

There was a plaque, I once saw on a piano “when there are no words for prayer, God gives us music”. Whoever put the plaque there must have discovered that prayer is not just words spoken, it’s feelings, emotions, swirling thoughts. There are many, many occasions when there are no words for prayer – you sit in silence at a loss for words.

Job and his three friends – our O.T. reading – sat together for 7 days.....sitting in silence, stunned at his appearance, aware of his grief upon grief. His children taken from him, his livestock, his health....grief upon grief. There they sat, on the ground in silence, lost in thought, grieving with and for their friend, sharing his sorrow.

They were doing shiva.

In our New Testament readings for today, the disciples, 10 of them, are gathered in a familiar room – perhaps where they had celebrated Passover – somewhere in Jerusalem. It’s Easter Sunday evening, but they’re not singing “Christ the Lord is risen today. Hallelujah”. The truth is, they were grieving. Mark 16 tells us, “they were mourning and weeping.”. They would have been sitting on the floor, terrified at the prospect of being captured, speaking in low voices, door locked.

They were doing shiva

Shiva is the Jewish practice of responding to the death of a loved one. Folks gather together – immediate family, sitting down low, speaking in low voices if speaking is done. There are no words for prayer on such occasions, particularly when the death was sudden and tragic. Mourners rehearse their relationship with the one who was taken by death – and the thoughts and feelings come – a lot of could’a; should’a would’a ‘s; regrets, guilt, the high points, the loved one’s character, the dreams shared about what could have been. Worry about “what now?”

I have had that experience and I know many of you have had the same. There are no words for prayer.

I can imagine being a fly on the wall in that room in Jerusalem – looking, listening. All of the disciples absolutely convinced that Jesus had died, they saw Him being taken down from the cross, His lifeless body placed in a tomb. He's gone from us. Never mind the strange news from Mary Magdalene about having seen Jesus and saying that He was risen. Never mind the news from Cleopas that they had seen Him too. It was nonsense news, they didn't believe it.

I see Peter, tear-stained face, in agony – racked with guilt about having betrayed his Friend – three times....bragging about defending Jesus from His certain death. There's James and John – stunned - ashamed that they had recruited their mother to ask Jesus if they could sit at His right and left when He sits in glory. Then someone says, “we all betrayed Him, we forsook Him and fled when He was arrested”

Doing shiva. Today our church is doing shiva, a somber reflective shiva....sitting in reflective contemplation as to what has happened these months. We rehearse words, actions, meetings after meetings, trying to fathom what our Synod has put before us. Our denomination is hurting, we hurt. Wondering what happens now? Dealing with loss of friendships, people who have walked away, unspeaking. Feelings of anger, pain, sorrow – our responsive readings describe what we sense.

Back to the disciples. We need to understand that these 10 disciples are the nucleus of the Church. Jesus meant for them to continue His work of the Kingdom. These are our church fathers!!! But they're absolutely gutted – the dream of the Kingdom is dead! What they dreamed of during the Triumphal entry is gone. There will be no church because our Shepherd has been taken. Perhaps they ponder going

back to their day jobs before Jesus came along. Peter had in mind to go fishing again. It was a 3 year adventure with Jesus, fantastic experiences – but the dream has died when Jesus died....or so they may have thought.

Suddenly Jesus “came and stood among them”. We don’t know how, we’ll take the Scripture at face value - and after overcoming their probable shock – the text says when they saw the Lord they were “overjoyed” – it was their Hallelujah moment! This changes everything, it changes everything, everything!!

The text tells us Jesus “breathed” on them. Now, what does that mean? Think of it this way – you know of people who have the capacity to enter a room full of people and change the atmosphere in the room.- perhaps anxiety to hope, from grumbling to gratitude, from a somber spirit to laughter and joy. Such folk have a spirit or energy and personality to breathe new spirit in others.

The word “breathed” is the word in the book of Genesis used to describe God the Creator making mankind from the dust of the earth – “and breathed into his nostrils the breath of lifeand the man became a living being.” Jesus “breathed” new life into His disciples and they began to live again – hope is revived. They are a new creation. They are commissioned “as the Father has sent me, I am sending you” The Kingdom dream is born anew, the fathers of the church are revived . They are transformed. Their mourning has been turned to dancing. Jesus unlocks the door - the church is not to lock the world out, but to let it in.

The resurrection changes everything, everything, even in this place and among these people. If Christ is not alive, we are of all people to be pitied. His living breath is on this place and in this room.

Jesus Himself, stepped down into the shiva moments of this church as He stepped into the disciples shiva. He declared Himself to be alive. He claimed that He was

and is the Resurrection and the Life. When the disciples looked at the sorry tragic scene on Calvary, they may well have wondered “How on earth is that possible?” But, now they get it, now they get it. The promises of Life can be trusted. There is transformation, coming from not going inside ourselves, doing self counsel and therapy, but from looking outside ourselves and seeing this Jesus bloodied on a cross, dying in our place, broken that we might be fixed and seeing that One, triumph over the grave, and breathing new life into those who dream of the Kingdom of God with Him.

That’s the challenge! In a bit you will be invited to come forward and demonstrate that you can leave laments, griefs, sorrows, worries with God who records them, and you will be invited to take a white stone. This illustration that John uses in the Revelation comes from a practice in ancient Rome, where a panel of trial judges would render their verdict on an accused, casting their vote on guilt or innocence using a black stone for “guilty”, a white stone for “innocent”. The stones would then be counted, and there was more white than black, the accused would go free. White stones are a declaration of innocence. John, urges us to persevere in our life of faith, striving to model the life of Christ in holiness. So, today this white stone is your token of your status before God, because of Christ, and your call to persevere in the mission and ministry of the Kingdom of God in this place.