do this alone. God, the great un-raveler, is with us. God, the One who was with Abraham and Sarah wandering around ~ Moses in the wilderness ~ in the fierce friendship of Ruth and Naomi ~ in the courage of Esther ~ in the wisdom of Micah calling for justice/loving kindness/and humility ~ and in the flesh of Jesus who promises wherever two or three gather (not just in person but online - on zoom calls - on the telephone - on Skype - in letters - and in your life today) Christ is here. May that presence give us strength to explore and examine the unraveling of these days.

**Prayer:** God, like a knitter, grant us a long, loving look at the reality of the threads of our life and help us begin to find ways way to weave our lives individually and collectively together. Amen.

### **Morning Meditation - Wednesday June 24**

un·rav·el (ən' rævəl) ~undo (twisted, knitted, or woven threads) OR to investigate and solve or explain (something complicated or puzzling)

I am aware of how many stories in scripture are about unraveling.

Abraham and Sarah have to leave their home to wander around. Jacob steals his brother's birthright blessings and runs in fear for his life. Moses is raised in the privilege of the Pharaoh's palace only to also flee in fear after killing a guard. And just when Moses thought he had a good life keeping watch over sheep, God called him back to the very place he had left skid marks in the sand to get out of to confront the Pharaoh to let God's people go. Ruth's life is unraveled - as is Naomi's life - by death and difficult choices.

And that is just the first few books of the Bible!!

We could jump to the gospels where Jesus, God's love in the flesh, is condemned as a common criminal to die on a cross. Paul goes from persecuting the early disciples to becoming our most passionate preacher of God's grace in Jesus.

Where did we get this idea that with faith everything should be chocolate rivers and pony rides?

What if faith is about the great unraveling - the undoing of our understandings and ways of life.

What if faith is about a great unraveling where we are constantly called to look deeper than what is on the surface?

How has your life been unraveled in both meanings of that word in the last few months?

Which characters in scripture can your story identify with?

~ Have you left behind something ~ feel like you are wandering?

~ Have you felt the deep heart break and soul ache of death and difficult choices?

Do you feel like not only has the apple cart been upset, but the apples are rolling all around and won't stop for you to even begin to pick them up?? (That last question is certainly one I ask myself quite a bit.)

How can this great undoing help us see clearer and deeper than when things are tightly woven together?

Hold this image and we will come back to it tomorrow.

**Prayer:** Unraveling and revealing God, open our hearts to encounter Your embrace every second this day. In the name of the one who opened his life to You every day. Amen.

### **Morning meditation - June 23**

Centering verse: But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

I remember early in my ministry someone telling me that I would need patience and persistence. Patience because often change can take time. Despite the fact that we live in a world of instant/immediate communication where we can microwave a meal or have Door Dash arrive with something tasty without ever actually talking to anyone, we are still people. People, as Moses, Miriam, and Aaron found out in the book of Exodus, can be stiff-necked...prone to grumble and mumble and take a long time (40 years!!) to move from one location to another. Patience helps us see the big picture of where our hearts long to go. Persistence helps us in the day-to-day. So I do not get distracted or take every exit ramp that looks like an easier path. Persistence to keep on keeping on even when the immediate evidence suggests or says that our actions are foolish. If you read the whole book of Ruth, you will hear how Naomi makes a pretty compelling case for Ruth staying in her homeland. Exhibit A: Naomi won't be able to provide or protect Ruth. Exhibit B: Naomi isn't going to have any more children for Ruth to marry. Exhibit C: Ruth will be a stranger in a strange land that is recovering from economic depression and a food shortage/famine. That leads to exhibit D: This isn't exactly the best time to move when the future seems uncertain. I hear echoes of Naomi's reasoning and rationale all around me today.

Yet, Ruth, patiently persists and persuades Naomi to go along. I am wondering if I need more of Ruth's faithfulness in these days. As the pandemic drags on. Wondering how to face the illness of racism that has been woven into our country from the beginning. As economically people struggle. As we seem confused and conflicted about how to live individually and collectively. As all the ways we have been church in the past don't seem to be coming back soon. It is one thing to type this into a computer for you to read...it is another to live it day in and day out.

Patience and persistence as the fuel that feeds faithfulness. Centuries ago someone who wasn't even Jewish, married into the faith, showed us in a beautiful way what is needed today. And perhaps is exactly the story that needs to awaken our imagination in such a time as this.

**Prayer:** God grant me the strength, wisdom, and courage of Ruth as I face this new day. Amen.

## Morning Meditation - June 22

Centering verse: But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God."

Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi, is hurting. She has already endured burying her husband, now her two adult children have died too leaving her vulnerable economically and emotionally. Her safety net is completely gone, she remains a refugee in a foreign land that never became her home. The heartbreak and soul ache can be felt still fuming from the pages of scripture in the opening verses of Ruth. I have noticed recently that what is happening around me can impact and influence what is happening within me as I read scripture. While I always knew scripture was heartfelt and honest, more and more, I see that the stories of the Bible are a roller-coaster with twists and turns. The stories of scripture mirror our own lives. I wish it had not taken a pandemic to help me see this. Naomi's suffering and struggle is our suffering and struggle. Just this year, I, too, have felt the raw and real grief that happens in the face of someone I cared deeply about dying. In response, I understand why Naomi just wants to be left alone. Sometimes our souls hurt so bad that any words, even the most tender, don't seem to help. We convince ourselves that if we are alone, like a wounded animal, we might be able to heal and not endure others trying to make it better.

Yet, just like other parts of creation, humans tend to thrive when in herds and clustered in community. So, Ruth protests and persists to protect Naomi.

Who keeps coming back to you with love and support in these days? Who keep showing up patiently, persistently, in a sort of protest of caring? Who sings Ruth's hymn to you, "Don't push me away...cuz I ain't going anywhere (my translation)"?

The words that come to mind are of the beautiful song, Stand by Me by Ben E. King. The opening words are:

When the night has come  
And the land is dark  
And the moon is the only light we'll see  
No I won't be afraid  
Oh, I won't be afraid  
Just as long as you stand, stand by me

It is my prayer that the person who is stirring in your soul, who stands by you, and who promises to persist in his/her presence helps you in these difficult days.

**Prayer** ~~ I invite you to blare Ben E. King singing Stand by Me as our heartfelt prayer today

## Morning Meditation in honor of Juneteenth - June 19

Please pray with me...

God of our weary years where for too long we have treated Your beloved children as less than beautifully created in Your image. God of silent tears that have been bravely, boldly cried out by our African-American brothers and sisters even as though of us in privilege have turned aside. Continue, O God, we pray to bring us along the way. We pray that we would have the courage to lift and listen to every voice. Voices that cry out in pain and protest. Voices that make us feel uncomfortable confronting the pathways of privilege that have been paved for people like myself

to travel unaware that others were not allowed. Voices calling out to change a culture of violence through our words, actions, policies and practices. Voices that ask us to be silent and listen. Voices that call us to get involved and risk. Voices that have been saying this for centuries crying out to be heard...crying out to be seen...crying out to breathe in the full liberty of this land so many were brought to as enslaved people.

On this day we enter the space of both celebrating that on June 19, 1865, Union General Gordon Granger led thousands of federal troops to Galveston, Texas to announce that the Civil War had ended, and slaves had been freed; and yet we know that the ramifications of racism persist to this present day. We may have passed legislation, but too many hearts still hate. We may have made some progress, but too many still push back with bigotry that causes brokenness and wounds physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Lead us in the path we pray, O God, toward Your realm. A place and space where we gather at a river of extravagant embrace for all people. Lead us in the path we pray, O God, toward a listening, learning posture; a loving embrace; and a realization that centuries of wrongs need our hearts, hands, and hard work. Empower us with the Spirit of Moses to work for liberation; the Spirit of Miriam to lead dance and worship; the Spirit of Frederick Douglass to speak truth; the Spirit of Harriet Tubman to do something that help; the Spirit of W.E.B Du Bois to name the cultural context; the Spirit of Rosa Parks to understand why our African American brothers and sisters are be sick and tired of being sick and tired; the Spirit of Rev. Dr. Otis Moss to ask, "When is someday?" Let this prayer pour forth from our hearts and be lived in our lives this day. Amen.

### **Morning Meditation - June 18**

Centering Verse: They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

Seven days his friends sat with Job. I wonder were they sitting in a circle? Did they start and stare at a fire? Did they eat or fast? Was there an awkwardness to the sustained silence? Were there a few moments when one of the friends almost started to say something...you know the way a person will take a deep breath that catches your attention...only then to not utter a single word? Did any of them sigh loudly? Did any of them draw in the dirt or play/pick at a small patch of weeds nearby? What sorts of thoughts roamed and raced around their minds?

Seven days of silence.

Seven days of just sitting with each other.

Seven days of letting the suffering sit alongside them in the circle of friends.

Here is a truth...even if Job's friends didn't speak a word...their presence spoke volumes.

