

5.29.22 – Seventh Sunday of Eastertide & Memorial Sunday

“From Mourning into Dancing”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Lamentations 3:22-33 (NIV) ~ Pam

- ²² Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
- ²³ They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
- ²⁴ I say to myself, “The Lord is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him.”
- ²⁵ The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;
- ²⁶ it is good to wait quietly
for the salvation of the Lord.
- ²⁷ It is good for a man to bear the yoke
while he is young.
- ²⁸ Let him sit alone in silence,
for the Lord has laid it on him.
- ²⁹ Let him bury his face in the dust—
there may yet be hope.
- ³⁰ Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him,
and let him be filled with disgrace.
- ³¹ For no one is cast off
by the Lord forever.
- ³² Though he brings grief, he will show compassion,
so great is his unfailing love.
- ³³ For he does not willingly bring affliction
or grief to anyone.

L: These are Words of Condolence from God. C: Thanks be to God!

John 17:20-26 (NRSVue) ~ Pam

- ²⁰ “I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. ²⁴ Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.
- ²⁵ “Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made your name known to them, and I will make it

known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them.”

L: These are Intercessory Words from God! C: Thanks be to God.

Please pray with me:

Righteous Father, we surrender our hearts to you this special day. We have honored many who are with you now; we remember their lives, their faith, and service, and are grateful. Your words of hope and unity through Jesus Christ strengthen us as we gather in community for remembrance and renewal. Help us to receive your healing, accept the new normal in our living, and eventually rejoice that you reign here and in heaven. May these feelings find words in your Word; so please speak through your messenger. **“Amen.”**

Memorial Day as a Federal holiday was originally called Decoration Day, in 1869 to honor those who died during the Civil War by placing flowers on their graves. Many families and this church extended this day and meaning to embrace the memories of loved ones who died during that year. Presumably, May 30th was chosen because more flowers would be in bloom, and as of 1971, it was made an official Federal holiday on the last Monday of May. We now remember all wars and military service to our country. As of 2000, on that day, Americans participate in the National Moment of Remembrance, a time to pause in a moment of silence to honor those who have died serving the U.S. So please do that tomorrow at 3 pm.

For our church, over the years, it has become the tradition you witnessed today, sometimes with flowers, crosses, and today with commemorative stones. Let’s tie it all together. Reflecting on our world and country’s tremendous loss of life this year, we need the faithful God we sang about in the first hymn.

Like the writers of Job and Lamentations, our losses feel overwhelming. Lamentations is a long poem recalling the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC, yet Chapter 3 is a personal

lament filled with hope. These people experienced something similar to Ukraine: war, property destruction, starvation and exile to a foreign land. The early chapters express their anger and disbelief in a loving God – why, oh, why, God could you be so angry to punish us this way? I’ve heard those questions asked about today as well, and it is our nature to try to figure things out. But can we get inside the mind of God, our creator? Not possible. Like the writer of our first passage, however, we **can** remember that God did not abandon him in his anguish. He poetically writes that God’s love never ceases and in his unconditional and expansive compassion, **his mercies are new every morning**. These are beautiful, comforting memory verses to learn.

Next, there are helpful instructions for processing such overwhelming grief. Let him sit alone in silence and solitude, and turn the other cheek, for God does not willingly afflict, grieve, or cause pain to his creation or to the children of humans, his creation. Yes, severe, heart-breaking consequences may come from loss, but God never leaves the sides of his children, parents, extended family, or friends of his children during or after the crisis. He is with us through it all, helping us cope, make sense of life, and go on living. The unlimited grace of God defines his faithfulness even in our human pain or doubt; that grace and mercy give us hope for a **new** day. We receive a fresh supply of steadfast love every morning! That’s one reason I believe that 12-step group members acknowledge “one day at a time.” It is not just the addiction they are getting through one day at a time; it is learning to receive healing and love one day at a time. Members can start their day over when it gets to be too much, allowing a higher power, may it be Creator God, Allah, or

Buddha to lead them through the pain. For us too, grief requires patience and waiting (25-26), endurance to suffer quietly (27-30), and wisdom to know the pain is temporary (31-32). After everything we've learned and seen through the cross and Christ's appearances to the disciples, can't we believe that **we are worthy** of God's abundant, covenantal love and forgiveness?

