

## ***Poured Out for the World***

Lamentations 1:1-6

Luke 17:5-10

October 6, 2013: World Communion Sunday

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### **I. Introduction**

Like most of you, I suspect, this week I have been in this mental place of being obsessed with our appalling lack of leadership on Capitol Hill and mourning all of the places in which that inaction has manifested itself. So, I was reading the newspaper yesterday and gathering up all of the data that I could and I flipped the newspaper over and saw a little article on four more people who were killed in Cairo yesterday. And I had this sort of mentally jarring experience that I think many of us have when we get so caught up in D.C., U.S. politics that -- actually there are other things happening in the world, right? And there's this kind of jarring moment of, "If I'm not paying attention then nothing else must be happening."

And World Communion Sunday is a wonderful opportunity for us to remember, particularly in the midst of our ongoing national crises, that we're part of a bigger community and that we are connected with one another across the world as children of God and that we live in this wondrous and rich tapestry where we are all interconnected with one another. We celebrate our brother and sisterhood today as we gather at the World Communion table. Given the celebration that is Holy Communion, our scripture readings today are a little bit incongruous.

### **II. The Power of Lament**

And our reading from Lamentations is the prophet Jeremiah's reflections on the fall of Jerusalem and the way in which that experience tore at the heart of the Jewish community of his day. The way that they have spent centuries worshipping at the temple had now been done away with as the temple was demolished and the leaders carried off into captivity in Babylon, and this deep sense of loss and heartbreak and disorientation as now we need to figure out who we are as a people of God without the land that God had led us to.

In Lamentations in the context as one of the lectionary texts for World Communion Sunday is an invitation to remember all of those places around the world where there is fragmentation and violence and civil war, and populations are being moved into other areas and all of those places where life has been shaken to its very core.

It reminds us that we as a people of God have been in that place and while we as Americans may not be experiencing that, it is our call as God's people to be mindful of all the places around the world where people are experiencing violence and dispossession of their land and civil war and all of those pieces that Jeremiah is crying out about in this chapter from Lamentations. That's an important call because it's so easy for us to avert our eyes from pain and suffering that's not happening in our backyard. And Lamentations wants us to understand that we've got to pay attention to all of it.

There's a wonderful Harvard psychiatrist, who's done a lot of work with post-traumatic stress syndrome, named Judith Lewis Herman, who writes that our typical

response to any experience of atrocity or trauma is to try to banish it from consciousness. And we in America have raised that ability to a high art-form, right? We've figured out countless ways to distract ourselves from pain that is happening around us and around the world; whether it's to the entertainment industry or drugs and alcohol use or any of the other things that we come up with to shift our gaze from some of the hard places in the world. We are experts at this. And the Book of Lamentations invites us to practice some truth-telling. The Book of Lamentations refuses denial, reverses amnesia and invites us into a place where we are aware of the pain and suffering around us.

### **III. Mustard Seeds**

Now the danger there, of course, is that when we are faced with the various crises that are around our world, there is in that an implicit call to do something about it. And part of the reason that we wrestle with this very strong desire to avert our eyes is that some of the situations that we are called to address are so overwhelming, we have no idea where to plug in, right?

The violence in the Middle East has been going on for so many generations, you don't even know where to start with that. Civil war in Syria and hostage taking and riots in Kenya and bombings in Pakistan; just the stuff that happened this week is overwhelming and it is a very natural response to sort of throw up our hands and say, "There's nothing that we could do about that."

There's also the added complication that sometimes solving some of our world problems may involve changes in some of our behavior patterns, right? So when we

look at, for example, the huge loss of rainforest in the Amazon, part of that's directly relatable to our taste for beef in our country. When we look at the rising sea levels and climate change; that's related very directly to our love of fossil fuels. So, part of dealing with the world crises may involve our changing some of our own behavior patterns which is uncomfortable.

The reason I think that the lectionary text from Luke was paired with this passage from Lamentations is because the disciples are giving to Jesus voice for what we all feel in the face of the kind of struggles that our world is addressing. In the first couple of verses of this passage from Luke Jesus is telling the disciples what it means to be a disciple, that we are called to be agents of reconciliation in the midst of brokenness, that we are called to be agents of forgiveness when people wrong us. And the disciples say, "Well, how many times do I have to forgive somebody?"

"You just keep forgiving them," is what Jesus says. To which the disciples say, "Jesus increase our faith." In other words, "Give us the tools we need to do the impossible because you're asking us to do the impossible. So, at least give us the tools we need to deal with the impossible."

