

*Based on \*Psalm 130. The Pilgrim Laments and Finds a Deeper Union with The Divine*

*\*Incarnational translation of Psalm 130 below.*

My mother's death was beautiful. So said a dear friend of mine when I asked her how death of her mother had affected her life.

The room was decorated for Christmas. With white Christmas tree lights glowing in every direction. Candles burning brightly through the winter darkness. Tinsel sparkling with delight from the windows. A bowl of warm ginger water and a vat of lotion mixed with lavender oil sitting at her mother's bedside. Ready to bathe and anoint her body upon her death. Which is exactly what my friend and her sister-in law and her niece did. Led by a hospice caregiver who was very much with child.

The combination of their bathed and oiled palms massaging her mother's bathed and oiled body settled them all into a peace that passes understanding. Every stroke of their gentle, firm hands overlapping one another in a gift of unqualified grace.

Another friend offered hymns in the background. Her still, small angelic voice singing one life into being through the pregnant woman's womb. And one life into ending through my friend's mother's death. And all life into being again and again and again in an embrace of a moment the mystics call "the eternal now" and what I would call "the fullness of time."

If we have to die, which we really do not want to do, but we really do have to do, someday, hopefully far away, this is how we want it to be, right? At the end of a long and well-lived life. With the baptismal covenant re-enacted in its purest form. And a thousand angels singing us through the suffocating darkness of what we will never fully comprehend, into the everlasting light of the steadfast, persistent, never-ending *hesed* love of God. Bathed in the font of our identity flowing forever in oil and water and tears and laughter.

This is how we want it to be. If it really does have to be.

And, of course, it does.

But it does *not* have to be like this: with a delta variant on the rise as intentional disinformation dampens demand for a vaccine the rest of the world is literally dying for.

It does *not* have to be like this: with a violent insurrection resulting in now three deaths by suicide among the valiant officers who held the line long enough to save our democracy.

It does *not* have to be like this: with wildfires raging in the Pacific Northwest and new research indicating an "almost complete loss of stability" in the Atlantic Ocean currents that maintain the climate of Europe and North America.

In response to *this* reality of mortality, the youth of America cry out: “cancel my subscription!”

And they are right! We must join her in her crying out “from within the suffocating darkness of what we will *never* comprehend.” Joining, too, with the psalmist in pleading with God to listen. Speaking, perhaps, the truth of our deepest fear: *Are* you listening, God? Do you care? Do you have ears to hear? Are you there?

The thing about the psalms is they do not gloss over the depth of human lament with mere platitudes about God and greatness and grace. They tell it like it is. As we must. That this virus, this body politic, this climate crisis *hurts!*

That it leaves us aching for that ever-eluding vision of wholeness and hope that flows from our baptismal covenant. The one we glimpse for brief moments in stories like my friend’s mother but that far too easily fades when we face the fear that comes in violence and the too-soon taking of a living, breathing presence in our midst.

And so we plead with God to listen. To hear. To care.

And God does!

With a reminder that our baptism into grace asks something of *us* in return, as well. And it is time for us to take heed of that call.

In the days of the early church, confirmands into the faith of Christ committed themselves to a rigorous process of preparation for a life of non-violence. Of stripping away the anger and the indignity and the aggression that was deep within them. Of refusing to return evil for evil but to respond to evil with grace, the way Jesus did.

This is the call to each of us today. Re-affirming our baptismal covenant and the grace it proclaims. But also re-affirming the commitment we make in return to keep on stripping away the anger and indignity and aggression that continues deep within us. And prepare ourselves over and over and over again for the non-violent gift of grace we are meant to become in Christ.

It is harder than we wish it were, or we would not be here today crying out in anguish again and again and again, right along with the Psalmist. It helps no one to gloss over the very real rage we carry from whatever wounds the violence of this world has inflicted on us and those we love.

Instead, we pray psalm 130 to its fullest: naming the anger, and the hurt, and the hope. *Making Space for Lament*, as the psalmist does. Singing through it, as the psalmist does. Crying out to God. Crying out to community. Calling forth an active, listening, truthful response that every one of us needs to hear, as the psalmist does:

Which is that none of us can stand if God is keeping track of transgressions. Not one. That the pain we receive becomes the pain we inflict, if we are not careful. Whether it is intentional, or whether it happens without our knowing.

So what are we to do?

A generalized search on Amazon.com reveals over 40,000 *religious* titles on the topic of anger. We could read our way into wholeness and hope and healing.

But I think ritual matters more.

In the end, it is just not possible to *reason* our way to the grace of God. We have to practice the intimate, dialogical relationship the psalmist describes.

Which is what the ritual of Sunday morning worship is really all about:

Grounding ourselves over and over again in the glow of the “eternal now” we claim in our baptism. Praying for deliverance not just from the suffering itself but also from the senselessness of so much of it. Calling forth a new reality with God and each other in the shared memory-vision of a room filled with candlelight and oil and the healing touch of two mothers giving birth to the grace that will always meet our grief.

In union with the God who really does choose to persevere with us by transforming our honest, angry, grief-filled lament into expectant, confident, defiant-against-despair hope ... through a steadfast, persistent, NEVER-ENDING LOVE beyond anything we can possibly know with our minds.

Which, if we think about it, really *is* how we want it to be.

Let the church say, Amen!

Psalm 130

(a song of rising)

From within the suffocating darkness  
of what I will never comprehend  
I cry out to you, Holy One

—You who exist eternally—

I plead with you:

*Hear my voice!*

*Force your ears to listen,*

*to respond to the sound of my pleas!*

But if you kept track of transgressions, Holy One, who would stand?

With you there is forgiveness ...

... in order to inspire reverence.

With my whole being I ache for your ever-eluding vision,  
like those who watch for the morning,  
even more than those who watch for the morning.

Await the Holy One, all you people with whom God perseveres—  
wait expectantly, confidently, defiant against despair—

Because union with the Eternal Existence is “*hesed*”:  
a steadfast, persistent, NEVER-ENDING LOVE  
beyond anything we can possibly know with our minds.

And union with God is an exponentially-increasing  
and ultimately everlasting  
repayment of our crushing debt  
in this world and the next.

And God will repay the debt for all of our transgressions,  
because we are the people with whom God chooses to persevere.