

The Broken Cup
Psalm 77
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
March 22, 2020
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In the midst of all that is different, it is still Lent. This season of reflection, of setting aside and taking on, of repenting and re-aligning our lives with God, this season continues, even as so many things have changed in our daily lives. And while many of us feel disrupted by the changes brought about by COVID-19, there are still gifts available for us in this time. And things like social distancing and quarantine may just create space for some of the reflection that this season is about.

Now, meanwhile, let's not pretend this is easy...on the contrary, it is difficult. So today we turn to another image of the cup – this week the broken cup – to see what wisdom it has for us. Because, after all, we know what it is to feel broken. Whether it is the brokenness of grief upon the death of a loved one, the brokenness of relationships ended too soon, the brokenness of depression or disaster or illness or financial hardship...brokenness is part of being human. And, in these days, we add the brokenness of being separated from each other, of being scared, of being uncertain about so many things.

Last week we talked about the chipped cup – about those chips and cracks in us, sometimes just parts of ourselves we aren't fond of, sometimes the chips and cracks resulting from our own sin.

This week as we turn to the broken cup we come face to face with those situations that are put upon us, sometimes hurts done to us by other people, sometimes hurts that have no real explanation. These are the things that no matter how good we are or how well we plan, just might happen anyway.

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A family is hit by a drunk driver on their way home from vacation. A seemingly healthy 30-year-old dies from cardiac arrest while playing basketball with friends. A tornado blows down a neighbor. An unfamiliar virus wreaks havoc on the world with fear and financial crisis, distancing and death.

So, what do we do with our brokenness? What do we do with God in the midst of it?

Our psalm today gives us a place to start. Psalm 77 is understood to be a prayer of deliverance from personal trouble. Here the psalmist, in the midst of their own pain, cries out to God. And part of the beauty of this psalm, like many others, is that the psalmist doesn't worry about being polite or choosing words carefully, but is simply honest.

The psalm begins, "I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, that he may hear me. In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted..."¹

Then the psalmist goes on later in the psalm, "'Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love ceased forever? Are his promises at an end for all time?'"²

And finally, the psalmist ends, not on a dismissive note acting as if the pain hasn't been real, but with a word of hope remembering God's faithfulness at other times, saying, "I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord; I will remember your wonders of old. I will meditate on all your work, and muse on your mighty deeds."³

This psalm gives us many beautiful reminders. First, it reminds us that God is listening and there is nothing in our lives – nothing about how we are feeling or what we are experiencing – from which we have to protect God.

¹ Psalm 77:1-2, NRSV.

² Psalm 77:7-8, NRSV.

³ Psalm 77:11-12, NRSV.

It also reminds us that it is not a sin to question God or to feel abandoned by God, but that God creates space for us to express whatever we are feeling. As I heard a person reflect recently on a painful time in their own life, they said, “God’s got broad shoulders and waited me out.” God will not abandon us even in times when we might feel like abandoning God.

This psalm also reminds us, that like in all of our relationships, sometimes we keep moving forward only because of the memory of what has been. Sometimes we hold on to hope not because of what we are feeling right now, but because we have had experiences of love and faithfulness in the past that will buoy us through.

Of course, in times of pain and brokenness, it is often asked, “Where is God?” And, as you all know well, there are many answers thrown around. Some say God isn’t – that God simply doesn’t exist or doesn’t care. Some say God is the cause of everything, every joy as well as heartache, predestining every happening. Some say pain and brokenness are acts of punishment from God.

Yet, as I read the scriptures and reflect on my own life of faith, I say that God is a companion in our pain and brokenness. Our Christian faith claims that in Jesus, God entered into humanity in a special way, and one of the implications of that is that God honors our human experience. God walks with us through the realities of the joys *and* sorrows of our life. God laughs with our delights and cries with our grief and pain. God is not a puppeteer directing every move, nor one who sits and waits to take vengeance on us whenever we mis-step.

Remember, this season of Lent moves us toward Easter. But we can’t forget the realities of Holy Week that get us there. So we remember the pain of Jesus as he was hung on the cross by people who couldn’t embrace his message of love, by people who wanted to hold on to their power and prestige more than they wanted to care for their neighbor. And when we read the stories of his crucifixion we hear Jesus cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken

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me?”⁴ And we are also told, in another gospel, that before his last breath he said, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”⁵

The psalmist knew it. Jesus knew it. And we are invited to know it as well...to know that God is with us in all times...to know that God can hear whatever honest cries we shout...to know that God is big enough to take our anger and questions and that God will always be ready for us to return even if we walk away...to know that God is offering love and hope and healing in the midst of it all.

What would happen if we embraced this idea? If rather than wondering what we did to cause God to visit grief or disease or anything else upon us, what if we simply looked around to discover that God was with us all along. What if we could see, as Mr. Rogers would say, the helpers and know that it was God’s love moving through them? What if we could offer ourselves and each other the same grace that God offers and not worry about being polite to God, but instead let ourselves be real with God so that God can be real to us? What if we allowed ourselves to be vulnerable with God and each other and in that vulnerability allowed healing movement to come?

Brokenness is part of life. It will happen and will happen again. And through it all God is present, offering healing and wholeness, mending our broken places, giving us life.

Amen.

⁴ Matthew 27:42b, NRSV.

⁵ Luke 23:46, NRSV.