Our second passage today, John 17:20-26, is Jesus' attempt to prove it to his disciples yet again, and through his word, to us. In tragic grief, we must support one another through our faith, salvation, and community. Memorial Day itself demonstrates the historic military unity that death for the cause of freedom requires and demands. Not just the "military unity of command," but also the camaraderie and support of families before, during, and after service. The ceremonies are symbolic and instructive. But also, humans need a place to share experiences of God and prayer. We need other people to hope and dream with, knowing that we are not alone. Cemeteries, churches, town squares, and holiday barbeques in the parks are all ways we come together **in community** to process our grief and receive hope.

Before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, the gospel writer John reminds us and his readers that he and the Father are one. If one knows Jesus, one knows the heart of God. Through prayer and intercession, we can build community. That word no longer means geographic neighborhoods, but groups of like minds or interests. We here at this church are "community" or a unity of believers. Someone asked if the cities and towns in DMV would come together in support like the Uvalde, Texas town did. I was tempted to defend our urban independence remembering how we did

during 9/11 in DC and even in NYC. Yet the reality is that it was temporary and fleeting. My neighbors are just beginning to know each other through circumstances, children, and life events (like being locked out, and needing someone to help). Although it is slow and tentative, residents are beginning to come out of pandemic hibernation. Our church certainly reaches out to care for one another through calls and cards, but can we do better at sharing the **divine relationship**, and not just the human one?

At the moment of crisis or grief, there is an open door for faith, but it really swings wide many months later or on anniversaries. After the patient waiting is when we are more open to faith examples and testimonies of God's divine love. It is then when we can receive the divine love demonstrated by acts of serving and generosity. We do not proselytize or give conversion materials, but we can express our faith personally, showing God's love through our actions. We can be a living example of God's abundant love in the middle of adversity.

As Jesus was approaching his persecution and death, he prays for the disciples—those God gave him to teach and to become a divine community. He also intercedes for us and all future believers—not for an institutional church but he prays for our unity to become the body of believers who can influence the world, demanding compassion and divine love in places like Uvalde and Ukraine. Even if we never know why God allowed these bad things to happen (don't forget free will and our own sins of greed, lust, ambition), we can see God working in the midst of the horror, and be reassured he has abundant covenantal love for us. We cannot solve these deep philosophical issues on a Sunday morning, but

we are here, striving to be thoughtful, compassionate, and unified. We come to remember and honor, in the name of the Lord: “²² The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (John 17:22-23).” I find those words incredibly reassuring, even if we’ve lost our way. How about you? If you’re still mourning and not yet dancing, talk with me privately; whatever you are feeling is OK! You are not alone on this journey called life, ministry, eternal life, and yes, even death. You can be an example of faithfulness to others, and in that example build a sense of divine community with those around you. Through your trials, others can see Jesus! ||

Psalm 30:5b, 8-12

^{5b} weeping may stay for the night,
but rejoicing comes in the morning.

¹⁰ Hear, Lord, and be merciful to me;
Lord, be my help.”

¹¹ **You turned my mourning into dancing;
you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
¹² that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent.
Lord my God, I will praise you forever. Amen.**

Will you pray with me? Gracious Lord, we love you even in our doubts or sadness. We thank you for your incarnate Son, Jesus, his life, death, resurrection, appearances, ascension, and intercession. We thank you for these Scriptures to remind us of your compassion and abundant love. Help others to see that love in us as we go about our days and difficult moments. Give us patience to wait on you; let us sit in the silence and solitude of your immeasurable mercy. May we go from here refreshed and renewed, ready to be a faith example for others. **Amen.**