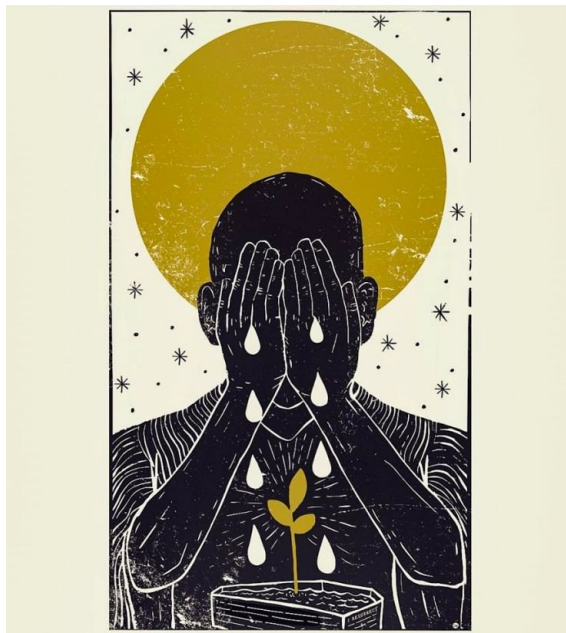


**Second Congregational Church in Newcastle, United Church of Christ
Newcastle, Maine**

**The Fourth Sunday After Pentecost
Online Worship – June 28, 2020
10:00 AM**



Scott Erickson (American, 1977–),
The Sorrowful Saint, 2016¹

INVITATION

Welcome to Virtual Worship with the community of Second Congregational Church in Newcastle, United Church of Christ in Newcastle, Maine. From our various spaces, on our various devices, we enter sacred time together. No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here. God meets us everywhere and in all our humanness. Be here in this sacred moment. God is with you. God is with us. May this worship of saints be blessed, be nourishing, be comforting, be church.

PREPARING FOR WORSHIP:

As we gather, please be sure that your device (computer, phone or tablet) is in the mute mode to avoid feedback and background noise. You are encouraged to use the “chat” or “comment” features to offer prayer requests at any time during the service.

Before the time of the service you may want to prepare a simple worship space. Perhaps you can light a candle or have a Bible with you or set in place some other symbol of faith that brings you comfort. Perhaps an outdoor element – a flower, leaf or branch - helps you to spiritually focus. Perhaps you would like to include the photograph of someone you wish to bring into the circle of faith. Whatever it is, follow your heart.

¹ This image by American artist Scott Erickson showed up on my Facebook feed, with the caption “*If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it,*” (1 Cor. 12:26). Erickson painted the image in July 2016 in response to the fatal shootings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile. It suggests that tears of grief can be generative, that new life can rise out of death. That’s not at all to say that death is good because it catalyzes a movement of change, but that our mourning the evils of racism and murder, our publicly crying out “Enough!,” is not fruitless, though it often seems so. Growth, hope and healing will come. Erickson is an artist in Washington State. He has collaborated with a number of non-profits including WorldVision and International Justice Mission and was a 3-year Artist in Residency with Ecclesia Church in Houston, TX (2009-2012).

*Thank you for your preparation.
Let us now be present to the Spirit
which brings us together and loves us where we are!*

+ + + + +

GATHERING MUSIC

Jane Wilmot, Minister of Music

Link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/19aXkkJOGzSKFJFIjadw26HAQGntkcKzs/view?usp=sharing>

WELCOME & CENTERING MOMENT

CALL TO WORSHIP: Words by Abraham Heschel:² *(said aloud together but muted):*

**“Prayer invites God to be present in our spirits and in our lives.
Prayer cannot bring water to parched land,
nor mend a broken bridge,
nor rebuild a ruined city.
But prayer can water an arid soul,
mend a broken heart,
and rebuild a weakened will.”
Let us lift our hands in prayer
and open our hearts to God
as we pray and worship this morning!**

OPENING HYMN “Awake, Awake, To Love and Work” Morning Song *(Next Page)*
(Music is pre-recorded by Jane Wilmot. Singing is Jim O’Brien. We will remain muted to avoid audio feedback and lags. Please sing aloud at home or follow along as best as you are able. Remember, it’s our spiritual intention that matters!).

