



"Ours is not the struggle of one day, one week, or one year.
Ours is not the struggle of one judicial appointment or presidential term.
Ours is the struggle of a lifetime, or maybe even many lifetimes,
and each one of us in every generation must do our part."

— John Lewis in Across That Bridge: A Vision for Change and the Future of America

ORDER OF WORSHIP

"No Matter Who You Are
or Where You Are on Life's Journey,
You are Welcome Here"

*You and your household may want to have a candle and matches
ready to light during worship.*

PRELUDE: "Silver Rain" by Marianne Zimmerman Arr. Peter Amidon" *Patty Meyer*

WELCOME

SILENT MEDITATION and THE LIGHTING OF CANDLES

Please join by lighting a candle in your home

INTROIT:

"Elijah" by Bill Harley; arr. Peter Amidon; slide show by Bill Harley; sung by Louisa Sullivan Hungate, Lauren Breunig, Lynn Mahoney Rowan, Emma Schneider, Amelia Fontein, Suzannah Park, Emily Miller, Will Rowan, Rhys Glennon, Arthur Davis, Sam Amidon, Jeff Fellingner, Nathan Morrison, Gideon Crevoshay, Guillaume Sparrow-Pepin, Avery Book, and Stefan Amidon.

CALL TO WORSHIP: Psalm 119: 129-136

Your decrees are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them.
The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.
With open mouth I pant, because I long for your commandments.
Turn to me and be gracious to me,

as is your custom toward those who love your name.
Keep my steps steady according to your promise,
and never let iniquity have dominion over me.
Redeem me from human oppression, that I may keep your precepts.
Make your face shine upon your servant, and teach me your statutes.
My eyes shed streams of tears because your law is not kept.

OPENING HYMN#400: "There is a Balm in Gilead"

You can copy and paste this link in your browser to listen and watch:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBwrmz-iBRY>

PRAYER OF CONFESSION¹

A voice is heard in Ramah [and all over our nation and around the world], lamentation and bitter weeping. Mothers weep for their children; they refuse to be comforted for their children, because they are no more. (Jeremiah31:15)

Our hearts are heavy this day and tears are close to the surface as we watch the unwatchable, think about (and try not to think about) the unthinkable, bear the unbearable, cry out for solutions to the unfixable. Our groanings are too deep for words. Tears come at the oddest moments. Despair crouches at the door, waiting to set up housekeeping in our souls. Sit with us, dear Jesus, be with us in our grief and in our regret.

SILENT MEDITATION

WORDS OF CONSOLATION²

*God of consolation,
Surely you count in heaven,
Just as we count here on earth,
In shock and in sorrow,
The souls sent back to You,
One-by-one,
The dead from the COVID pandemic,
And from racial injustice,
As the ones become tens,
The tens become hundreds,
The hundreds become thousands,
The thousands become ten-thousands,
Each soul, a heartbreak,
Each soul, a life denied.*

*God of healing, an end to this pandemic of illness and of violence against one another,
Bless those who stand in service to humanity.*

¹ Adapted from a prayer by Ruth Haly Barton found at:<https://transformingcenter.org/2016/07/prayer-lament-breathe/>

² adapted from a prayer written by Alden Solovy, found at <https://sojo.net/day-of-lament/prayers>

*Bless those who grieve.
Bless the dead,
So that their souls are bound up in the bond of life eternal.
Until suffering ceases,
And we can stop counting the dead,
In heaven and on earth.*

Please take time during this music to pray for all those grieving loved ones at this time...

SPECIAL MUSIC “Lament for victims of COVID-19”

You can copy and paste this link in your browser to listen and watch:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXNvD0W6EJ8&feature=youtu.be>

Note on the music from Fred Breunig:

*I heard **Boys of the Lough** in the early 1970s at Passim's in Cambridge, MA, and was totally taken by this slow air that Cathal McConnell played that night on his wood flute. I'm sure that my version has changed dramatically from what I heard that night, but I always hear Cathal in my head and do my best to channel him on my fiddle. When Lise asked me to play something in memory of the victims of COVID-19, this immediately came to mind. Images are from Patrice's and my visit to Ireland in 2010, England in 2019, and lastly from the skies above Thetford, Vermont, in 2020.*

CHILDREN'S STORY: “Big Momma” *Margaret Dale Barrand*

CHILDREN'S HYMN: “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands”

You can copy and paste this link in your browser to listen and watch:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuID8Z_LCvUw

From 1969, Mahalia Jackson (1911-1972), known as "The Queen of Gospel", sings "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands". With much thanks to the kids on that broadcast of Sesame Street. Gospel and civil rights legend, Mahalia was 58 years old at the time. She retired two years later in 1971, and died of heart failure and diabetes complications in 1972.

