

God's Grieving

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We had a different service planned earlier this week. I had a different sermon written earlier this week, one that fit the joy of the last Sunday of the Easter season. One that stuck to the lectionary and the prayers that were written months ago.

But then this week happened, and we decided we couldn't white knuckle our way through anymore. That church should be the last place where we pretend that everything is fine. Even though I'm worried that talking about this week will open flood gates that will be impossible to close. That we'll just cry forever because how could we not cry after this week?

But what can I say about this week? It is too much.

This week that we set aside to remember all those in the armed forces who have lost their lives, defending our country.

This week that marks the second anniversary of the murder of George Floyd.

This week, just after the one-millionth person died of COVID.

This week where the news cycle has already moved on from two different racist attacks because of the atrocity of a mass shooting at an elementary school.

This week that was already too full of other sorrows and deaths and fears and anxieties, more every day.

So, what can I say about this week?

Maybe I **can** say *Lord have mercy*.

Maybe I **should** say *Something has to be done*.

What I **want** to say, most of all, is *God, where are you? What have you been doing? Why is this happening? When will it stop?*

Our Gospel today, this text from John, was already assigned in the lectionary, and I kept it because I think it speaks to this week in two ways.

This prayer is from Jesus' final discourse, as he prepares the disciples for his death and later ascension. Just after Jesus finishes praying this prayer—while the disciples listen—they all go to the garden and pray, and Jesus is handed over to the authorities. Jesus knows that physically he will no longer be with these faithful people. He knows the trials they will face, and the sorrows that they will endure. The thing he wants them to know—this important thing that he left for the end—is that he will never truly leave them.

Jesus prays: *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.*

He says: *I made your name known to them, and I will make it known that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.*

Even though Jesus may not physically be with the disciples, he wants to make sure—even as they watch him beaten, as they

stand at the foot of the cross, as they see their Lord and teacher take their last breath—they know that he has not abandoned them, that he will never abandon them. Jesus is united with his people, the way that his father and the holy spirit is united with him.

This can be hard to believe, especially in a week like this one.

So, we also have the promises of Psalm 46 to remind us that God's people have always been united with God, that God has never left us in times of trouble. In fires, in floods, in wars, in the world shaking, God has been present.

Martin Luther took this psalm and turned it into the song: “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” I love that song. I can see this song as a hymn of triumph, but this week I like it even more as a still small song of protest, where the most important word is *though*.

Though the earth should change.

Though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea.

Though its waters, rage, and foam.

Though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

Even while terrible things are happening, we trust that God is present.

That God is one with us.

That God mourns with us.

That God does not stop bad things from happening, but in the midst—*though* they're happening—God is still there, so we will not be afraid.

Though God might not be a mighty fortress that prevents death, God promises that God has been in every foxhole.

Though God's love has not kept illness at bay, God was at every ICU bedside.

Though God's justice has not yet dismantled white supremacy or systemic sin, God is kneeling on the city streets with everyone who can't breathe.

Though there are more guns than people in this country and *though* we feel helpless and despairing that this could ever change, God is present in every classroom, at every shooting, at every funeral, and every candlelight vigil.

And most importantly:

Though this is the world we live in now, God is not content that this is the world we stay in.

God watched God's only son be killed and God's grief shook the very foundations of the earth. God's grief today is still shaking foundations. Can you feel it?

When it feels unsteady, like everything is in chaos? That is God crying out in rage and sorrow and pain. This is not how things are supposed to be.

This is God crying out in promise—yet again—that we are united. That our grief is God's grief, and that our pain is God's pain. That—even though there are death dealing forces at work—God is with us and has not given up.

God's cry that shakes the whole earth is a cry to us so that God's resolve would be our resolve. That God's desire would be our desire. That *though* we live in a world full of violence and warfare and death, God is already working.

Our Psalm says: *God makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear. He burns the shields with fire.*

God changed the world with the resurrection of Jesus. *Though* it seemed like death had won, God was still working for God's people, and God is working now.

I want to leave you with a blessing from Jan Richardson:

A Blessing in a Time of Violence

Which is to say
this blessing is always.

Which is to say,
there is no place
this blessing does not
long to cry out
in lament,

to weep its words
in sorrow,
to scream its lines
in sacred rage.

Which is to say
there is no day
this blessing ceases
to whisper into the ear
of the dying,
the despairing,
the terrified.

Which is to say
there is no moment
this blessing refuses
to sing itself
into the heart
of the hated
and the hateful,
the victim and
the victimizer
with every last
ounce of hope
it has.

Which is to say,
there is none
that can stop it,
none that can
halt its course,

none that will
still its cadence,
none that will
delay its rising,
none that can keep it
from springing forth
from the mouths of us
who hope,
from the hands of us
who act,
from the hearts of us
who love, from the feet of us
who will not cease
our stubborn, aching,
marching, marching.

Until this blessing
has spoken
its final word,
until this blessing
has breathed
it's benediction
in every place,
in every tongue,
peace,
peace,
peace.

Today, we mourn and grieve and weep, and we know that God cries with us. Tomorrow, we shake the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our stronghold.