Is there someone you know who needs you to be with him/her today in the midst of the raw realities of these days? Is there someone stirring in your heart right now you could call, not to give advice to, but to be present with? Is there someone you might even meeting - outside - in the dirt - six feet apart - in silence with each other - letting the looks you exchange and being physically presence could communicate?

How might these words of Job be embodied in you? Inspire your imagination? And be lived this day?

**Prayer:** God of stillness and silence, God who calls us to the solidarity that doesn't always need words. Let Your spirit continue to connect us and call us to be Your people in these days. Amen.

## Morning Meditation - June 17

Center verse: Now when Job's three friends heard of all these troubles that had come upon him, each of them set out from his home. They met together to go and console and comfort him. When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads.

Bad news travels fast. Job's friends hear of his calamity and crisis, so they come to console. But when they see Job in a distance, they can't believe their eyes.

Crisis changes us ~ sometimes from the inside out. Crisis changes us ~ emotionally, physically, spiritually. Struggle and stress and strain causes our souls to shift. Or as Richard Rohr says, there are two paths to change - great love and great suffering. Usually, we prefer the first one. Great love has changed my life - from marrying my best friend to the first time I held my two children in my arms. But I also know great suffering has changed my life too...not just given me more gray hair!

The problem is that we want to race and run to the solution and definitive statement we can post or tweet out. We want to microwave our way to enlightenment. Job's friends come and sit silently with him. (In fact, if you keep reading most of the book of Job is his friends saying all the wrong things causing more hurt and harm to Job. You can read most of Job and think, 'With friends like this who needs enemies?')

You probably have heard that the words, 'silent' and 'listen' contain the exact same letters in a different order because they are connected. When we are silent, we are invited to listen. At first we have to listen to our monkey mind point out all the problems within us and around us. Slowly, staying in the silence, we can quiet the inner critic to hear the still small voice of God that flows through us.

My question, friends, is, "How has the present crisis changed you?" And before you race to answer that question, can you let it sit in silence to listen. Or better yet, call a friend, and hold the question together in silence.

**Prayer:** Holy God, whose first language is silence, help us re-learn Your native tongue so that we might speak from a deeper space and place to the chaos within us and around us. Amen.

## Morning Meditation - June 16

Centering Verse: Then his wife said to him, "Do you still persist in your integrity (or wholeness)? Bless God, and be done." But Job said to her, "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?"

Viktor Frankl once said, "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom."

I wonder if there was a pregnant pause between what Mrs. Job said and Job's response? I wonder if that silence space spanned several minutes? I wonder if Job prayerfully pondered what his wife was saying...if he was able to wait before he spoke. Honestly, I am not doing so great with that recently. In a world where we are over-stimulated and saturated by the sounds of a never ceasing 24-hour-news-cycle, we can feel pressure to come up with snappy, witty, insightful, and re-tweet-able (I think I might have just coined a new word there) social media posts right now!!! We can feel like we have to say something quickly before the moment passes.

I love the quote by Frankl because it slows me down. Maybe speed isn't always my friend. Maybe the fast and frenzied pace we have so accepted isn't the best way. Maybe we might look at that space between what is said/what we encounter or experience not as a void we have to fill immediately, but as holy fertile ground that needs to lay fallow for a while. What if my response isn't being judged by its speed, insightfulness or interestingness or even on any scale of 1 to 10, but on whether what I say or do is helping or hindering my growth - and the growth/flourishing of another.

Silence need not be just a practice set apart from the rest of your day with a prayer time, but one woven into your interactions with others. Practicing silence...space...room to let the stimulus of sights and sounds settle into your soul...then letting your soul create a response.

My prayer today is that I might practice such a way of being and that I might sense growth, even if it is .0001 millimeter in my soul.

**Prayer:** Help me, O God, live these words. Amen.

### **Morning Meditation - June 15**

Centering Verse ~ Job took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes. Job 2:8

In the blink of an eye, Job's life goes from being blessed beyond belief to being broken beyond repair. Within a few short verses Job loses his family, his home, his livelihood, his health (he is covered from head to his pinkie toe in sores). Job loses everything that he thought was stable and certain. It is a gut-wrenching, head spinning, stop-the-roller-coaster-called-my-life kind of moment. It is expansive and extreme, because I believe the writer of Job wants us to find our loss in Job's losses.

For me, trying to face the crashing waves of current culture can bring some of those same gut-wrenching, head spinning, stop -the-rollercoaster like feelings. A pandemic that continues to infect thousands of people every day causing untold misery; systemic racism, sexism, and discrimination that infect the soul of our country; economic turmoil that physically threatens the well-being of millions of adults and children; and our persistent polarization whereby we seem to say, "You are either with me or against me."

