

13TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

READ: JEREMIAH 15:15-21

"Why is my pain
unceasing, my wound
incurable, refusing to
be healed?"

REFLECT:

The photograph above is of some of the 'red rebels', performance artists from a troupe called *The Invisible Circus* who have featured in many of the Extinction Rebellion protests around the world. An eye-catching sight, dressed in red veils with painted (sometimes tear-streaked) faces, they move through the crowds in slow-motion unison, with graceful, silent gestures of beseeching, empathy and pain. The red they wear symbolises the blood of the species of the earth (including humans). It represents both our commonality and our suffering.

Every time I've encountered the red rebel brigade I've found their presence incredibly moving, and somehow prophetic. Without words they express deep lamentation for injustice done to the earth.

The effect they have on onlookers is akin to a funeral cortege passing by. People tend to stop, fall silent, watch with solemn reverence.

This week's reading from Jeremiah, a passage sometimes known as "Jeremiah's lament", might surprise us. The prophet refers to God as "like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail." Somehow these words have never made it into Christian liturgy or hymnody! And yet I think there's a powerful lesson for us in this passage, as in the many Psalms and other passages of the Bible that express pain, disappointment, anger and betrayal, some of which even gets directed at God.

Jeremiah's words are a jumbled mix of praise and anguish. He seems to be holding nothing back, as he lays his pain and suffering, the burden of his calling, at God's feet.

I think that lament is something of a lost art in our culture, and perhaps even more so in our churches. Somewhere along the way we swallowed a lie that says that lament is the opposite of praise, and that doubt is the opposite of faith. Jeremiah demonstrates that in fact they are all bound up together, and all very much part of a living faith, a faith that longs, struggles, questions and grows. A faith that engages with God, that is bold enough to make demands, that is sure enough in God's promise of love and grace to be completely and utterly honest.

As Bible commentator Angela Dienhart Hancock says, "the opposite of faith is not anger but indifference."

CONNECT:

Finding passages in the Bible that express the full range of human emotion was transformative to my faith. If you still need convincing that "it's OK not to be OK", take a look at the self-doubt and disillusionment of Ecclesiastes, or the raw pain expressed in Job and Psalms 6, 10, 13 and 88 (to name a few), or the words spoken even by Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and from the cross.

PRAY:

- Good or bad, tell God how you really feel. Don't hold back.
- Remember in your prayers all who are grieving, and all who are in pain or despair.
- Pray for situations where injustice seems to prevail.
- Pray that the church will be a prophetic voice, speaking truth to power with courage and love.

RESOURCES:

Our friends at Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website:
www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

SUPPORT:

Pauline and myself, and your elders, are here for you if you need someone to talk to, have a prayer request, or just fancy a chat! Ping us an email or give us a ring.