PRAYER OF COMMUNAL LAMENTATION (Psalm 74 adapted)³:

(said out loud together but muted):

**O God, why have you withdrawn from us?
Where have you gone? Are you still here?
Are you angry with us all?
Did we do something wrong?
You have been present in our hearts
which are now filled with ruins all around us —
Angers, fears, doubts, griefs, resentments.
The world, which once glimpsed your peace, is a mess.
How long will you leave us like this?
No one knows.
Why have you drawn away?
Why do you hold back from us?**

**You are our God,
Creation’s salvation from the very beginning.
Yours is the day, yours also is the night.
You established the moon and the sun.**

² Call to Worship is a quote from Abraham Joshua Heschel, as offered on page 453 of the hymnal, *Hymns of Truth and Light*, 1988, First Congregational Church of Houston, TX.

³ Prayer of Communal Lamentation and Words of Assurance are liturgy created and/or adapted by Rev. Char Corbett.

You fixed all the boundaries of the earth.
 You made both the summer and the winter.
 And a time and a season for everything,
 even our angers, fears, doubts, griefs and resentments.
 O God, remember us. Have mercy on us.
 Rise upon us once again
 and regard us with your favor.

Awake, Awake to Love and Work

1. A - wake, a - wake to love and work! The lark is in the sky;
 2. Come, let thy voice be one with theirs, shout with their shout of praise;
 3. To give and give, and give a - gain, what God hath giv - en thee;

the fields are wet with dia - mond dew; the worlds a - wake to cry
 see how the gi - ant sun soars up, great Lord of years and days!
 to spread thy-self nor count the cost; to serve right glo - rious - ly

their bless - ings on the Lord of life, as he goes meek - ly by.
 So let the love of Je - sus come and set thy soul a - blaze.
 the God who gave all worlds that are, and all that are to be.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (said out loud together but muted):

(Second Church follows the version of the Lord's Prayer that is offered below. However, you are invited to say this prayer aloud in the tradition that brings you the most comfort: debt/debtors; sins/sin; trespasses/trespass).

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE (Pastor Char):

The mercy of God is from everlasting to everlasting. God, whose Spirit is forever present in this world and the next, forgives us our sins and strengthens us in all goodness by the grace of Jesus Christ. May we share this Good News of peace and healing today and every day. Amen.

SCRIPTURE: Selected verses, Lamentations 1 & 2 (NRSV) Reader: Robert Breckenridge

(The readings selected from Lamentations 1 & 2 are set in table format, not for comparison, but to save space. The selection offered is for those who have been studying. **This morning's reading is highlighted in bold**).

<p>Lamentations 1:9b; 11b-22 (Daughter Zion)</p> <p>9^b "O LORD, look at my affliction, for the enemy has triumphed!"</p> <p>11^b Look, O LORD, and see how worthless I have become.</p> <p>12 Is it nothing to you, ^[b] all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the LORD inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.</p> <p>13 From on high he sent fire; it went deep into my bones; he spread a net for my feet; he turned me back; he has left me stunned, faint all day long.</p> <p>14 My transgressions were bound ^[c] into a yoke; by his hand they were fastened together; they weigh on my neck, sapping my strength; the Lord handed me over to those whom I cannot withstand.</p> <p>15 The LORD has rejected all my warriors in the midst of me; he proclaimed a time against me to crush my young men;</p>	<p>Lamentations 2:10-15; 18-19 (Funeral Singer)</p> <p>10 The elders of daughter Zion sit on the ground in silence; they have thrown dust on their heads and put on sackcloth; the young girls of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground.</p> <p>11 My eyes are spent with weeping; my stomach churns; my bile is poured out on the ground because of the destruction of my people, because infants and babes faint in the streets of the city.</p> <p>12 They cry to their mothers, "Where is bread and wine?" as they faint like the wounded in the streets of the city, as their life is poured out on their mothers' bosom.</p> <p>13 What can I say for you, to what compare you, O daughter Jerusalem? To what can I liken you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter Zion? For vast as the sea is your ruin; who can heal you?</p> <p>14 Your prophets have seen for you</p>
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the Lord has trodden as in a wine press
the virgin daughter Judah.