Sitting in the ashes seems to be a holy metaphor for these days. Job takes the sharp shard of pottery - which is symbolic of his shattered life - to scrape at the wounds and wants of his soul. He sits in silence.

For me, silence is like the prelude, intermission, and postlude. It is the space to reflect before we respond. We live in a world of instant and immediate communication. If I don't get my two-cents in now...right now...the moment will pass and I will have missed it. We are plagued by the fear of missing out (FOMO). Reply to this email, text that person, race and run here and there. Silence says stop for just a moment. Perhaps we are concerned that if we cease our addiction to hurry we might never resume. But silence doesn't work that way. Silence lets your head, heart, soul, and life get back in sync so that you can speak the truth in love. Silence is space. Space for God to speak or just sit still with you among the wounds and wants of the world that is too much. Silence is one of the toys in our spiritual toy box.

I invite you to join me in silence when your heart, soul, head, and whole life might find space to get reconnect to each other in this time.

*Silence.*

**Prayer:** God whose first language is silence, help us learn anew and afresh how to speak this language before we resume speaking the native/natural language we always speak. Amen.

### **Morning Meditation - June 12**

Centering verse: The Lord is the people's strength; God is the fortress of protection for the anointed one. Save your people, God! Bless the ones You claim! Shepherd them and carry them for all time! Psalm 28

Woven into the psalms of lament are threads of hope, prompts to praise. For many of us who are raised in a dualistic mindset of either/or thinking, this can strike us as very, very strange. We tend to categorize and compartmentalize. If you are sad...you are sad. Yet, life is much more beautifully complex than that. For example, there are moments at memorial services where I have found myself laughing while tears stream down my face. I am at once both profoundly thankful for the ways the person left his/her fingerprints on my heart and heartbroken that the person is no longer physically present. Gratitude and grief need not be polar opposites where we have to select one or the other. Lament and praise need not be in direct opposition either.

This is where the Psalms of Lament are needed and necessary for a Pentecost people. We need to pray our pain and sometimes that will come out in singing praise. Praise points us toward hope that today need not be like yesterday. Unfortunately, we tend to get trapped in what might be called cartoon thinking. Remember the seven dwarfs from Snow White? Or the Smurfs? Or Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh or Tiger? So often we reduce people to 2-dimensional known only by one trait, rather than the beautifully complex creatures we are. I have moments when I have all the enthusiasm of Eeyore...to times when I am bouncing around tirelessly like Tiger. Both are inside of me. Sometimes both simultaneously try to come out!

Both lament and praise are within me in these days too. Yes, the world is broken. Yes, today marks 4 years since the Pulse tragedy and I am not sure our LGBTQ community is safer - but might be in more danger of violence. Yes, we need to dismantle systemic racism and as a white person I need to do more than more part. Yes, the church is being called in new directions during all the other stress and strain. Yes, God is good all the time and all the time God is good. I know deep in my heart that the sacred love that woke me up this morning will abide with me and invites me to abide in that holy love. May the One who loved us in being swirl, sustain, strengthen you and me to be the people, create beloved community and care for all creation this day.

May God's love be with you now more than ever. Amen.

### **Morning Meditation - June 11**

Centering Verse: The Lord is my strength and my shield. My heart trusts in God. I was helped, my heart rejoiced, and I thank God with my song.

Remember that within a psalm of lament there is a structure for you to share your suffering and process your pain. You start with awakening to God's persistent presence; you move on to the complaint - naming and claiming where it hurts; you request for God to intervene and interrupt such disorder; and then there is a statement of confidence.

It is a difficult shift from naming/noticing what is wrong to stating we still trust. In our modern world we are much more likely to get caught up in cycle of cynicism. We say things like,

"Everything is wrong." "Nothing is right". "It is always going to be this way." It is a downward spiral that never sees anything as positive...the proverbial glass is always half-empty.

I am reminded of Walter Brueggemann's helpful overview of whole Hebrew hymnal of the psalms. Brueggemann says that there is a move within the psalms for order- to disorder- to reorder. Psalm 1 talks about how we can be trees planted in the soil of God's grace, flourishing - not caught up in brokenness. Psalm 1 says there is an rational and reasonable order. But, by the time you get to Psalm 28, the psalmist is singing a different tune. That is life is complex and there are moments of crisis when our souls cry out. We can get caught up in continual disorder and deconstruction. We might see no blessing We can want to throw everything out and always want to start fresh because this time we will get it perfect. Within a psalm of lament, when we shift toward a statement of confidence, we realize that some of the chaos and crisis may persist, but with our still-creating/crafting God, we might find ways to reorder and reorient our lives. The statement of confidence is living in the liminal space where both disorder and reorder are interacting/intersecting/interplaying with each other.

