

Scripture Readings

Psalm 42

Galatians 3:23-29

**Lead Us to the End**

I want to share with you a lament that I heard at an inhabit conference in 2018. On occasion it comes to my mind ever since. It was a powerful lament at the time but in 2020 it was actually published and I am sure that is because the lament had only become more real. Here is what Tom Wuest said about it. “I wrote this lament as a response to our American (and human) struggle against violence in all its forms. We are all part of the stories of the abuse of power and wasteful bloodshed that have been endemic throughout our history and continue to devastate us today. Jesus calls his followers to repentance, which is a change of heart—literally, to walk in a new direction. This path is one of unity, not uniformity. It is a challenging and rewarding way of love, care and respect for one another despite our divergent ideologies and disagreements. This song cries out to God, “spread wide your table . . . gather us in . . . tear down the barrier walls between us and them.”

I invite you now to hear this lament, psalm, prayer, song as a reflection on what God is calling us to in this time. Listen, pray and sing as you feel lead.

Lead Us to the End - Tom Wuest  
O God we are crying out  
Marked by the violence of Cain  
Our hands are bloodstained, forgive us  
O God, your children are suffering  
You hear the groaning  
You know the sorrows, have mercy  
We are sowing in tears  
May they be, Lord, seeds of your peace

Take our hearts of stone  
Give us hearts of flesh  
Lead us to the end  
Of us versus them  
Spread wide your table Lord  
Gather us in  
Tear down the barrier walls  
Between us and them

There is a light shining in our darkness  
There is a spring whose waters never fail  
There is a voice crying out in the wilderness  
There is a way of peace through the valley  
through the shadow of death

By the power of the Spirit  
By the word made flesh  
In the kingdom of heaven  
With the wolf and the lamb  
The earth is the Lord's  
And all it contains  
Lead us to the end of us versus them

Rap:  
To see your face / even clearer  
My neighbor's face / is in my mirror  
We need your power / to fall like showers  
We need your grace / to fill this place

We need your love / from up above  
We need your hope / just to cope  
We need your hand/ to trust your plan  
We need you now / we're crying out

We face east/ to feel your peace  
We face south / and laugh out loud  
We face west / tears hit our chest  
We face north / groan for warmth

To your image / please conform  
Unity / not uniform  
Tear down / the barrier wall  
Then we'll celebrate / and watch it fall

*credits*

*from Songs from the Parish Collective, released July 14, 2020*

*Jonathan "Pastah J" Brooks: rap*

*Yvonne Araujo-Schacht: drums, vocals*

*Danny Kim: violin*

*Jessica Mitchell: vocals*

*Hailey Mitsui: vocals*

*Ivan Penn: trumpet*

*September Penn: vocals*

*Derek Rice: piano, vocals*

*Peter Schrock: bass*

*Tom Wuest: vocals, guitar*

*Written by Tom Wuest (copyright April 2018)*

Holy God may we know the barriers we hold up, may we know the places we block your love, grace and hope. Amen.

This is the song that comes to mind every time I hear the scripture "There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." My soul longs, my heart breaks for a world like this.

When my child asks me why is there war?

When my child says why do people bully people? Why do people treat people different because of their race or gender I stumble over the answer every time because I honestly don't understand.

I struggle, my heart breaks along with everyone else's as I hear the numbers of graves being discovered of indigenous children who were taken away - why? To remove the 'savage?' Instead it is the savage that took them away in the name of God. How can that be?

And so we lament in the midst of June, when we commemorate **National Indigenous History Month**. We have taken the last month, to recognize the rich history, heritage, resilience and diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples across Canada. This is not the end of our work but only the beginning and we seek reconciliation.

In this month we also celebrate pride month here in Canada, another group of people that have received rejection and barriers from the church as a whole. The LGBTQ2S+ community. Is a community that the church has been destructive towards since its inception. We lament and pray for forgiveness and reconciliation with all people no matter who they love.

Today we hear the news and we see refugees fleeing countries that are devastated by war and here in Canada we sometimes watch without response. There is so much to pray for, there is so much to do. May we offer light and hope to those in need, those aching for loved ones, those longing for peace and freedom and hope.

I don't know about you but as I hear news about more school shooting my blood boils and then I feel weak from the sorrow. How lord? How can it be? I lament and I pray for a country that holds itself up with pride and power and greed, while it stands on it's podium on top of the world and watches it children killed because having a gun is a right to uphold.

Here is the thing... all of this news is too much. Honestly I've probably named more sorrow than one should in a sole sermon but it is how my heart aches today. I know it is why we are seeing

skyrocketing levels of depression and anxiety because who can hold all of this and then live through a pandemic too.

During the first year of the pandemic, there was a 95% increase in apparent opioid toxicity deaths. BC, Ontario and Alberta top the list of deaths. It is easy for us to judge but the truth is most of us have addictions of our own and few of us can claim that in the last three years they haven't reared their anxiety ridden traits.

So as we head into our summer months I wonder where God is calling us to transform. Martin Luther King jr. said "Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."

Today's scripture remind us in Christ there is no Jew nor Greek, no slave nor free... It is only with the heart of God that we can actually live without the barrier walls. It is God who breaks our hearts of stone. It is God who transforms our lives and our will.

Today's gospel reading was the one where Jesus casts the demons actually legions out of the man who has been living in the tombs and they run into a herd of pigs and are cast off the cliff. That story can be too hard to hear, too hard to tell but the truth is we all have our demons. Of course, instead of addressing them head on, we go to great lengths to avoid them and silence them and control them - if all else fails, escape them: voices, feelings, out-of-control thoughts, habits, all those fragile parts of our hearts and our minds and bodies we thought we had control over.

We all have demons, which is probably why Jesus made the trip to a spiritually unclean, Roman occupied, gentile town full of swine herders in the first place. Jesus had a point to make: no one is so unclean we are out of God's reach, but we don't really want to hear it. We keep pretending we have our acts together. Instead we get to attack the other shame another race, blame a certain sexual orientation, talk about those struggling with mental illness. Let's talk about him, shame her, blame them, try to fix them, control it all and then, refuse to build relationship in love and grace.

If we focus on the other we don't have to acknowledge what is happening for us. "One glass takes the edge off, another to unwind, and a third induces numbness. Netflix, You Tube, pot, doesn't it all basically work the same way? We all have demons. We can crawl into our beds and weep for days without explanation. Uncontrollable panic can attack us without warning. Fear or grief can lead us to the darkest tombs. Sometimes it's impossible to escape or control these mighty storms, so we might try to control or escape other things instead. Stop eating or eat too much. We may not have the energy to move, or we might exercise or work or shop too much. Nobody wants to face their own demons and so we put up walls that block out the other.

That's the message Jesus lived to tell. God loves us despite our foibles, our flaws, even our demons. Society has it wrong! Our human struggles, illnesses and weaknesses - they do not define us. After encountering Jesus, this man falls to his knees and names his demons. And if you've ever been to an A-A, an N-A, or an Al-Anon meeting, you know what I'm talking about. Folks in recovery introduce themselves at meetings by sharing their God-given authentic name and then stating their addiction. Right then, the demons begin losing their power. Where two or three are gathered, the demons know they are being seen.

As Rev. Lori Raible sums it up.

In Christ we find the courage and strength to face our demons together, and by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are called by name and set free. In this Gospel truth, we are called to cross the sea, to the east side, to address the demons of those who have not had access to such power of knowledge of such love. We are asked to break down the walls that separate us. For there is nothing you can do, nowhere you can go, no tomb dark enough, and no demon too powerful to separate you from the love of God, in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).