

Five Wounds
A Sermon for September 18, 2016
Jeremiah 8:18-9:1
[Lansdowne UMC](#)

Our first reading this morning was from the biblical book of Jeremiah. Now as many of you know, Jeremiah was a bullfrog. He was, actually, a good friend of mine. Now, I never understood a single word he said... but something something...dadada.... we'd sing joy to the world!.... Hmm. Well it would seem that that is not at all the same Jeremiah from our scripture. Rather than singing "Joy to the World," *this* Jeremiah's joy is gone and he's full of grief. He says, "my heart is sick."

Jeremiah has warned God's people that if they didn't start making some different decisions, they'd be bringing about their own destruction. People from the north were going to come in and destroy their city and deport them to some foreign country. And for Jeremiah, it has hit home that they're not going to change their ways.

And so Jeremiah mourns, just as God mourns. They've cried so hard that they've run out of tears. Has that ever happened to you? Jeremiah says, "If only my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears, I would weep day and night for the wounds of my people."

God sees their brokenness. God knows their hurt. God mourns that they follow after worthless things. They're sick, but they won't come and be healed. Yet somehow they still expect that their situation will just magically get better. They say, "The harvest is past, the summer has ended, yet we aren't saved."

We've spoken of Jeremiah's message to turn away from worshiping false God's. And in repenting, people would turn back to the ways of God. In chapter 7, verses 5-7 God says:

if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever.

Not only had Israel failed to be faithful to God as their only god, but they failed to be faithful to God's desires to look after the most vulnerable among them: the alien, the orphan, and the widow.

Meanwhile, Jeremiah's people are resting on their laurels, unchanged and unrepentant, wondering, "isn't God going to come save us? We thought God would have done it by now..."

And so Jeremiah just has to sit by and watch his people implode. Perhaps you've seen a situation like this happen in your own life—to a friend or family member.

When I was in college, I had a roommate in college who was very gifted. He was a stellar musician with perfect pitch, he aced the math portion of his SATs, and when it came to computers, he was great at everything surrounding them—the fastest typist I've ever known, great at building computers, great at programming them, and great at playing video games...

Well, at some point during our sophomore year he became completely obsessed with —addicted to, even— playing a particular video game

that was played in groups online. He was on several teams made up of people from all around the world, and he had regular practices with them at all hours. He would enter competitions. I think they might have won 50 bucks one time.

But it eventually became all he did besides eat and sleep. Sunrise and sunset didn't matter. He got himself on a 25 hour cycle. Every day he'd wake up an hour later than he got up the last day, first sleeping through the morning, then through lunch, then through dinner, then waking up when I went to bed.

Two things became clear to me about where this was going if he didn't make a change in his life:

1. Like a clock that runs fast, he would eventually go full circle and be on a normal schedule again, waking up at the same time as me.
2. he would eventually flunk out of school.

It just tore me up to see it happening, because I loved him as a friend. But he wouldn't listen to logic. With all his talent, I knew what he was capable of with a bit of discipline, but he was throwing it all away because he prioritized a video game above everything else. This video game had become his idol: the reason that he got up in the morning, and the thing into which he poured all of his time, talent, and devotion.

My roommate, like the people of Judah to whom Jeremiah writes, refused to see that their actions were hastening their own downfall. Although they understood the symptoms—their very livelihoods were threatened—they would not accept the voices of truth and reason in their lives that diagnosed the root problem and offered a cure.

I mourned that my roommate would flunk out of college. Jeremiah mourned the inevitable destruction of God's holy city and Temple, because these people would not change. They wouldn't turn away from the worthless idols and act justly... so they could never be the people that God had made them to be.

There could have been healing. God asks, "Is there no balm in Gilead?" Gilead was a region on the other side of the Jordan river from Jerusalem. And they were *known* for making healing ointments-- balms. So asking, "Is there no balm in Gilead?" is like asking, "Is there no ointment at Walgreens next door?" Or, "Can't you get Band-Aids at the CVS across the street?"

Of course you can! That's what they do... they have that stuff!
There is a cure, so why haven't the people been healed?! It's maddening! But it's also tragic.

And so Jeremiah's responds in the only faithful way that remains: he mourns. He cries until he has no more tears.

