I speak to you in the name of our Creator, Christ the risen one, and the Holy Spirit, the one who heals, restores, and transforms us. Amen.

The readings today seem rather disjointed, don't they? Lament in Jeremiah and the Psalm, an exhortation to pray for everyone, including our rulers in the letter to Timothy, and then this really weird parable about money management in the Gospel of Luke. Let's see if we can find the golden thread that runs through them.

Last night I attended an amazing event at AbbeyChurch which launched a book on Leonard Cohen called *Rags of Light* and a new CD by Rachel Colman called *Make a Way*. It was an evening of song and lament. The speaker quoted from Cohen:

> "I greet you from the other side of sorrow and despair. With a love so vast and so shattered, it can reach you everywhere."

My sermon was dancing with Leonard Cohen's words all through the night.

On some Sundays, Scripture comes to us like poetry: it names our ache, it carries our grief, it gives us permission to weep. Jeremiah is often called the weeping prophet, and our text today one of the weeping poems. It is a duet between Jeremiah and God. The question is: Can they hear each other? It's hard to tell if they are speaking past one another or if they can hear each other loud and clear. It's sometimes hard for us to tell if our prayers make it to God's ears or not isn't it? But let's imagine, for our sake, that they can hear each other. Jeremiah's cries, then, are answered. In fact, they are more than answered, the Lord joins in with their crying. The Lord accompanies them in their mourning. Jeremiah cries out:

> "My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick" (Jer 8:18).

Then God's voice echoes the cries of the people:

> "For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me" (Jer 8:21).

Jeremiah's words are devastating. He hears the cries of his people after the disaster of the Babylonian invasion. The Hebrew word for "grief" in 8:18 is דַּאֲבוֹן (da'avon), meaning faintness, sickness, or weakness. Jeremiah's heart is literally failing him. He hears the voices of his people asking, "Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not in her?" (v.19). This is both accusation and despair: has God abandoned us? Then comes the haunting refrain:

> "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved" (v.20).

If you missed the harvest, there is no food until the next season. If you missed the summer, the chance of rescue is gone. This is a cry of hopelessness: We waited for salvation, and it did not come.

God responds to Israel's cries:

> "For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt" (v.21).

The Hebrew word for hurt here is שֶׁבֶר, shever which means fracture, shattering. God is shattered by human suffering. God mourns. This is not the image of a distant, unmoved deity. This is a God whose tears water the earth. And then the prophet gives us perhaps the most human image of God in all of Scripture: God weeping, eyes overflowing like a fountain.

> "O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night" (Jer 9:1).

This is not a stoic God, untouched by sorrow. This is a God who cries with us, who feels our grief, who sits in the ashes of Jerusalem with the people. God does not "fix" the suffering. Instead, God is present in solidarity: a duet of lament. God longs to become "a fountain of tears" for the world. In the first part of this poem God is condemning Israel for greed and exploiting the poor:

> "from the least to the greatest everyone is greedy for unjust gain; from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. They have treated the wound of the daughter of my people carelessly, saying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. They acted shamefully; they committed abomination, yet they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush." (Jer 8:10–12)

Psalm 79 echoes Jeremiah's grief but turns it into communal worship. The psalmist describes devastation: the nations have defiled the temple, Jerusalem is in ruins, and the dead lie unburied. It is brutal. Yet the people do not remain silent. They cry out to God:

> "How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever?" (v.5).

> "Do not remember against us the iniquities of our ancestors; let your compassion come speedily to meet us" (v.8).

> "deliver us and forgive our sins" (v.9)

Here, the Hebrew word for compassion רַחֲמִים (rachamim) is super important. It comes from the root רֶחֶם (rechem), meaning womb. God's compassion is womb-

like: tender, life-giving, protective. The people are not only asking for forgiveness, they're also pleading for God's motherly mercy to surround them once more.

Notice also how Psalm 79 shifts from the singular to collective. It's not only Jeremiah's private grief but the community's shared lament. When one member suffers, all suffer together. Community lament binds us together in shared grief. It builds solidarity and resilience.

Lament is challenging though, isn't it? We are often very uncomfortable with the intensity of this emotion and action. I think it's because it makes us feel very vulnerable. It touches the raw part of us where we have no defences. But I love the lament in scripture, because it gives permission for me to express the depth of emotion I feel with death, loss, injustice, war, and violence. It helps me process and is somehow, mysteriously cathartic. Jeremiah offers his weeping words for when you don't have any words yourself, when only a dead silence greets you in the night. They are words for when you hurt not only for yourself but for all those who suffer far more than you. They are words for when trauma bites and you find yourself reeling from another panic attack. And they are words for when you wish you could cry because at least you'd be able to release some of the sorrow in you, like a pressure valve, whistling out a song of relief.

