

Midweek Responsive Prayer
“Weeping Waters”
March 25, 2020

The Rev. Lois K. Van Orden, Interim Pastor
Zion Lutheran Church, Hummelstown, PA

OPENING COMMENTS

Welcome to “The Word of God from my home to yours.”

As you can see, we are not in my home for this midweek Lenten service. We are in Loyalsock State Forest at Dry Run Falls. I’ll say more about this excursion in my message for today.

We continue our on-line offerings of midweek Lenten and Sunday worship services during this time of social distancing and separation to prevent the spread of the Corona Virus.

I am Lois Van Orden, serving as the interim pastor for Zion Lutheran Church in Hummelstown, Pennsylvania.

I trust that you will find this prayer service uplifting and nurturing for your spiritual life, especially against this backdrop of God’s beautiful creation.

For this service, I thank my family, my husband Dean and adult children Philip and Elizabeth, for their “behind the scenes” support with set-up and recording. I am also thankful for the technical skills of Tim Bastian who provided step-by-step directions for posting these recordings to the church website and Facebook pages.

Please let us know that you listened to this worship service by either calling or sending an email to the church office at zluthoffice@gmail.com. We’re track attendance for our records.

One more reminder before we begin. Please remember that the mission of your church continues through this time of trial, this on-line worship service being one way that we are reaching out to you, so please, send your offerings to the church for local and world-wide mission support.

Let us now turn our hearts and minds to responsive prayer.

OPENING DIALOGUE

P: Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal.

C: have mercy on us.

APOSTLE'S CREED

P: With the whole church, let us confess our faith.

**C: I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

P: Show us your mercy, O God,

C: and grant us your salvation.

P: Give us the joy of your saving help again,

C: and sustain us with your bountiful Spirit.

P: Give peace in all the world;

C: for only in you can we live in safety.

P: Keep the nations under your care,

C: and guide us in the way of justice and truth.

P: Let your way be known upon earth;

C: your saving health among all nations.

P: Let not the needy be forgotten,

C: nor the hope of the poor be taken away.

P: Create in me a clean heart, O God,

C: and sustain me with your Holy Spirit.

P: Lord, hear my prayer,
C: and let my cry come before you.

P: The Lord be with you.
C: and also with you.

***THE PRAYER OF THE DAY**

PSALM 137

P: Let us pray. God of courage and compassion, comfort the exiled and oppressed, strengthen the faith of your people, and bring us all to our true home, the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalm 137

¹By the rivers of Babylon— there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion.

²On the willows there we hung up our harps.

³For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

⁴How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?

⁵If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!

⁶Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

⁷Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem’s fall, how they said, “Tear it down! Tear it down! Down to its foundations!”

⁸O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us!

⁹Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!

HOMILY

“Weeping Waters”

The Rev. Lois K. Van Orden

Water Passages “Weeping Waters”



The midweek Lenten theme of Water Passages continues today with the topic, “Weeping Waters.” My search for water falls that look like weeping waters identified Hawaii as the best sites, but given our current travel restrictions, my family and I ventured to Dry Run Falls in Loyalsock State Forest in Sullivan County, Pennsylvania. This little adventure got us out of the house while honoring social distancing. The water that pours over the rocks gives the appearance of tears.

In my humble opinion, the psalm that we read this week is one of the most mournful lament psalms in scripture – and yet, it is filled with beautiful imagery. Generally speaking, the psalms of communal lament express deep sorrow for the labors and struggles of a nation, asking for God’s blessing or intervention. If there is a time in our world to turn to the psalms of lament, it is now, in the midst of this contagious illness we call the Corona Virus.

The backdrop for the words of Psalm 137 is exile. The people of Israel saw their nation and holy temple destroyed by the Babylonians. Three waves of deportations to Babylon are dated to 605, 597 and 587/586 BCE. The prophet Jeremiah, who we learned about last week when he was thrown into a muddy cistern, witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of his people. He escaped to Egypt. This particular psalm was probably written toward the end of Babylonian exile, when the people saw that Babylon was to be destroyed by the invasion of Persian Emperor Cyrus. Once this happened, the people of Israel were set free by the Decree of Cyrus in the year 536 BCE.