¹⁶ For these things I weep;
my eyes flow with tears;
for a comforter is far from me,
one to revive my courage;
my children are desolate,
for the enemy has prevailed.

¹⁷ Zion stretches out her hands,
but there is no one to comfort her;
the LORD has commanded against Jacob
that his neighbors should become his foes;
Jerusalem has become
a filthy thing among them.

¹⁸ The LORD is in the right,
for I have rebelled against his word;
but hear, all you peoples,
and behold my suffering;
my young women and young men
have gone into captivity.

¹⁹ I called to my lovers
but they deceived me;
my priests and elders
perished in the city
while seeking food
to revive their strength.

²⁰ See, O LORD, how distressed I am;
my stomach churns,
my heart is wrung within me,
because I have been very rebellious.
In the street the sword bereaves;
in the house it is like death.

²¹ They heard how I was groaning,
with no one to comfort me.
All my enemies heard of my trouble;
they are glad that you have done it.
Bring on the day you have announced,
and let them be as I am.

²² Let all their evil doing come before you;
and deal with them
as you have dealt with me
because of all my transgressions;
for my groans are many
and my heart is faint.

false and deceptive visions;
they have not exposed your iniquity
to restore your fortunes,
but have seen oracles for you
that are false and misleading.

¹⁵ All who pass along the way
clap their hands at you;
they hiss and wag their heads
at daughter Jerusalem;
“Is this the city that was called
the perfection of beauty,
the joy of all the earth?”

¹⁸ Cry aloud ^[b] to the Lord!
O wall of daughter Zion!
Let tears stream down like a torrent
day and night!
Give yourself no rest,
your eyes no respite!

¹⁹ Arise, cry out in the night,
at the beginning of the watches!
Pour out your heart like water
before the presence of the Lord!
Lift your hands to him
for the lives of your children,
who faint for hunger
at the head of every street.

Last week we concluded our two weeks of reflection on the book of Ecclesiastes, one of the five “forgotten books of the Bible” that we are considering as part of the summer series I’ve chosen. In full disclosure, I didn’t create this sermon series; I came across this suggested 10-week summer lectionary in mid-May when I was desperate to find or create summer worship that would speak to our unusual times. This series was offered by Rev. Robert Williamson, Jr., the pastor of the multi-denominational and building-less church, Mercy Community Church in Little Rock, Arkansas. Williamson is also the professor of Religious Studies at Hendrix College and he has based this series on the 2018 book he wrote, “*The Forgotten Books of the Bible: Recovering the Five Scrolls for Today.*”

In the Jewish tradition, the five books known as the Five Festival Scrolls (*Hamesh Megillot*), perform a central liturgical function, as the texts are associated with each of the annual major Jewish holidays: The Song of Songs is read during Passover; Ruth during Shavuot; Lamentations on Tisha B’av; Ecclesiastes during Sukkot; and Esther during the celebration of Purim. Together with the five books of the Torah/Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), these “festival texts” or “scrolls” orient Jewish life and provide the language for faith, particularly during trying times.

In the Christian faith however, these books have largely been forgotten and are rarely preached on or offered as the subject of Bible studies. Yet I believe these relatively short but overlooked biblical texts deserve so much more attention. They address difficult, universal and timeless human matters that, well, really matter to us. These include the complex human issues we are all culturally, communally or perhaps even personally struggling with this very summer: grief, existential despair, hopelessness, the spiritual and emotional consequences of violence, sexual identity, class, race and ethnicity, suffering, doubt and protest.

