



Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora  
October 1 2023 - Eighteenth Sunday after  
Pentecost  
Canon Paul Walker

When the installation of over 300 cloth feathers went up over the doorways of the church on Wednesday, there was a moment of recognition. We stood back to take it all in, and in so doing we couldn't help but pause to recognize the almost 5,000 documented children who did not return home from residential schools in Canada. But I also recognized that over 60 people participated in the creation of this public memorial. In so doing each of those people have had some opportunity to have conversation with one another and to pause for a moment to reflect on what reconciliation means at this time in our history. In seeing the feathers blow in the wind and hang down towards the ground, for me it expresses what many of us feel, a public lamentation.

Lamentation is not what our culture promotes, but curiously it is a common occurrence for the Hebrews.

“There by the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept, when we remembered you, O Zion. As for our harps, we hung them up on the trees in the midst of that land. For those who led us away captive asked us for a song, and our oppressors called for mirth: “Sing us one of the songs of Zion.” How shall we sing the Lord's song upon an alien soil?” (Psalm 137).

That is a classic. About 65 of the psalms are a lament - that's nearly half of all the psalms. No wonder the psalms are so central to worship - because the psalms are expressing a human experience that is so common and universal but is often unexpressed because we just don't know how to say it, let alone be in it.

Sometimes there is such an unspoken pressure to move on, that in the rush to find closure lament is often eclipsed. And no wonder, because lament is a hard thing to do. Lament is the grief of living with a memory of loss that we find ourselves complicit in. Lament does not engage in blaming others. Lament recognizes our own role and complicity in whatever the loss or abandonment may be. That's the truth telling.

Perhaps the other reason we don't do lament is that it is typically accompanied by a sense of our mortality, that all flesh is grass and there is an inherent fragility to life. It recognizes that there is a time laden quality to life; that everything we construct is vulnerable. But we don't need to approach this harsh reality with panic or lies or construct illusions of security or sentimentality. Lament is a sign of maturity and courage.

In the narrative arc of the scriptures, we don't stay in lamentation. There is a word of consolation that is spoken in the midst of the lamentation. “Comfort, O

comfort ye my people,” Isaiah cries from the desert. It is the sound of the trumpet resounding from the turret that calls those in exile to renew their strength, to mount up with wings as eagles, to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint.

Even in the face of loss and complicity, where the world is filled with violence and cruelty, where it is so easy to blame one another, there is a declaration that you are free. This is not just an arm over the shoulder kind of comfort, it is announcing a new creation of unimagined proportion. It is an invitation to see the rising of God’s glory in the world.

You remember after Jesus’ friends had all scattered, the resurrected Jesus, the new creation, the unimagined reality, comes in their midst and calls them out of their fears to gather together and do what they used to do. They do what any of our grandmothers used to do for us. They do what they did when they were last together. In the upper room, on the Emmaus Road, on the beach after they have fished all night and caught nothing, they do what they did when they were last all together: they break bread.

Because when they were last together and celebrated the Passover Festival they remembered and recalled the great exodus. They remembered their freedom from generations of slavery. And now, as they break bread together, even though they felt that they went down the wide road towards destruction, even though

they knew they were complicit in this horrific event of the crucifixion, they now find themselves at the end of the narrow road that leads to life. A door is opened for them that they barely had the resources to knock on.

All the old has gone and is thrown into the fire.

A good tree, the eternal tree of life, is now in their midst, offering them what it is only capable of offering: good fruit. This tree, the Incarnate One, is offering them what previously in the Garden of Eden they were forbidden to receive, and now they finally eat it.

You will know them by their fruit.

While the fruit of *our* labour will inevitably spoil, and while we offer a stone instead of bread, or a snake instead of a fish, God offers the fruit that will last, the well that will not run dry, and the bread that will be our life. For the leaves on this tree are, as St. John says, for the healing of the nations.

May we find ourselves refreshed and renewed as we feast on this bread and become re-membered, put back together, in a place where Abraham first had the vision to see: where every tribe, race and nation is reconciled and comes to feast at the banquet of the Lamb.