The invitation as we pray our pain is to also notice and name the blessings. Not because one negates the other, but because both together is where God's creativity can often be found. God, like a weaver, bringing together threads of our lives to create a new tapestry. God taking the fray strings that seem fragile and wrapping those with the strings that are stronger.

The question is both where does it hurt and where is there a moment of healing? Healing that doesn't magically make all the hurt disappear, but reminds us that God is still at work in these days.

**Prayer:** God who listens to our cries in these days, who invites us to not store our suffering in our souls, help us also sense the ways our spirits dance with the divine - even briefly - this day. Amen

## **Morning Meditation - June 10**

Centering Verse: Give back to them exactly what they deserve! Because they have no regard for what the Lord has done, no regard for God's handiwork, God will tear down and never rebuild! Bless the Lord because God has listened to my request for mercy! Psalm 28

There are moments when I can find myself in an adult version of a 2 -year-old temper tantrum. I pace around my house listing a litany of all the things someone did that hurt or harmed me. I feel the volume of my voice increase with each wrong that I name. Like adding a log to a fire, soon there is a burning blaze of all the wrongs the person has done in my soul. Sometimes the adult version of the temper tantrum is justified, I am processing the pain and lamenting. Sometimes, I will admit, I am being petty or just throwing myself a pity party. Almost always, I get near the end of my long list of wrongs which only stops when I collapse exhausted (physically, emotionally, spiritually) on to the nearest soft surface. Spent. Worn out.

The Psalmist this morning has been going on for awhile with his or her lament/complaint to God. The person wants nothing to do with those people, questions how in the world God could have crafted/created folks like that, the disregard others have, and the hope that what goes around comes around will win the day.

Pause with me...when has this psalm of lament been your lament? When have you felt so hurt by someone else, anger feeding and fueling every fiber of your being that your words come out so fast and furious? And while you usually don't ascribe to a theology of smiting, you are willing to make

an exception in this case or for that person? Name that moment. Name that relationship. Name that pain that may still be there on the shelf of your soul.

Notice that the psalmist says, "Bless God who has listened". Not bless God because that person who hurt you is now getting what he or she deserves. Not bless God because you convinced God to do everything you asked. Not bless God because you won and the other person lost.

Bless God who has listened...heard your hurt...leaned into your lament with love.

In Exodus, God hears the cry of the people. But this is not a distant hearing...it is a kind of hearing that hurts within the divine's soul. Like when someone shows you a scar and you wince in physical pain. God's listening is not kept to a professional distance but is a participation with us. God in God's self feels the depth of our pain.

So, my friends, let's keep coming back to the question of naming where does it hurt? And how does the Psalmist's permission to pray our pain knowing God listens make a difference today?

**Prayer:** Listening, leaning in with love God, continue to help us process the pain knowing that just by You hearing us in the very depth of Your being offer the help and hope we need for today.

Amen.

## **Morning Meditation - June 9**

Centering Verse: When I lift up my hands to your holy inner sanctuary. Don't drag me off with the wicked and those who do evil; the type who talk nice to their friends while evil thoughts are in their hearts!

A psalm of lament begins with an invocation, which is less about invoking/inviting God's presence and more about us being awoken to/aware of God's persistent presence. The next piece of the puzzle of a lament is the complaint. This is where the psalmist gives us permission to pray our pain. The Psalmist insists that God can take our frustration and anger. The Psalmist invites us to not stifle or suppress our suffering on the shelves of our souls. But this will not come easy to many of us raised with an understanding of faith as, "just be kind." Such words of the psalmist above seem antithetical to notions of an ethic of love. How in the world can we practice doing justice and showing loving kindness and walking humbly with God (as the prophet Micah said)?

In one way, we pray our pain so that we don't pass it along. When we let loose our frustration to God, we may be less likely to yell at our family, friends, or the grocery person who did nothing wrong. The Psalmist offers us a pathway for sharing that which is stirring within us, saying, "God can take all that we bring."

In another way, the more we pray our pain, the more we can see the helpful and harmful ways fear and frustration work in our lives. The more at ease I am with noticing the people who push all my buttons, the more I can ask the necessary question, "Why?" Why does that person's post or comment cause pain? Why is this my reaction/response? Perhaps it is because I see parts of myself in that person I don't like. Perhaps it is because of the tone/tenor of what is said. Perhaps it is because I have been holding back sharing my thoughts and I am upset that this other person isn't.

