

## **Lent Devotional April 7, 2020**

### **Scripture**

Lamentations 1:17-22

*17 Zion stretches out her hands, but there is no one to comfort her; the LORD has commanded against Jacob that his neighbors should become his foes; Jerusalem has become a filthy thing among them. 18 The LORD is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word; but hear, all you peoples, and behold my suffering; my young women and young men have gone into captivity. 19 I called to my lovers but they deceived me; my priests and elders perished in the city while seeking food to revive their strength. 20 See, O LORD, how distressed I am; my stomach churns, my heart is wrung within me, because I have been very rebellious. In the street the sword bereaves; in the house it is like death. 21 They heard how I was groaning, with no one to comfort me. All my enemies heard of my trouble; they are glad that you have done it. Bring on the day you have announced, and let them be as I am. 22 Let all their evil doing come before you; and deal with them as you have dealt with me because of all my transgressions; for my groans are many and my heart is faint.*

### **Devotional**

#### **The Rev. Dr. Michael Spezio '96, Academia (2020)**

*In loving memory of Pfarrer Wilhelm Handwerk*

“See, O Lord, how distressed I am; my stomach churns, my heart is wrung within me, because I have been very rebellious.” Can we allow the poet’s lament to echo our own, in our own day? Can we join in communion with the great lament in the poet’s time over Jerusalem’s historical fall, joined to that of our own lonely cities?

What is the poet’s lament? Isn’t it the same as our own? It is a lament for the suffering brought on by our own rebellion, our rebellious action and inaction. We have hurt ourselves and others. Participating in systems of false value and disvalue, we have helped cause a suffering that holds the entire nation in its grasp, in the grip of loneliness, of emptiness. We extend our hands for some sense of friendship, fellowship, comfort. God’s grace meets us there. God’s own action moves us inwardly to a greater awareness of and wakefulness to the source of this great suffering and our part in it.

It is only God’s grace that can turn the heart, that turns our hearts, that brings repentance and our return to understanding. “Is wrung” in the passive voice of the Hebrew means “is turned, is changed.” We are changed. God turns us around. Our hearts are met by God’s own grace, turning us to awake, to look, to see anew.

What we see when we look may deepen our own distress. How can a heart turned and awakened by God not feel distress at suffering? Our “stomach”—the most inward aspect of our very self—is churned as we are turned, once again by the grace of God. We turn and are distressed as our repentant eyes take in the suffering of the nation, of our neighbors, of our most authentic self. Our prayer is that we will remain open to grace and, in so being, open to compassion, and that God will likewise turn the hearts of all nations. We pray then to the most gracious and compassionate God: “Deal with them as you have dealt with me.”

### **Prayer**

Gracious and compassionate God, be with us in our lament. Turn our hearts and our most inmost parts toward seeing anew, toward the suffering that we ourselves experience in this moment, and toward the suffering that others experience because of our shared rebellion. Bring us this day into the grace of knowing that our suffering is that of others also, that our lament is their lament, and bring us into the

grace of praying that our understanding may become full—and of praying for a fullness of understanding that all may share. Amen.