Our brief two-week look at Ecclesiastes helped us to consider the meaning of life, living purposefully in every season that life brings our way and the importance of living in the moment and seeking joy, even when life seems to be chaotic and out of control. We can find encouragement and, oddly enough, even comfort in this strange little book.

Today, we move on to consider an even harder and more disturbing text, the Book of Lamentations. Although mostly set in a structured, rhythmic and poetic meter known as an alphabetical acrostic (using the Hebrew alphabet), this five-chapter book is not for the faint of heart. The author (or authors) of this ancient text are grappling with the lived and gruesome reality of the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and its first temple by the Babylonian Empire.

The city, God's chosen city known as the Daughter of Zion, was destroyed in 586 B.C.E. by the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar. All the Jewish people were either slaughtered, enslaved or sent into exile. The few who remained were left essentially to die or to scrape together some semblance of existence. Believing they and their city had been chosen and protected by God since the time of Abraham, the devastation of Jerusalem scattered and shattered the community and threw the Jewish people into theological and spiritual chaos. Believing they were being punished, they wondered if God was angry with them and unforgiving. They lamented that in God's wrath and anger, their punishment and extreme suffering felt grossly unfair. Additionally, they protested against not only their Babylonian enemies, but also their political allies who abruptly deserted them during and after the war. Ultimately however, it was God they protested most against for what they perceived and experienced as God's cruel and unjustified treatment.

One of the helpful ways that Rev. Williamson breaks down these five chapters for deeper reflection is by suggesting we hear the five different voices that are represented in the poem, roughly a chapter each: Chapters 1 and 2, which we'll focus on today are the back and forth voices of the narrator, or more accurately, a male Funeral Singer and the personified city, a female, the Daughter of Zion. The following chapters are then characterized respectively as The Strong Man (Chapter 3), the Scoffer (Chapter 4) and the Community Voice (Chapter 5), which we'll get into more of next week.

With all that important background, let's jump prayerfully into our scripture text this week, focusing primarily on communal grief.

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Something deep and groaning happens when a city or community experiences a tragedy, whether it is the aftereffects from an act of mass violence, a major weather event, a painful breach of trust between groups, agencies or neighborhoods or some other catastrophic moment that has rippling effects upon a community. The community's collective memory in relationship to this painful event is recalled in such a way that it only takes a single word to conjure up the feelings and grief that everyone experienced. After living most of my life in Connecticut, I still feel this power of collective memory whenever someone says, "Newtown" or "Sandy Hook." As my pastor friend, Rev. Liz Miller says, "In the moment those words are said aloud, everything becomes still, for a long agonizing second. These are events so powerful and wide sweeping that a single word can collapse time and transport us somewhere else."

Much like those trigger words for Connecticut residents, I think the words that would have triggered the early listeners of Lamentations might have been “Jerusalem” or “Solomon’s Temple” or “Babylonians.”

The poet of Lamentations captures the collective memory of a people in grief, pouring out their pain and sorrow at the violence they have experienced, the despair they feel for their future and the intolerable anguish resonating over their lost spiritual identity and political dignity.

The images and words from Lamentations invite the listener into the experience of communal grief as expressed by the distraught Daughter Zion. These poetic words were not written to be kept at home in a journal, safely hidden away. No, this poem was written so that it might be read aloud to the crowds in the street, much like the town crier shouting out the daily news. This poem was written to give voice to the pain and the grief the people of Jerusalem lived with in the aftermath of Jerusalem’s destruction. The city’s demise and the ruins of Solomon’s holy temple broke them and shaped their every movement, emotion and decision.

Why tell this story? Why remember the violence and pain? Why recall the deaths and exile, the life they could never return to? The author of Lamentations did what most poets and artists do – use compelling words and images to express the common grief that is felt and to connect people in our individual emotions and pain. The intent of the artist is to draw us together into a common story so we might recognize a mutual, larger experience and move from isolation to comfort and perhaps one day arrive at hope and healing.