And Jesus' response is an interesting one. Because you would think that Jesus wants our faith to increase, right? Jesus can increase our faith but that's not what he says. What Jesus says is, "You don't need more faith. If you have the faith of a mustard seed, the smallest seed out there, you could change the world. You can change the world."

In other words, the issue is not how much faith we have; the issue is how we act out of that. Jesus says put your faith, little tiny, mustard-seed faith, into action and what you're going to see is God does something with that that you can't even get your head around. If you acted with your mustard seed of faith, you could say to this tree, "Uproot yourself and be planted in the sea." Well, that's a silly idea, why would you want to plant a tree in the sea? The point is not about telekinesis, right? The point is that when we act out of that little faith we have, the faith that is inadequate, the faith that doesn't always understand what we believe, the faith that doesn't even know if we believe it sometimes. If we step out and act on that, God starts to do something that we can't even begin to understand.

So then, in the context of this passage from Lamentations where Jesus is saying that in the midst of a world that is torn by violence and self-interest and greed, terrorism, displacement, situations that you have no ability to solve; when you choose to step out on the little faith you have, God is going to do something you can't even foresee.

I often find myself, when faced with a challenging situation, waiting until all of the right pieces are in place to address that situation. Do you experience that at all? If I just had a little bit more of x; if I had a little bit more time, if I had a little bit more money, if I had a little bit more expertise, if I was a little bit smarter; maybe I could start to deal with that.

Jesus says you have all the pieces you need, right now, to address situations that you see no solution to. You have all the faith. You have all the wisdom. You

have all the resources. You have all the capability; you just need to do something with them. Don't wait around for God to give you everything you think you need. God has given you what you need take it and act.

#### **IV. It's a Small, Small World**

So, what does that mean in terms of World Communion Sunday and our call to build this sense of being part of a world community? There are a couple of things I want to suggest. One is that we are called to pay attention to what is going on in the world around us. We cannot as Christians shirk our responsibility to look full in the face the places in our world that are experiencing brokenness. Now, we're actually not bad at that here in the Metropolitan community because we're all here in D.C., we're exposed to a lot of national stuff, we're across the street from the School for International Service, many of our folks in our community are involved all over the world. So, we bring a fairly high level of sophistication to that, but I want to suggest that we can't then be smug because then our call is to figure out how to let the rest of the country understand what's going on around the world.

I'm going out to visit my family in Ohio, shortly. A great community, an academic community, in Columbus, Ohio, but you don't get to international news in the newspaper out there until about page 37. And we all know what that's like. We have an obligation to make sure that we as an American community understand that our connection with the people around the world is so tight that we can't have the luxury of ignoring pain and violence and brokenness in other areas of the world. It is very easy

for us, as a country to get, sort of isolationist. And we have done this throughout our history.

When World War II was beginning to rage in Europe, our national attitude was, “That’s their problem. They’ll have to solve it.” And it wasn’t until Japan brought that war to our own shores that we figured out, “Oh, maybe we can’t just ignore it.”

We are called as a national community to use our vast resources, economics and expertise, to help to heal the wounds all over the world. And we do not have the luxury to decide to disengage. We are called to engage constantly and in every place because we’ve got a gift to offer.

Let me also suggest that we, as a Metropolitan community, have also decided to live this out over the years through our voluntary mission work, so that every year for years we have sent missionary teams around the world to do work. And I will share with you one of my personal great sadness last year, was the fact that we were unable to get a mission team together to complete a trip that we have planned to South Africa. We have some very strong ties to South Africa through our Bokamoso connections and a lot of very important work was being done there. We have over the last several years developed very strong ties to Nicaragua and are starting to get more and more opportunity to do very substantive work there.

We couldn’t get enough folks from our congregation together last year to go to either of those places and that concerns me. So, I want to challenge you all as we gather together on World Communion Sunday to reflect that we have an opportunity to engage our broader community. And this Wednesday, Ann Michel is going to be

starting a series of classes on South Africa, the history and culture and opportunities for engagement that will hopefully lead into a South Africa Volunteers in Mission trip next year. If you've got any interest in that, come on Wednesday and join us for that conversation. This is who we are as a Metropolitan community, and I want us to continue to live into that call.

Last year, I went with my children to Disneyworld and you've got to make the obligatory trip through the ancient, *It's a Small, Small World* ride, right? And its dated and exactly as true as it was, even more true than when it was built. It is a small world and it is a rapidly shrinking world in which we are so deeply connected with people all over the face of the globe that every action we have impacts someone else.

## **V. Conclusion**

World Communion Sunday is a day in which we commit ourselves to making that a healthy connection. To stepping out with our mustard-seed faith in the situations that we have no idea how to solve and watching God do miraculous things.

Amen.