Letting God help us understand why we do what we do or say what we say is the deeper level of discipleship. The first step is to acknowledge that we all carry tension within our bodies, brokenness in our hearts, and bruises in our souls. Some of the anger is really grief. Deep sadness that people loved into being by God and who reflect God's handiwork are treated as less-than.

Once again, we come back to the theologian Ruby Sale's question, "Where does it hurt?" It is not a question we can ask only once and be done, but a daily invitation to the one who calls us to pray the pain that persists day after day.

**Prayer:** Let lose my lips, O God, with a heartfelt lament for all the ways we have faltered and failed. I cry out for African Americans, Asians, Latinos, Native Americans, and LGBTQ brothers and sisters who are hurting for too long. Let me listen with compassion and care...let me not be dragged off to cynicism of despair that nothing changes. Listen, O God, to your children praying...and let me do the same. Amen.

### **Morning Meditation - June 8**

Centering Verse: I cry out to you, Lord. You are my rock; don't refuse to hear me. If you won't talk to me, I'll be just like those going down to the pit. Listen to my request for mercy when I cry out to you. Psalm 28

When I read some of the psalms there is a part of me that wonders, "Can you really talk to God like that?" Is it okay to be that bold - even demanding? To be that honest? To be that vulnerable? I am much more accustomed to hearing polite petitions in prayers to God rather than protests. I remember one prayer from a prayer book started off, "God, we humbly beseech Thee." To be sure there is a certain poetry to those words, but it sort of sounds like we are interrupting God from all that is on the divine to-do-list.

Psalm 28 is usually categorized and classified as a psalm of lament. 42 of the 150 psalms are laments. Lament is a holy protest, an attempt to process our pain, to say that we do not have to stifle what is stirring within or shelve the suffering of our soul - but we can cry out to God. 42 times the psalms give us a permission slip to pray our pain, not push it down. 42 of the hymns in the Hebrew hymnal suggest that there are times when we will be singing the blues. Pause right there. Where did we get the notion that with faith everything is always chocolate rivers and pony rides when over 25% of the Hebrew hymns are not joyful, joyful but precious Lord take my hand to lead me and help me stand?

42 times in the Hebrew Hymnal you are invited to sing about whether God has forsaken/forgotten you, about what you'd really like God to do to your enemies, how you are fuming with frustration and how everything has gone to you-know-where-in-a-hand-basket. It is raw and rough as sandpaper. But it is honest and vulnerable. We have become so taken by God as all powerful that we forget that God is all vulnerable - God comes to us as an infant laid in a manger - it doesn't get more vulnerable than that! God meets us in the vulnerability. The psalmist says that God meets us not just in the polite, poetic prayers but the ones that come from the deepest part of our soul that need to cry out in crisis.

What do you want to cry out to God today? I cry out for people at our church who are hurting. I cry out for people I love who are on hospice care. I cry out for the lives of too many African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans who have been treated as less than beloved children of God. I cry out for families who are grieving the death of a loved one due to COVID 19 and wonder if/when there will be another wave. I cry out for a lack of leadership and how we have normalized hate. I cry out to God for those who are alone and isolated, and I can't go visit. I cry out to God for my children and what kind of nation will I leave them. I cry out for help.

Ruby Sales ask the question, "Where does it hurt?" I invite you this day to take the permission slip from the psalm and pray your heartfelt responses to that question to God.

**Prayer:** Lord, listen to Your children praying from the depths of our souls to yours. Amen.

### **Morning meditation - June 5**

Centering words: from the hymn, "Praise to the Living God": Praise to the living God, around, within, above, beyond the grasp of human mind, but whom we know as love. In these tumultuous days so full of hope and strife, may we bear witness to the Way, O Source and Goal of life."

I woke this morning with these words stirring within me, particularly the second part about the tumultuous days so full of hope and strife. Like so often within human history, these days are full of paradox. I see the strife each time I click refresh on my news feed. I see the frustration of our African-American brothers and sisters who have been pushed to the sidelines and silenced for centuries. I hear the heartbreak and soul ache of people out of work or having to choose between going back to work and childcare. I feel the pain of a world where it feels like everything is going off the rails.

And...there are moments of hope...when people raise up and give voice to the pain that has been suppressed for too long. Hope by the energy directed toward change and creating a world where we do live out our deepest values. Hope that today need not be like yesterday...and that through the struggle and storm new life can be born.

