

## *From the Pastor ...*

### **March 29**

The forty days of Lent are over and we enter now the holiest week of our worshipping year. Those days when we witness Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem; his increasing conflict with the leaders of the Temple; the bittersweet occasion of his last supper with his friends; the deep betrayal of a companion who has lost his way; the anguish of the cross; the stark emptiness of death; the shock of a loss that breaks the hearts of his followers. Holy Week. What is holy, we ask about greed and betrayal, about pain and death, about loss and fear? Why, it is in these places that our God comes closest to us. It is in these places where we most need the Divine presence to lift us up. It is in these places that our faith can be met with love and presence and a tiny spark of hope.

This deep brokenness in our world does indeed hold a profound holiness. Our God will not forsake us in these moments of violence and hurt, of despair and anger and fear; for Jesus has journeyed through these spaces before us, and he waits here still, to stand by us as we too pass through them, to offer presence and love as we buckle under the stress, to cry out with us in our anguish, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This holy week is holy precisely because it does not shy away from hurt, but rather it leans in to embrace the reality of what it means to be human and to remind us that we do not walk these paths alone. Let us journey together through this holy week. Let us witness all that Jesus endured in order to reconcile us to God's self. And then, come Sunday, let us shout with the same joy that echoes around our world community of faith, "Hallelujah, Christ is risen!"

### **March 22**

*The days are surely coming says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Jeremiah 31:31, 33b*

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, days of renewed hope, of renewed relationship, of deep connection with the divine. Jeremiah spoke these words to the people of Israel as they faced a life in exile, their city destroyed, their Temple – God's very own house – torn down. What sorrow and discouragement they must have experienced! Into this place Jeremiah speaks words of encouragement and hope – "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; I will be their God and they shall be my people."

This month, as we mark the one-year anniversary of our nation's pandemic shutdown, Jeremiah speaks these words to us too. As Easter approaches, our God again invites us to receive a new covenant, accepting God as our God and leaning into our identity as God's people. As we journey toward the end of our Lent of Listening, let us tune our ears for God's invitation to choose once again to be God's people. As we face the heartbreak of holy week and anticipate the joy of the resurrection, where is God calling us to listen? Where is God inviting us to lean into God's deep love?

### **March 15**

Yesterday, as we continued our Lent of Listening, we spent some time thinking about what it means to listen to one another's suffering. We pondered the idea that the cure for suffering is to gaze on that suffering, to stand present in the midst of pain, to be willing to bear witness to the unspeakable, to remain steadfast in the presence of intolerable hurt. When we make ourselves vulnerable by sharing our true selves, our pains and fears and anxieties with one another, and when we stay present to hear these things, we engage in a sacred moment together, a moment that can spark healing and restoration, ease pain and promote reconciliation. This week as we continue our journey toward the cross, I wonder where God is calling each of us to listen? I

wonder where God is calling each of us to speak? I wonder what healing might come from a willingness for us to name hurt and witness pain?

### March 8

*"Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength." Deuteronomy 6:4-5*

As we continue our Lent of Listening, yesterday we reflected on listening to God and God's call to us. Our readings reminded us of the Ten Commandments and of Paul's claims that "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength," 1 Corinthians 1:25. To listen deeply to God, is to hear the call to forsake the wisdom of the world and its golden idols and to embrace instead the foolishness of self-giving love that Jesus models and calls us to embody ourselves. In a world where so many are focused on preserving their own power, wealth, status and influence, we as Christ's body in the world are called to offer a different model of being in community together, one where we foolishly put the needs of others over our own desires, seeking instead a world where all can experience the stability of their basic needs being met, all can find space to explore and use the gifts God gave them, all can flourish and thrive. As you listen to God this week, how is God calling you to embody God's foolish wisdom as your own act of self-giving love for the world?

### March 1

*Lord, you have searched me out and known me, you know my sitting down and my rising up, you discern my thoughts from afar. Psalm 139:1*

Yesterday, we reflected on how God listens deeply to our lives, searching us out to know us, becoming acquainted with all our ways, tracing our journeys and our resting places and hearing every word on our lips, even before we have spoken it. As we make our way down this Lenten road toward the agony of the cross in Jerusalem and out the other side to the joy of the empty tomb, we can find reassurance in God's abiding presence in every aspect of our lives. Even as we bear the deep sorrow of a half million deaths due to COVID, even as we stand in solidarity with those mourning Daniel Prude's death anew and crying out for a justice that seems unbearably long in coming, we can cling to the presence of the One who will not let us go, the One from whom we cannot flee. As the psalmist reminds us, even if we climb up to heaven or make the grave our bed, God is there also. Darkness is not dark to God, and the light around us will not turn to night. In the God who listens to every sigh and murmur, we find a steadfast presence that we too are invited to copy and offer to our own communities. As we tune our ears and our eyes to notice God's listening presence in our lives, let us also allow that abundant attention to overflow our own lives to provide energy for listening deeply to one another as well. Even as we encounter those who cannot feel God's presence, let us commit to holding the space of God's amazing grace with our neighbors until they too can find their way back to God's enfolding embrace.

### March 2021 Harbinger

*For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. O that today you would listen to his voice! Psalm 95:7*

As the people of God's pasture, how comforting it can be to listen to God's voice – the voice that will lead us to the good, green grass when we hunger; to the cool, clear water when we thirst, and to the spaces of safety when we encounter danger. This year, in the midst of the chaos of a disordered life, we are focusing on a Lent of Listening. A time to notice how God listens deeply to our lives. A time to practice the art of listening deeply to others. A time to invest in listening deeply to God.

We hear so much about the art of listening these days. How to listen without spending all our time planning what we will say next. How to listen without judgment instead of arguing in our heads with what is being expressed. How to listen with curiosity when all we want to do is attack or defend. To listen with our whole selves is to give the speaker the gift of an active presence, fully focused on their words, attending to the nuances of body language and tone, watching what the eyes and the hands say. When I taught preschool, we used to tell our children that they could listen with their whole bodies. How wonderful it was to watch them squirm into place, their small legs and torsos wiggling with excitement, their expectant faces turned toward the speaker. So often, at these times, when another child was speaking and expressed sadness or fear or upset, the listeners gathered around would respond with compassion and love and a ready hug. As I picture them today, I wonder, what would happen if we continued to listen to each other like that? What would happen if we truly believed that God listens to us in the same way? What would happen if we listened to the deepest parts of our souls with a whole body's worth of attention? Can you imagine the good God could do with that?

As we continue to prepare for the time when we can once again leave our cocoons and venture into the wider world, why not lay some groundwork for change by listening to God, to one another, to ourselves? Let us do the counter-cultural thing and, instead of continuing to fight with the "others" we encounter in the political, personal, work or faith realms, let us commit to listening in order to understand, to gain compassion, to receive insight. In a world where listening has largely disappeared, let us challenge ourselves to talk less and listen more; to create space for the voices that so often remain unheard; to tune our ears to God's listening presence in our lives; to seek the answering response of our hearts when we hear God's voice. Let us listen with our whole bodies and ask God to show us how to answer with our whole lives.

© 2021 Rev. Laura Bachmann

All rights reserved. Please contact us for permission if you would like to use the content.