

Hearts Broken Open

Jeremiah 31

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This Lent, this time in our world--
It is a hard time.

I am struck by the pain,
the deep sadness, the frustration, and even anger,
of a friend, two weeks ago
as we both stood by and prayed
and looked on at her son, in a hospital bed
hooked to a ventilator,
wondering if he would survive a fentanyl overdose.
He did not.

I am aware of the loss, the emptiness
that haunted my day, on Wednesday,
after hearing that a dear friend from seminary
died from aggressive ovarian cancer.

Then the next day the anger I felt, upon hearing the verdict rendering for the Oxford Shooter's father, thinking about the completely needless deaths of Madiyson Baldwin, Tate Myre, Justin Shilling, and Hana St. Juliana.

Then my attention goes global and I think of the war of Russian aggression in Ukraine. And our congress's seeming abandonment of those people.

Then the deaths of more than 12,000 children in Gaza—completely, utterly innocent little ones apparently written off as acceptable collateral damage in the genocidal retribution Israel is enacting.

Back here in Detroit, just last year 20,000 families were evicted from their homes.

And it's warm in March. In a way that it really shouldn't be...

Good Lord. There is too much.

The Hebrew prophet Jeremiah
also lived in heart-rending times.
In 626 BC as the world of that day

teetered on its edge,
he was intimately and viscerally aware
of personal, public and national despair.

By 587 BC Jerusalem would be conquered,
overrun by the Babylonians.
Their temple destroyed,
the city ravaged
and the leaders
all either exiled or killed.
And Jeremiah was reviled
by his people for predicting it all.

And yet, and yet
as he is being forcibly removed from his city,
in the last chapters of his book
hear the words he writes
from God to the people,
*"The time is coming,
declares the Lord,
when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel
... it won't be like the old covenant
they broke that one,
this one I will engrave upon their hearts,
they will no longer need
to teach each other, to know the Lord,
because they will know me,
from the least to the greatest,
and I will remember their sins no more.*

All is being destroyed and in the midst of it is Jeremiah, the one they love to hate, is there telling them, reminding them that God no matter what, will never ever let them go.
"Though the mountains may fall, the hills turn to dust," (Glory and Praise Hymn: "Be Not Afraid.) though the glory of Jerusalem will burn in flames, still and all, the same God who took them by the hand and led them out of bondage in Egypt, that same God will be with them now and again. Making another covenant. Thus says, Jeremiah, from the Lord God.

This covenant is not an external law
that we can read from a distance,
not rules written that we see with our eyes
but rather Jeremiah and God
are talking about a covenant,
engraved on our hearts,
the very pulse of our God
embedded in lives,

that will not allow us
to go back to the despair
and isolation of being alone.

Words we do well to remember in this overwhelming time of our own.

When our hearts are broken open,
when we are sick with sorrow,
and we realize
that ONLY God can—offer us hope—
only God can sustain us.

There is a rabbinic teaching that says
God breaks open our hearts
so that God's covenant can be poured into them.

Or as the the poet, Mary Oliver says in piece entitled "Lead"
She writes:

I tell you this
to break your heart,
by which I mean only
that it break open and never close again
to the rest of the world.

It is in our sorrow
it is in our heartbreak,
if channeled in the right direction
that can erode the walls that separate us.

It is realized and honored sorrow that create channels of compassion
that destroy the walls
that separate and divide us.
It is profound compassion, dripping in and through our hearts from God's covenant that
enables us
Together to live out
God's healing hope in our world.

As it was then, may it be so now.
Amen.