In the church we often hear that we don’t know how to grieve anymore, or that we don’t give enough time and space for it. And isn’t it true, for you and for me, that given the opportunity, we will gladly turn away from grief and toward something more uplifting?

When we don’t know to how to carry our grief over communal tragedies and events, It is often our poets, artists, musicians and even cooks that help us process what we have experienced. Connecting is what helps us turn our grief from a private mourning to a publicly shared experience, and in doing so helps us move through it. The pain is still overwhelming and all-consuming, but we can see that we aren’t in it alone.

Perhaps this is why the communal grief we are all experiencing over Covid-19 and the deaths of so many people is so challenging, because we aren’t able to get together in traditional, ritualized ways like worship and memorial services in order to share and to grieve.

It's why we must particularly look out for those who can't connect in new ways because they can't access the technology that is required.

Yet again, I have to wonder: has the isolation of Covid-19 given us an unexpected gift: the time and the space for us to sit with our communal pain and grieve it? Especially when it comes to the global events of the last few weeks surrounding Black Lives Matter or the complexity of urban violence in places like Chicago. We're stuck sitting with it and listening to it, unable to busy ourselves like usual. We may be uncertain of how to grieve and we all grieve differently. But it needs to be done, and communal grief takes unlimited forms. For some it means taking to the streets or standing at Veteran's Park with People United Against Racism in protest - shouting our grief in chants and listening to speakers lament injustice and inequality. For other folks, their spiritual gravitation is toward quiet prayer, space to share fears and sorrows, to ground laments in prayer and contemplation. Candles are lit to remind us that there is still light in the world amidst all the pain. And there are others still who head to the woods for group hikes or paddle straight for the ponds or the ocean, the vastness and beauty of water helping us to soak in and then wash away the grief from our hearts and bodies.

Sometimes there is weeping. Sometimes there is rage. Sometimes there is kneeling or lying down. Sometimes there is silence.

One of the aspects of communal grief that is captured in Lamentation is the relationship between the five grievors and God. The funeral singer starts off, judging the Daughter Zion and ridiculing her demise and her new low status of filth. In Chapter 1, the Funeral Singer is almost haughty in their religious self-righteousness. Yet twice, in verses 1:9 and 1:11, the personified Daughter Zion interrupts the narrator-funeral singer, set upon making God and the Funeral Singer to look and SEE the suffering the community is enduring.

*1:9^b "O LORD, look at my affliction,
for the enemy has triumphed!"*

*11^b Look, O LORD, and see
how worthless I have become.*

*12 Is it nothing to you, ^[b] all you who pass by?
Look and see
if there is any sorrow like my sorrow,
which was brought upon me,
which the LORD inflicted
on the day of his fierce anger.*

We hear here the fragility of human dignity and we are made to acknowledge that the power of one's spoken truth will stand forever. It is easier to look away than to sit with what it means that people can be made to suffer. What does it mean that humans can do such things to other humans? What does it mean that God will act in anger?

It's only when the Funeral Singer hears this truth from the Daughter of Zion that he has a change of heart. The Singer and God even, are made to listen and to see Zion's pain. There's no fixing what has been done. It's done. But the singer's religious rigidity is softened by Zion's loud and truthful lament. And although we are left never knowing if the Daughter of Zion eventually finds hope in God or others, and we are left never knowing if the Funeral Singer ever extended their hand as a full and true ally, we do know that their relationships with one another are forever entwined in that communal moment and collective memory.

There will never be an end to the situations or experiences that send us into private or communal grief. It's the way of human life, I guess. I don't know that expecting an end to grief will do us much good.

What does do us good is the reminder that we are not alone. The Funeral Singer and the Daughter of Zion show us the way to listen and be present to grief: our grief and the grief of others. And as often as we encounter violence, pain and loss, or as we witness the violence, pain and loss of our neighbors, may we also encounter those who travel the journey of grief alongside us, listening and bringing words, art and rituals to embody our emotions. In doing such healing work together, we can tend to the grief that dwells within us, confident that God will be right there, faithful and steadfast forever and ever. Amen.

