

World Communion Sunday casts a vision of hope into our global community that is all too often defined by hatred that incites violence, by fear that justifies atrocity, and by despair that ignores it all because nothing can be done; what difference will anything we do make?

In 1933, Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, PA imagined something more than that. In 1936, the Presbyterian Church embraced this dream; several other denominations followed; and today, at the hour the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once described as the most segregated hour in America; the hour of worship; Christians around the world will come together, receive the bread of life, share in the cup of salvation, and proclaim our Lord's death until he comes.

Together, we cast a vision of hope of a world ruled by love that casts out fear and enjoys peace; peace with one another no matter how different we may be; peace in the name of God, Whom we worship different ways with different names; peace that empowers us to pay attention to what is wrong in the sure and certain hope that God is at work setting it right. In that hope, anything is possible and everything we do has the potential to change the world; even something as seemingly trivial as a church in Pittsburgh getting a bit big for its britches and celebrating World Communion Sunday.

My point here is not to simply puff up our Presbyterian pride, but to re-connect us with and to re-cast the vision that inspires this day. With that vision of hope, we can confront the real pain and suffering of our world and of the global church in particular without yielding to the despair that turns the channel and ignores it, because of course there is poverty and violence in downtown Reading; nothing can be done; what difference will anything we do make? Of course, a church in Pakistan was bombed during the worship hour when women and children were in the building; nothing can be done; what difference will anything we do make? Of course, Democrats and Republicans have preferred to shut down our government and may threaten the global economy by their inaction and their action; nothing can be done; what difference will anything we do make?

And on and on and on the litany of woes goes; we each have our tales to tell; our struggles and the people and places in this world that hold a special place in our hearts; a place so special that their pain and suffering breaks our hearts: Jerusalem, South Sudan, Nigeria, Reading.

When that occurs, when our heart is broken, we can despair, or we can conform to the ways of this world and try to do unto others as has been done to us; both of these options deny our faith; or we can follow in the footsteps of the writer of Lamentations; tradition says it was Jeremiah who sang these songs from a hilltop overlooking Jerusalem as the city was pillaged and burned to the ground. In that setting of total loss, which may have inspired the ugliest verses in the Bible; verses we read today: *Psalm 137:8–9 (NRSV) O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!* In that setting which I suspect is real in villages in South Sudan and in Syria and in many places around the world; perhaps even in downtown Reading!

In that setting, we can lament; we can name what is with complete clarity; we can face it head on; call it what it is and demand that those responsible be held accountable; we can hold God accountable for hopes beings dashed and promises that aren't being kept. And after we have done so, the language of lament takes us a step further, beyond the pain and into the realm of possibility: *Lamentations 3:21–24 (NRSV) But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”*

One of the great modern examples of lament was given during the holocaust. Rabbi's in Auschwitz put God on trial for the shoah as they call it. The story I read said that they put God on trial and found him guilty for creating a world where such a thing could happen; then one of the rabbi's said, “Let us pray.” The story was assumed to be a legend, but Elie Wiesel confirms that the trial took place. He responded to allegations by some that

the trial never took place by saying, "Why should they know what happened? I was the only one there. It happened at night; there were just three people. At the end of the trial, they used the word chayav, rather than 'guilty'. It means 'He owes us something'. Then we went to pray."¹

Can you imagine praying with that kind of honesty and having the holy boldness to look at this world that you love, and that God loves so much more, and say, “God, you owe us something?” Can you hope in God enough to voice your disappointment? Can you embrace the vision of this day; a world ruled by love that lives in peace; and dare to believe in the face of all the pain and suffering in this world that God’s steadfast love never ceases, his mercies never end. *“The Lord is my portion...therefore I will hope in him?”*

What would we be like if we could? What might happen if we did? Can we imagine? Anything would be possible. Everything we did would have the potential to change the world; even something as seemingly trivial as receiving the bread of life, sharing the cup of salvation, and proclaiming the Lord’s death until he comes by saying in the midst of it all: *“The Lord is my portion...therefore I will hope in him.”* Amen.

¹ <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/wiesel-yes-we-really-did-put-god-trial>