PRAYER

CONTEMPORARY READING³ Written by: Joanna Macy *Margaret Dale Barrand*

We are capable of suffering with our world, and that is the true meaning of compassion. It enables us to recognize our profound interconnectedness with all beings. Don't ever apologize for crying for the trees burning in the Amazon or over the waters polluted from mines in the Rockies. Don't apologize for the sorrow, grief, and rage you feel. It is a measure of your humanity and your maturity. It is a measure of your open heart, and as your heart breaks open there will be room for the world to heal. That is what is happening as we see people honestly confronting the sorrows of our time.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 8:26-28, 35-39 *Tony Barrand*

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

Nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE Hymn: #617

"Write These Words in Our Hearts ..."

³ Joanna Macy, Norbert Gahbler (2006). *Pass it On: Five Stories That Can Change the World*, p.105, Parallax Press

SERMON: "Faith in the Hard Times"

Sermon:

I am sharing these thoughts just days after the death of John R. Lewis and C.T. Vivian. These two civil rights leaders, who had marched together for racial justice, walked together across the bridge to heaven on the very same day, July 17, 2020, the very same day protesters in Portland, Oregon, were beaten with batons and sprayed with tear gas by Federal officers.

I am not the first to say that 2020 is the year our nation has woken up to see clearly with 2020 vision, the inequities in our society and the truth that our one nation does not have "liberty and justice for all", to see clearly the failings of our health care systems, and to see clearly, the suffering of our brothers and sisters around the nation...

Just as the lock down of our industries in the first months of the pandemic allowed us to see the stars again and to breathe clean air. Not being able to breathe has taken on a larger meaning. The breath of health and housing, the breath of racial justice, are more precious to us now than ever we might have imagined they could be.

We heard Tony read the words from scripture: "we do not know how to pray as we ought" and that brings us to the purpose of this service, a service of lament and hopefully of healing.

What is lament? Lament is different from grief, lament is a response to grief, to suffering, to injustice, and to pain in the world, past or present. It is intercession. One writer writes: "it is an act of prayer that is doing spiritual battle against the very things that are causing brokenness."

Though we can't always see the immediate effects, something happens in the midst of a communal lament, binding the community together more deeply, and helping bring God's purposes into the world, whether it be through us or through others.

Lament allows us to enter into the heart of the Holy Spirit as She mourns over our suffering and pain. Doing so enlarges the chambers and rooms of our own hearts to better understand the enormity of God's love.

Our faith teaches us we have to be willing to walk through the valley of the shadow of death with those who are hurting. Lament prayer allows us to do just that.

As the prayer we read together says: *“Tears come at the oddest moments. Despair crouches at the door, waiting to set up housekeeping in our souls.”*

Our bodies may be sick and tired of restrictions and our minds weary of trying to understand how our nation has arrived at this place, but beneath it all, I would dare say, we are involved in a national -- perhaps a global -- lament: lamenting the loss of precious people we may never have known or will come to know, people who have died of the COVID virus, young black women and men who have died at the hands of racist police.

I have had many hours in my car alone this week driving to Maine and back in a day to avoid the quarantine required if I made the visit longer. During the drive I listened for hours to the words of John Lewis as he had written them down in his book, *Across That Bridge*. The Bridge is a metaphor, of course, but it is a reference to the Edmund Pettis Bridge, named for a senior officer of the Confederate States Army who was politically active in the Ku Klux Klan, serving as a grand dragon and later as a senator for the state of Alabama.

I listened because Lewis had just died and I yearned to know more of him. But I also listened because I had heard Senator James Clyburn, our nation's African American Senate Majority Whip, say that more than anything it was their shared faith which brought them together. It was their shared faith that allowed them to weather the racism of colleagues. It was their shared faith that had given them courage during the Civil Rights Movement. It was their shared faith that brought them together in prayer before wrangling with other representatives. They shared prayer as they fought to represent the poor and the dying people in Michigan and Mississippi, the immigrant and refugee Children and Elders. It was the Holy Spirit, both men acknowledged, that interceded when they were at a loss for words. It was the Holy Spirit that interceded when they were exhausted and sick with despair. And it was the Holy Spirit that pointed the way of possibility, when they could no longer breathe or see a path for African Americans.