When I read and sat with these reading for the past few weeks, I couldn't help but think about our current state of things. They are very unstable and turbulent. The rich build their wealth on the backs of the poor. The same was true when this letter was written. Rome conquered huge swaths of land in Europe, Northern Africa, and the Middle East to gain wealth and power and the masses suffered for it. The author exhorts Timothy to pray,

> "for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity."

As rhetoric continues to get ramped up in the States, many places around the world, and frankly even here in Canada, there is a significant undercurrent of fear. We all want to live a quiet and peaceable life. A prayer of lament to God, would be very beneficial right now. The very expression of our grief and fear helps us process them. Doing that together builds our community of faith; it strengthens us in the face of the violence all around us.

At first glance, Paul urging to pray for rulers and authorities can sound like accommodation, almost like a call to bless the very systems that exploit and oppress. But notice what Paul is doing: he is reminding the church that even kings and emperors are not outside the scope of God's saving desire. To pray for rulers is not to endorse their injustice, but to hold them accountable to God's vision for human flourishing. And believe it or not, that's what is happening in our Gospel reading today.

Someone once said of preaching passages such as these, "Sometimes you have to squeeze the Biblical text until it leaks the Gospel." My goodness did I ever do some squeezing this week. I am indebted to Brian Walsh, Ched Myers, and Justin Ukpong for some Spirit-led insight on this challenging passage from Luke's Gospel.

Our Bibles call this "The Parable of the Dishonest Manager." But Jesus never gave titles, and if we follow the story closely, the one to watch is not the steward at all, but the rich man. And let's be clear: in Jesus' parables, the rich man is never

God. Never Christ. The rich man is the exploiter, the one whose wealth rests on the backs of others. Every time Luke introduces us to "a rich man," it is a warning sign: here is what greed looks like, here is the system that God will overturn.

So where is God in this story? Not in the mansion of the master. Not in the wealth built on debt. God's heart is with the farmers; those hidden, nearly forgotten figures in the story, the ones carrying impossible debts of oil and grain. Justin Ukpong, an African theologian, says that ordinary West African farmers, who know too well what it is to be crushed by lenders and traders, hear this story as good news.

Brian Walsh suggests that the manager wasn't squandering his master's wealth, at least not from the manager's point of view, and certainly not from the farmers point of view. This squandering is only from the rich man's point of view. He was displeased with the manager because the manager was not squeezing every penny he could from the farmers, he wasn't doing enough to maximize his profits and rive more to his bottom line.

When the manager cuts the debts of the farmers, even partially, he gives them a taste of relief, a hint of freedom, a glimpse of what justice could be. Ched Myers calls him the "defect-ive manager": defective because he belongs to a corrupt system, but defecting because he improvises an act of resistance. Ukpong calls him a hero, not because he's holy, but because in a moment of crisis he takes the side of the exploited. This is not a story about God as landlord calling in accounts. It is a story about God's preference for the poor, God's siding with the exploited, God's vision of justice that does not look like the world's.

Now let's connect the dots. Jeremiah wept over a devastated land and crushed and broken people, unsure if God was listening. The Psalmist pleaded, "How long, O Lord?" Both cried from the depths of loss and injustice. Paul urged Timothy to pray even for rulers, longing for lives marked by dignity and peace. And here Jesus tells a story where the poor are still crushed, debts still loom, the powerful still exploit, but where even a flawed figure can act in mercy, showing us God's heart. The golden thread is this: our God of compassion weeps with the exploited and abused and takes their side. Jeremiah's lament, the Psalmist's plea, Paul's prayer, and Jesus' parable all point in the same direction: God is not neutral in the face of injustice. God's compassion is fierce, siding with the poor, calling us to do likewise.

I wonder if we are being called to not only pray for our leaders, but for God's grace and compassion to be extended to them. For their hearts to be healed and changed. What if our cries of lament for our world creates more compassion and grace in us? What if we were then moved to extend this compassion and grace to those we deeply disagree with, even consider enemies? Gosh, that's sounds like the Gospel to me, even if we had to squeeze hard this week!

Amen