

Lamentations 3: 19-26; Hymn: Morning Has Broken

Many of us went to our basements this last week, the evening of the tornados. Most of us in this area came out of our basements with ourselves and our homes still intact. However, many in neighboring communities came out of their basements and were devastated to find their homes damaged, their belongings shredded and buried or missing, their yards and trees destroyed, and some in Naperville even had family members injured and hospitalized. A devastating loss for many... But ours weren't the only tornados – the southeast also had tornados and devastation in their wake that night... The collapse of the condo building in Surfside, Florida was another tragedy. And as we well know, other parts of the world are reeling from fires, from floods, from violence and war, and from the unremitting scourge of the pandemic. So many in our world, and perhaps we too, at some point in our lives, could sit with the poet of Lamentations, and say, "The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall," while our heads and souls are bowed down within us.

And yet, within Lamentations is this germ of hope, this recall of God's steadfast love, that gives our poet pause in the midst of his unrelenting grief, to dare to wait upon the Lord, whose love and mercies never end. They are new every morning, he writes. Chapter 3, verses 22 and 23 are the scripture inspiration for both the hymn Morning has Broken, and the hymn Great is thy Faithfulness, according to our hymnals. God's mercies are new every morning... Great is God's faithfulness.

Do we dare to believe that today, still? Do we act upon that? Last week we talked about Jesus calming the storm, and our encouragement to trust that Jesus is in our boat, ready to help when we ask. Now our caveat is that he may not help at exactly the time we want (how long were the disciples trying to wake him?!), nor perhaps in the way we want (who knew Jesus would be so curt with the storm?!), but God is able, and in our boat, God-with-us, to share our burdens and our journey.

Our scripture and hymn message today take us a little farther down this path, inviting us to trust that God is creating and recreating new days, new sunlight and dewfall each day, and other new creations in our world, every morning. We can praise and celebrate this newness God offers us each day, as we rise and see the garden and hear the birds singing in the morning. New days offer new opportunities, new possibilities for life and goodness, love and mercies.

Eleanor Farjeon is the poet who was commissioned in 1931 to write the lyrics to our hymn, set to the Gaelic (Scottish) tune Bunessan. I love the way she describes the garden, "sprung in completeness, where his feet pass....the sunlight and the morning are born of the one light Eden saw play; praise with elation - God's Re-creation of the new day..." You can just picture God in the first creation, walking in the garden with Adam and Eve, in the sunlight in Eden; and then as we think about it, we realize that each day, still today, God brings new light and new growth in our

gardens – God walks with us and recreates every day, beauty, sun light – how cool is that?! Praiseworthy indeed!

What are some signs you saw of God’s presence, God’s activity, making things new during the pandemic? Did you start a garden? Were you able to learn some new skills? Did you find time for any new hobbies? Did you make more time for connecting with a grandchild, in person or on tech? Did you make time for new exercises or physical activity, with your spouse or children or a friend? What new thing was God doing with you during the pandemic? Did you spend more time in prayer? Learn and practice a new way to pray? Did you take more walks in parks? Did you discover a new favorite place to watch birds or see wildflowers in bloom?

One of my favorite prayers from our Upper Room worship book starts like this: “New every morning is your love, great God of Light, and all day long you are working for good in the world...”. This I believe is what our poet in Lamentations was remembering, and what Eleanor Farjeon was alluding to as well in our hymn.

God’s steadfast love is seen in the faithful return of sunlight and rain, gardens and goodness in our world. We can trust in God’s provision for us, even in the worst of circumstances; God is still working for good in the world. This we saw in the life and ministry of Jesus as well – he was bringing good into peoples’ lives, wherever his feet passed – whether healing or exorcisms, dinners or talks at the playground, fishing or preaching, Jesus was working for good in the world. And he asks us to be part of that light and growth God channels into our world, to bless all of creation. We too can nurture goodness in the world in order to bless gardens, creatures, and people.

With our gifts to the Midwest Distribution Center this month, we will be part of helping children and families recover from tornado disasters, fires, floods, violence and war. With our conference, we are also giving monetary gifts to UMCOR Covid-19 relief this month, to help communities here in the US and around the world receive supplies and vaccines to put an end to this pandemic. These are some of our opportunities to bring sunshine and rain, new life and new growth, here in Geneva and all around the world.