Do you mourn, my brothers and sisters? Do you ever look around and say, "it shouldn't have to be like that"? Sometimes there is something to be done, but every once in awhile, we just need to mourn.

The other night at the Lansdowne improvement association meeting, I learned that there have been 184 Fentanyl overdoses in Maryland this year. In just the past 3 years, there's been a 12-fold increase in deaths related to this drug that's 50-100 times more potent than heroin. It

shouldn't have to be like that. These lives have value and they shouldn't be thrown away after something worthless.

Customs and Border control, on average, has apprehended 4,800 children *a month* in the past year who are crossing the border unaccompanied. How bad would your homeland have to be for you to send your children somewhere by themselves? It shouldn't have to be like that. That's something worth mourning.

Why, every night, are there nearly 600,000 Americans that don't have a home to sleep in? It shouldn't have to be like that. The average life expectancy of an American is nearly 79 years. And yet the life expectancy of the homeless is estimated to be somewhere between 42 and 52. Every year on December 21, the longest night of the year, people from across the nation, including in Baltimore, gather for Homeless Person's Memorial Day.

When a homeless person dies, there isn't usually a memorial service. Sometimes the only people that know that the person died are other homeless people. In their lives, the homeless are forgotten by much of society. They have no one else to mourn them. We must mourn them. We must do more than mourn them, but we must mourn them.

Why are there nearly a Billion people in the world that don't have access to water that doesn't make them sick? It shouldn't have to be like that! God and Jeremiah weep *together* for the people in Jerusalem that they love. Jeremiah's tears mix with God's tears. And God loves every single person, without exception. God loves those who are addicted to heroin,

and wants them to be saved from their condition. God loves the children who illegally cross borders. God loves the homeless.

And God knows suffering. Did you know that Jesus was a homeless refugee? I was reminded of that while doing my daily reading in preparation for Tuesday night bible study. Joseph was warned in a dream to take his family and flee to Egypt, because Herod is hunting Jesus down to kill him. Jesus was a homeless refugee.

The image that the bible gives us of God is a very different image from the wrathful, gray-haired, grandfather-in-the-sky that I think many people imagine.

In Luke 19, we see the God that Bible presents us with: “As [Jesus] came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying “If you, even you had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!”

The Bible presents us with a God who weeps. God mourns when there is sickness, and hunger, and brokenness. God mourns when hearts get hardened and they aren't open to hearing God's voice. God knows where this leads.

What is our reaction to the plight of those whom God loves? Do we forget them? Do we despise them for who they are and what they represent? Or do we join God in weeping and mourning? When we face our city, Baltimore, do we mourn for it with love?

Sometimes mourning is all we can do. But that does not change the reality that there *is* balm in Gilead. There is healing to be found in Christ.

Our Gospel reading for today challenges us to be faithful in little things, so as to not be disqualified from true, eternal riches. Worldly wealth will eventually perish, we are told. So use it now in a meaningful way—maybe even in a way that has eternal significance. And showing the love of God always has eternal significance. We must be people who take God's healing, out to the refugee, the homeless, the hungry, the thirsty. There *is* balm in Gilead, and Christ has given us the healing ointment so that, having been healed ourselves, we can take the healing out to others.

Someone once told me a riddle: what is the only man-made thing in heaven? It'll hurt your brain if you think about it too hard—trust me.

When Jesus appears to his disciples after his resurrection, he is different. At first, his disciples don't recognize him, because he's been changed, somehow. But one of the ways that they eventually recognize him is that they see the signs of his crucifixion: his nail-pierced hands and feet, and his spear-pierced side.

Jesus was raised from the dead, still bearing the wounds of the world. And Jesus ascended into heaven and was seated at the Father's right hand, still wounded. The wounds of Jesus' continually witness to the love that God has for the whole human race. Jesus brings the wounds of the world into heaven, where he can continually intercede on our behalf for the pain and the suffering of the world.

Charles Wesley wrote a hymn called “Arise, My Soul, Arise.”
Unfortunately it’s not in our hymnal. One of the verses goes like this:

Five bleeding wounds He bears; received on Calvary;
They pour effectual prayers; they strongly plead for me:
“Forgive him, O forgive,” they cry,
“Forgive him, O forgive,” they cry,
“Nor let that ransomed sinner die!”

Christ’s wounds plead for you and for the world, so that you and the world might be healed.