Each of the opening verses express the sorrow that the captives feel.¹ They are captive in a strange land, far from their homeland. Their captors assigned them to living space by the rivers of Babylon. If they must build house there, it shall not be in the cities, the places of commerce, but by the

¹ They cannot enjoy themselves (v. 1-2). They cannot humor their proud oppressors (v. 3-4). They cannot forget Jerusalem (v. 5-6). They cannot forgive the nations of Edom and Babylon (v. 7-9).

rivers, the places of solitude, where they might mingle their tears with the streams. The prophet Jeremiah had taught, that under this yoke, they are to sit alone, and keep silent, and put their mouths in the dust. (Lam 3:28-29) Thoughts of their beloved homeland, called Zion, drew tears from their eyes. These tears were not a sudden outpouring of weeping, but these were tears of affection for God's house which swallowed up their concern for their own houses. They remembered Zion's former glory and the joy of being in the courts of the Temple. Even the musical instruments that they played for their own worship and entertainment were laid aside. It was their judgment that they should not use them now that God called them to weeping and mourning. With such sad hearts, they had no spirit to use them. But the harps were not destroyed; they were hung in plain view, that the sight of them would give them hope in these deplorable conditions. All they can do is to offer expressions of sorrow for all that has happened and trust that God will deliver them from bondage once again, as God had delivered them from the taskmasters of Egypt.

We know the depth of such sorrow in this journey of life. Such sorrow and heavy hearts and shedding of tears comes with the death of a loved one, the news of a terminal illness for which nothing more can be done, the loss of a job within a few years of retirement, the end of a marriage, or the sudden change in physical mobility caused by an accident or injury of war.

With the deaths from the Corona Virus, there are many people in our world who are weeping, who cannot forget the joy of recent days when their loved one was healthy and happy, who are searching for answers to a multitude of "why" questions. We read about unbearable tragedies such as the family of 7 who became ill after eating at a New Jersey restaurant, followed by the disease claiming 4 lives. There are the stories of widespread death in Italy where the disease spread quickly, resulting in a travel ban that eventually spread to Europe and the world. We mourn for those who mourn. We weep for those who weep. We bear the burden of sorrow with the world in this time of quarantine.

In my search for resources to help people in times of grief, I stumbled upon a book titled, *Tear Soup* by Pat Schwiebert and Chuck DeKlyen with beautiful illustrations by Taylor Bills. The story is about Grandy who suffered a great loss in her life and how she faced her loss by setting out to make tear soup. The story ends with her grandson recognizing the breadth

and depth of her wisdom and so he asks, “what will I do after you die?” And she replies, “Don’t worry. I’ll leave you my recipe for tear soup.”

We have a recipe for tear soup that has been handed down to us. Like the people of Israel, we live by faith in God. We trust that by the grace of God, the Lord will pull us out of our time of weeping, that conditions will change, that freedom to live anew will be ours once again.

The lament psalms of the Bible are one of the recipes for us to express our sorrow, to weep with the psalmist, to acknowledge the sins and destruction of the nations, and to be assured of the presence of God who comes to the waters, where our tears are mingled with other threads of our lives, to save us time and time again.

Our Lenten journey may take us to water passages where we contemplate our relationship with God. We may find ourselves weeping for the sins we have committed, for the separation from God that we have allowed to continue because of our arrogance and pride, for the wrongful ways that we have treated others, for the failure to reconcile with our brothers and sisters in Christ. But there are other waters that are not mingled with tears of sorrow. These are the baptismal waters of God’s love, where the promise of forgiveness and the hope of new life are given to us by the grace of God. We cannot do anything to earn these gifts of life. But God calls us to stay steadfast in our faith and that God will journey with us through challenging times marked by weeping waters. And then, like Mary Magdalene and the disciples, our tears will be turned to joy as we rejoice in seeing the risen Christ, who stands before us as one who wept at the death of his friend Lazarus and in the garden before his death, but who lives anew and who promises us this same gift of new life. Amen.

***PRAYERS**

Church leaders: Triune God, our creator, redeemer and sustainer, strengthen and sustain all of your servants of the church, that pastors, diaconal ministers, and lay leaders may love and care for your people with patience and understanding, especially in this time of trial for our world. Grant that together they may follow in the way of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer: God our provider, you have not fed us with bread alone, but with words of grace and life. Bless us and the gifts of your people, which we receive from your bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

General/Sick: Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work or watch or weep, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, especially those struggling with the Corona virus, give rest to the weary, remembering all health care workers, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, comfort the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Time of conflict, crisis, disaster: O God, where hearts are fearful and confined, grant courage and hope. Where anxiety is growing and widening, grant peace and reassurance. Where impossibilities close every door and window, grant imagination and resistance. Where distrust twists our thinking, grant healing and illumination. Where spirits are daunted and weakened, grant soaring wings and strengthened dreams. All these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Final Petition:

P: O God, in you we live and move and have our being. Guide and govern us in this day by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but remember that always we are walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C: Amen.

***THE LORD'S PRAYER**

P: Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

**C: 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 trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.**

***BLESSING**

L Let us bless the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

L Almighty God, the Father, † the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless us, defend us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

C Amen.