Clyburn also mentioned that Lewis and Vivian had both seen Jesus in this current uprising of young people who are ready to stand in the streets for days and hours. They saw Jesus in the mothers with their children protecting protesters in Portland they saw Jesus in George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and

Elijah McClain who died at the hands of men who could not see their humanity.



If you haven't heard about Elijah McClain I'd like to share with you that he was a young violin player whose last words he, himself, recorded on his phone. While officers held him too tight he said among other things:

*"I will do anything.
Sacrifice my identity, I'll do it.
You all are phenomenal.
You are beautiful and I love you.
Try to forgive me..
Ow, that really hurt.
You are all very strong.
Teamwork makes the dream work.
I just can't breathe..."*

These past weeks you may have heard there have been violin vigils around the nation—laments for Elijah McClain ---gathering violinists, but also sometimes tens, sometimes hundreds, sometimes thousands of onlookers, brought together by grief, but offering up a lament. A hope, if you will, that music can bring us together. A hope that Elijah will not be forgotten. A hope than we can do/be better than this, more loving and kind. Beyond this, our lament is leading us to a new story. The story of a nation with more compassion and more commitment.

An amazing thing that is happening now is the story telling. We have come to see and know Elijah through his own words recorded on his own phone:

“I was just going home. I’m an introvert. I’m just different. That’s all.”
We have come to see and know Breonna Taylor as a bright, young 26-year-old African-American emergency medical technician. And George Floyd as a gentle giant. We have allowed ourselves to think of the victims of COVID as our grandmothers and grandfathers as children, grocery store clerks, doctors and nurses. Our despair has found a place to land, a spacious, compassionate place from which we can now move to do the small and bigger things which bring love to bear in the world. So it was with the disciples when they gathered to mourn the loss of Jesus to an unspeakable Death...at first afraid and bound together by grief, but through the tradition of lament they created a lament. They were moved to stand up for the poor and disenfranchised, to stand up to rulers who would have them fail, to stand together in hope for what should and could be. Knowing that nothing, not death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate them from the love of God. The violin vigils are like that—bigger than any one violin. Fuller than any one violinist. They take us to our souls and up to the skies in hope.

Let us pray:

Take us Jesus

Take us into our grief.

Take us into our fear.

Take us into our anger,

And help us pray.

And from that prayer,

Help us rise up in lament.

A lament to the skies and back,

Trusting that you will open our eyes

To what it is each of us can do for the sake of your Love and for each other.

Amen

I give you now one such vigil...

ANTHEM: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/13/arts/music/elijah-mcclain-violin-vigil.html>

You can copy and paste this link in your browser to listen and watch.

PRAYERS FOR HARD TIMES⁴ *Margaret Dale and Tony Barrand*

⁴ Adapted from a prayer written by Christian Schmidt

at: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/prayer-hard-times>

Spirit of Life and Love,

Be with us in this time,

in our pandemic lives

in our isolation

in our tribulation

as people suffer,

as parents grieve,

and children play alone,

as violence rages.

Be with us who feel the pain of loss,

who feel anger at injustice.

Be with the oppressed

and change the heart of the oppressor,

for we know that we are all joined in our humanity,

no matter how often we forget it.

Help us remember the hope we had,

the hope we have,

and the hope we will have;

help us remember joy in the midst of sadness,

success in the midst of challenge,

and good things in the midst of bad.

Help us to be better people,

to work for better things,

and to create a better world. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE:

Hymn #278 "Hear our Prayer, Oh Lord..."

THE OFFERTORY

CALL TO OFFERING

*DOXOLOGY

DEDICATION OF THE OFFERING

THE CLOSING HYMN: #490 "Steal Away" *Mariam and Guilford Church Choir*

You can copy and paste this link in your browser to listen and watch:

<https://youtu.be/x5EzKMt9-b0>

BENEDICTION

THREEFOLD AMEN: Hymn #291

Please take a moment to enjoy the postlude and then join us at "coffee hour".

*The zoom link is below and on the Guilford Community Church homepage:
guilfordchurch.org.*

POSTLUDE: "Blessed Assurance" Words by Fanny Crosby;

Music by Phoebe Knapp *Patty Meyer*