Then, I find that last part of the second sentence my deepest prayer. That I would bear witness to the One I follow, the One who is the author of love placed deep in my heart. That my words whether written here or spoken in a sermon or shared over the phone might be infused with a grace that is needed in such a time as this.

Yes, there is reason to lament. Yes, there is heartbreak that is true and needs to be named. Yes, we are surrounded by a love that will not let us go and our precious Lord is still taking our hand to lead us on and help us stand. Yes, it is me standing in the need of prayer and inspired by a vision that we - everyone crafted in God's image - will all be welcome to gather at the river. Yes, I need God every hour and I pray that I might be sent forth with God's blessing, my deepest faith confessing - especially in a time such as this.

**Prayer:** Gracious God, who is the conductor and composer of life, let my life flow on in endless song to You, our Source and Goal of my heart. Amen.

### **Morning Meditation - June 4**

Centering verse: In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— then the Lord God formed adam from the dust of the ground, and breathed into nostrils the breath of life; and the adam became a living being. Genesis 2:4-7

Spirit is not only an external collaborator with the chaos. Spirit is not only the wind whooshing around us, dancing with the chaos. Spirit is not only what surfs the sloshing chaos in response to God's creativity, Spirit is also within you.

Spirit is breath.

The second creation narrative in Genesis chapter 2 tells us how God sunk God's fingertips into the dirt of the earth. The words above tell us that God, like you did with clay in school or mud in your backyard, playfully formed and fashioned a being. It is important to note that the Hebrew word, adam, is not a proper name, but a reference to the material out of which God was working. Adam means earth-being. Adam is gender neutral. Adam is a word that reminds us that from dust we come...to dust we shall return.

And in God's creativity, God takes the dust and breathes life into the beautiful diversity of humanity.

I grieve the multitude of ways that 2020 has taken our breath away. The Coronavirus has taken away the breath of almost 400,000 people worldwide and those who have survived struggled to catch their breath during the worst days. For still others, fear of catching this invisible virus has caused us to quicken our breathing when we venture out into the world. And George Floyd haunting words, "I can't breathe," remind us of the ways systemic racism has denied our African American brothers and sister life.

Spirit is breath.

And for those of us who are here today, who wake up this morning with the ability to draw in oxygen that can sustain our bodies and breathe in a Spirit that can sustain our souls, we prayerfully draw breath we need to speak out. We prayerfully draw breath as the most precious gift of God's presence needed in these days. We prayerfully draw breath as a Pentecost people to let the Spirit guide what we say and do this day.

Your breath.

Right now.

May God's infuse and immerse You with a creative call to work for justice, stand up for the life of all people, and a deep abiding love for all the beautiful diversity of adams that share this planet with us.

**Prayer:** Breathe on me breath of God...fill me with a Spirit to be a witness of Your embrace for all people and be with the family of George Floyd today as they with deep grief gather at his memorial service in Minneapolis. Amen.

### **Morning Meditation - June 3**

Centering Verse: Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness (Genesis 1:26).

The Spirit and chaos are in cahoots and collaboration and cooperation with each other to create all kinds of wonders in response to God's still singing voice in Genesis 1. The Spirit and the chaos in a divine dance bring forth aardvarks and apples; ruby red robins and roses; sparrows and whales. The Spirit and chaos creatively come together with God as the conductor of the creation symphony. Then...God says to the Spirit and chaos...let us make humans in our image.

Let us?!?!?

From the very beginning diversity and difference has been baked into the whole dream of God. From the very beginning God didn't want bland sameness or uniformity, but craved and cultivated a vast variety of beautiful variations. Yet, as humans, we still struggle to dream God's dream and live in God's world.

We constructed a concept of race to define our differences and then placed values upon God's beloved children who were not white. After all, how could people of faith ever say that another human, created in God's image, is 3/5s of a person? It contradicts the theological truth of the Bible. We refuse to acknowledge our brokenness and repent. We legislate discrimination and didn't learn our history or Bible.

Each and every person beautifully created in God's image. Each and every person has stardust in his or her soul that needs to shine brightly.

Each and every person.

And when we chip away at this theological foundation, the ground beneath us crumbles. The viruses of COVID 19 and racism are chipping away at this ground. The theological foundation has been chipped away by cynical social media posts and polarization and plain-old meanness. Yet, God, the Spirit and chaos didn't stop creating centuries ago. If you read the Genesis poem it isn't written in past tense, but in the present - here and now- tense. God is creating, crafting with the Spirit and chaos. God is creating and crafting you and me in God's image this day.