Cat Stevens chose to add this hymn to his record album Teaser and the Firecat in 1971, because he was choosing music to speak to his spiritual journey. The pianist, Rick Wakeman, who collaborated with him on Morning Has Broken, wrote the musical interludes to the hymn. Wakeman felt that their rendition of the hymn “brought people closer to religious truth.” Some other songs included on that album are Moonshadow, The Wind, Peace Train. Stevens says he was looking for God’s presence and direction in his life. He wanted to channel good into the world, but wasn’t certain how to best use his music and art to do so. A few years later after a near drowning, his brother gave him a Quran, and Stevens converted to Islam after discovering his spiritual path was leading him there. He left his pop music career to focus on channeling his gifts into education, and charity work for children and peace. In 2005, his son began exploring music,

and led his father back into music, to use his musical gifts to build bridges between cultures, religions, for peace and understanding among peoples.

Where are you on your spiritual journey now? Are you, like our poet in Lamentations, looking for hope and new beginnings, mercy and salvation, in the midst of struggle right now? Are you, like Eleanor Farjeon, marveling at God's hand in creation and re-creation each day? Are you, like Cat Stevens, exploring spiritual and religious truths to find your path, to find your way of contributing to God's good in the world, for peace, for children, for creation, for community development?

The prophets of the Bible and the New Testament are teeming with the message that God is doing new things in our world, that God is bringing a new heaven and new earth, is making a new covenant with people, is putting a new spirit within us, and giving us new, undivided hearts. Jesus says he is establishing God's new covenant with us by his blood, and that we have a new commandment to follow: to love one another as he has loved us. Paul writes prolifically of God's new covenant in Christ, the new creation God has begun in Jesus, with a new humanity. We are given new birth into a living hope, we put on a new self as new creations in Christ, looking forward to the new heaven and new earth coming. We watch for God's work, as God makes all things new.

Morning has broken, like the first morning! What new life has God brought to you during this pandemic? How are you made new? And, how have you helped to bring new light, sunlight and rain to others, with Christ during this pandemic? How can we continue to work with God for good in our world, to share Christ's blessings of forgiveness and love with those in despair? How will we open up opportunities for new life with those who wait in the shadows, in places of struggle?

What are the new things we see God doing around us and within us? What are the new things you are doing, coming out of the pandemic? What have you learned about the pace of your life, the direction of your life? What have you learned is most important in your life? What values are the foundation for your daily life, your lifetime goals? How are you putting those values first, teaching them to your children and grandchildren?

New every morning is your love O God, and all day long you are working for good in the world. Everywhere your feet pass, life is re-created in your wake. Are we following in God's footsteps, with new love to share every morning? Let us choose good things to work on, that make the world better, that bless peoples' lives! Let us bring hope and love to fruition, sunshine and rain to help people and all of creation to grow in sweetness and praise!

May God shine his light in our hearts and grant that our faith and courage may grow, that we can shine with his love in our community and world, to bring new life, new light every morning that will grow God's blessings for all of creation, all of God's people.

Amen! Rev Lisa E Telomen, UMC of Geneva

Benediction (sung) FWS 2166 Christ Beside Me

Tune: Bunessan (tradit. Gaelic) Words: St. Patrick's Breastplate

Vs 1. Christ beside me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me, King of my heart;
Christ within me, Christ below me,
Christ above me, never to part.

Vs. 2 Christ on my right hand, Christ on my left hand,
Christ all around me, shield in the strife;
Christ in my sleeping, Christ in my sitting,
Christ in my rising, light of my life.

Children's Sermon:

Hi children, and young at heart! I'm glad to share with you today about ways we can see God at work in our world, and ways we can help others to see this!

Where do you see God at work in our world? The most common ways I see this are 1) in the beauty of nature (flowers, trees, seeds, rivers), and 2) in the beauty of love shared, by people and creatures (family, friends, perhaps your dog or cat, for instance).

I want to suggest a challenge for us to embark on this summer:

Let's keep track of ways and times we see God at work in our world, by jotting down a note (such as, a little tree growing) and then dropping a coin in a jar or box for each note, any size coin!

Every wonderful thing we see that shows us God's creativity and love, we drop a note and a coin in the jar. Then, at the end of the summer, we can bring our jars to church, and tell each other what we saw. And then, you can decide how you will share your coins in a way that helps to share God's love in the world. For instance, giving the coins to an animal shelter, or to the food bank, or to a wildlife rescue center, to a church mission.

How many ways will we see God at work? Keep your eyes open! And maybe your family can help give you some coins to put in your jar or box.

I look forward to hearing about what you see over this summer!

Let's pray:

God, we thank you so much for taking such good care of our world, and for encouraging us to help you do so. We thank you for gardens, for forests, for creeks that show us so much of your beauty and love. We thank you also for family, friends and pets that share with us your love and care.

Help us to see you more clearly, love you more dearly, and follow you more nearly this summer, so we can share your good news with others! In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.