MUSIC

"My Way's Cloudy"

arr. Harry Burleigh

Soloist: Jim O'Brien

Link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/17c_z69Z31Sjn8RCldnXv4ULS1qmS4i8B/view?usp=sharing

SILENT PRAYERS AND PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

[NOTE: You are invited to type your prayer requests in the "Chat" or "Comment" features of your online device or to name those you pray for aloud in your own sacred space. PLEASE BE PRUDENT and do not share last names or specific, sensitive information on on-line platforms, as we can unknowingly increase an individual's vulnerability in our stated care].

*****NOTE:** Today, we begin our time of prayer with two minutes of silence, sharing with God in this sacred space our prayers of lament, grief, despair, anger and frustrations as well as our joys and blessings if we are so moved. Pastor Char will then offer the prayers of our community from the week and those offered through Comments or Chat. *******

BLESSING OF GIFTS RECEIVED AND GIVEN⁴ (Pastor Char):

Let us take this moment to reflect on the tangible and intangible gifts we have received from God and others this week and the ways in which we have shared our gifts of love, support, care, time and resources with others... (Silent Reflection).

Church members, friends and visitors are invited to continue their pledges or to give freely to Second Church's ministries by going to our website, www.secondcongo.org and making a donation through Givelify or Pay Pal. Checks payable to Second Congregational Church can also be mailed to Second Congregational Church UCC, PO Box 243, Newcastle, ME 04553.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING: (Said out loud together, but muted):

Gracious God, you have given us so much more than we could ever hope for or deserve. As your servants, may we be obedient to your call to be generous, following your example. May the gifts from our own lives help others to know they too are loved beyond measure. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

“Wait for the Lord”

Taize (NEXT PAGE)

(Music is pre-recorded by Jane Wilmot. Singing is Jim O'Brien. We will remain muted to avoid audio feedback and lags. Please sing aloud at home or follow along as best as you are able. Remember, it's our spiritual intention that matters!).

LINK: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FgQr4HzV2hCVPA4qQJlrTu4VZRX1_fW/view?usp=sharing

BENEDICTION⁵

As we conclude this time of worship and prayer,

we know that always, God goes with us:

through the presence of the Spirit and the presence of one another.

Hear these words of blessing:

May the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now and forever. Amen.

⁴ Prayer of Blessings and Thanksgiving have been written by Rev. Char Corbett, 6/23/2020.

⁵ Prayer written by Rev. Sarah Van Zetten-Bruins, “Service of Lament Liturgy,” at <https://www.faithward.org/service-of-lament-liturgy/>. Visited on 6/23/2020.

Wait for the Lord

The image shows a musical score for the hymn 'Wait for the Lord'. It consists of two systems of music. Each system has a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a piano accompaniment line on a bass clef staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are: 'Wait for the Lord, whose day is near.' and 'Wait for the Lord: be strong, take heart!'. The piano accompaniment features chords and moving lines in the left hand.

Text: Isaiah 40, Philippians 4, Matthew 6-7; Taizé Community, 1984
Tune: Jacques Berthier, 1923-1994
© 1984, Les Presses de Taizé, GIA Publications, Inc., agent

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VIRTUAL COFFEE HOUR CHECK IN (ZOOM ONLY)

* * * * *

Today's Worship has been prepared, sent out, offered and led by:

- ▶ **Bill Bausch**, Communications & Technology Support; Snippets Meister
- ▶ **Robert Breckenridge**, Scripture Reader (all the way from Peru!)
- ▶ **Rev. Char Corbett**, Pastor
- ▶ **Jim Corbett**, Videographer, Zoom and Facebook Live Host
- ▶ **Katie Corbett**, Floral Arrangement from the Corbett Gardens
- ▶ **Jim O'Brien**, Soloist
- ▶ **Jane Wilmot**, Minister of Music