

# *St James United Church*

Message for September 11, 2022  
Second Sunday in the Season of Creation



“From Lament to Hope”

- Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

Readings: Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; “Breakage” by Mary Oliver

As we pray together on this Second Sunday in the Season of Creation, we continue to reflect on the words of the prophet Jeremiah. Given this, I'd like to begin my reflection not on what we heard this morning but by revisiting last week's selection as Jeremiah went down to the potter's shed. Recall that he watched as the potter worked on the clay, and while there, attentive to what he was witnessing, he received a prophetic word, or should I say saw a prophetic word enacted. There's a lesson there as we pause each year to reflect on creation. We're invited to be Jeremiah and so like him to pay attention to what's before us, essential if we are to take seriously our role as co-creators with God and so to care for, rather than dominate, our planetary home.

And if we're attentive, we know that things don't look good. We've just gone through the hottest summer on record for the island of Newfoundland. A continent-wide drought devastated Europe. In Africa some lakes are shrinking while others overflow their banks, once consistent weather patterns long disrupted. Temperature rise is several time higher in the Arctic than other parts of the globe. Island nations continue to be threatened by sea level rise. And as we've seen on the news, record-breaking heat gripped Pakistan this spring, melting glaciers, and then monsoon season came early bringing rains made more powerful by global heating. A third of the country is flooded, a million homes lost, crops swept away, 32 million people displaced. On the horizon is the prospect of waterborne diseases and famine. This tragedy calls for to be attentive.

And as we do, our first reaction likely echoes the words of Jeremiah from today. “No healing, only grief; my heart is broken.... If only my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears.” His words were a lament for all that was happening to his people, made more poignant because it was preventable if they'd heeded his warning. This situation mirrors ours, the majority of scientists agreeing that the escalating change in climate is caused by human action, especially in Western nations given that we were first to industrialize and contributed the highest amount of CO<sub>2</sub> to the atmosphere. With one weather emergency after another, how do we not lament, our voices finally joining those in the Global South who bear the greatest burden of global heating?

And as we do, we must also cry out for more than fellow humans. Mary Oliver's “Breakage” captures in the small scale of an ocean beach what's happening globally. Many plant and animal species are at risk of going extinct, unable to adapt to the rapid change in their eco-systems. Here's an example close to the heart of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Since 1950 the

global seabird population has dropped by 70%. What a staggering number! And the songbirds that we love so much are following suit, 3 billion lost in North America alone since 1970. In this larger story, we're the gulls dropping shells on the rocks, leaving a broken landscape.

And so we need to lament, because only when we cry out in sorrow, finally "read[ing] the whole story" do we consider making any significant change. I know it's helped me shift my behaviours. As I shared previously, I've been enamoured by nature since I was small. I chalk it up to where I grew up. Barrie, which is situated along Lake Simcoe, had lots of natural space then. My best friend and I would bike to Little Lake just on the edge of town to catch frogs. When I returned as an adult, I was shocked by how much Barrie had grown. The small lake, a pond, is surrounded by development. I went to the water's edge but there was no sign of the frogs of my youth. I sat and cried for the loss, not just of my childhood, but for the impact on the ecosystem. The larger lake is also under threat, prone to algal blooms due to fertilizer-laced runoff. And as the area grows, there are plans for a water treatment plant that will tip Lake Simcoe out of balance for good. So out of my sense of lament, I decided to do something. I joined a local watershed protection group, and then Glen and I decided not to buy a house where we could afford one. It meant commuting, thus furthering urban sprawl and raising our contribution to GHG emissions. For a bit when coming here, we thought about living in CBS, I love an ocean view, but decided to buy in walking distance to the church. It's one step, but joined to others it makes a difference.

Doing these things gives me hope. In the bible, hope is part of lament, writers not despairing, stuck in why bother paralysis, but grounded in trust that despite how they felt about the situation, God was with them. Consider this from "Lamentations", attributed to Jeremiah: "The thought of my pain...is bitter poison.... Yet hope returns when I remember this one thing: God's unfailing love and mercy still continue...as sure as the sunrise." Hope is integral along with lament if we are to respond to our climate challenge. This double energy is also central to the sacrament of communion. Time and again following Jesus' death, as his disciples gathered in grief around a meal, he appeared. They knew, as put in 1 Timothy, that they'd sinned against him, and yet he came with mercy, not just to renew them in grace but to renew their call to ministry. Like them we need to lament but not stay there, instead to draw on our experience as we preach the good news. Communion helps us in this. As we share in this meal together, the Risen Christ is with us in mercy, helping us reflect on our past, strengthening us to keep sharing the good news with our actions, among other things by helping those impacted by climate change, like the people of Pakistan, doing all we can to care for the earth, perhaps the most critical ministry of our time.

Friends, in this time of climate upheaval we are called to lament. We must if we're attentive to what is going on around us. But I pray that we also cling to hope. After all, we aren't alone. As sure as the sunrise, God is with us, taking individual changes and joining them together, turning actions borne from lament into lasting change. Amen.