Each and every person.

**Prayer:** God open my heart to see Your image in each and every person I encounter today. Amen.

## **Morning Meditation - June 2**

Centering Verse: In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Chaos certainly seems to be one way to describe what we are feeling in the world today. Chaos of an invisible pandemic that continues to spread in ways that we don't fully comprehend and cannot control. Chaos in our cities where systemic racism has not been discussed and has caused so much pain since the founding of our country. Chaos economically as people are forced to work, risking their lives at meat processing plants or restaurants and still others are without work and no prospects. Chaos where we don't dare ask, "What else can happen?" for fear that question might just find another heart breaking and soul aching response.

Crisis/chaos often shines a light on the brokenness that has always been there. I have seen this at funerals where family feuds that have festered for years come out over arguments about hymns. I have seen this in my own life when pushed to the edge emotionally and spiritually, someone says something innocuous and it becomes a lightning rod for all the unrest I feel. In those moments, I am tempted to control or cover up the chaos rather than get caught up in it. I have been taught that being calm and collected is better than appearing in chaos.

But what if it is the interplay of the Spirit and chaos that brings for what God calls, "Good"?

If the Holy Spirit is willing to roll up the sacred sleeves in the face of chaos, all sorts of things are going to get stirred and swirled in the mix. And it can be tempting to start classifying and categorizing what is good and what is bad. We may want to do everything we can to control rather than get caught up in the activity of the Spirit. Ever wonder how long the Spirit was willing to hover and hang around with the chaos before the two collaborated in creating light and dark? Sure, it is only one verse in Scripture, but in the eternity of the timeless One, maybe the Spirit surfed for centuries with the chaos willing to form a relationship. The pain and ache of this moment are real and deeply felt by so many. The pain and ache of this day reach back centuries. The pain and ache

finding expression are coming from beloved children of God. I continually and prayerfully want to stay open to what is being expressed by so many. African-American and Latino communities hardest hit both by the virus and economic recession; police profiling practices that my white privilege has not experienced; painful present racism that harms people I love in ways that break my heart. The chaos of this moment is real, and I enter this day prayerfully and willing to let the Spirit work through what I say and do.

**Prayer:** Come, Holy Spirit, come, help me catch wind of what You are doing, even when I am knocked off my feet and am not sure I have the strength. Open my heart, ears, and whole life to Your still creating and crafting presence here and now. Amen.

## **Morning meditation - June 1**

Centering Verse: In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Yesterday, the church celebrated Pentecost ~ the gift of the Holy Spirit to the early church. If we are to be a Pentecost people for the sake of the world today, how might we stay open to the Spirit? Or perhaps the first question is, what exactly is the Spirit?

This part of the Trinity feels elusive and evasive, like trying to catch or capture a butterfly. And at the same time definitions around any part of the divine can feel like we are trying to pin the butterfly to a piece of Styrofoam for a science project. And really, once the butterfly stops fluttering around, we have lost part of the joy and beauty.

Within Scripture there are several passages that speak about the Holy Spirit, including the very first verse of the Bible. The Spirit is what hovers and hangs around with the chaos, she surfs the waves gleefully, she awakens God's imagination around what could be. I am intentionally using a female pronoun here for an exact reason that will get to...which is totally my way of getting you to keep reading these morning meditations.

The spirit is there in the beginning. The spirit is collaborating and conspiring with the chaos. The spirit is what is bringing life and light out of that disruption. I am reminded that within the Genesis creation poem, nowhere does it ever say that the chaos was completely eradicated or erased. Never does our theology say that God set everything linear and logical, and that was that. Just that God rested on the seventh day, only to pick back up creating with the Spirit in the midst of the chaos on the eighth day.

Which means, that our still creating, crafting God is moving in the chaos of today alongside the Spirit. Whether that is in the intellect of scientists working on vaccine, in leaders trying to discern ways to address systemic racism, in the hearts and lives of you and me inhabiting this time when our lives have been chaotically turned upside down/inside out.

How do we stay open to the spirit? What might the spirit be nudging us toward both individually and collectively? Those are great questions that the morning meditations will seek to respond to in the days to come. But for today, I invite you to go outside, breathe in the creation that the Spirit still hovers and hangs around with/is woven into. Listen for the song of a bird fuel and feed by the Spirit. Taste the goodness of food from the soil drenched with the spirit. And know the truth of the mystics who say that the glory of God is a human being fully alive.

**Prayer:** Come, Holy Spirit, come and hover in my soul this day, inspiring me to collaborate creatively with You. Amen.