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Osler Mennonite Church

**Favour Not Exhausted:**

*Psalm 130; Lamentations 3:22-24; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15*

Good Morning Everyone,

When I looked over the lectionary texts a couple weeks ago, I thought I knew what I would preach about this morning. I started researching and sketching out a sermon with themes in mind. Then on Thursday I learnt about the 751 unmarked graves that were discovered at Cowessess First Nation, here in Saskatchewan. And then Friday morning, Muhammed Kashif was attacked in Saskatoon; a Muslim man targeted for his religious beliefs. I've spent the weekend sitting at my computer at a loss for what to say.

A couple weeks ago we paused for lament in our service, to remember the 215 children discovered, and shortly after that we lifted up prayers for the Afzaal family who were killed in London Ontario. Facing tragedies of a similar nature now I became unsure if there was anything more that I could say in today's service. It felt lacking to simply repeat the same acknowledgements once more without feeling there had been movement towards renewal. MCSask had already released a heartfelt statement, maybe it would be just as well if I preached as I had planned to, hoping that the general themes of love and service would filter into our current context.

As I debated this in my mind, I remembered some wise council I received recently. The week the 215 children were discovered, we took time in our OMC youth group to talk about what was happening. In part of our discussion, we talked about the different places we were processing this news, including their schools. They shared all kinds of honoring and informed ways their communities were talking about this. Then one of our youth said "My school didn't say anything, nobody talked about it at all – and they should have." The other youth nodded on their Zoom screens. It was so clear to them that the correct response for our communities was to *minimally* acknowledge what has happened. With this small moment they gave me their baseline of accountability, what they expect from their communities, from this community, our church gathered here on Sunday morning. So, with this guidance I'll have us turn to our scripture texts again this

morning, rooted in the context of the events of this week and ready to look for our path forward.

Our call to worship this morning is from Psalm 130. **“Out of the depths I cry to you, Yhwh! God hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to my voice, my cries for mercy!”** This psalm is often miscategorized as an individual cry for help, picturing a suffering person at the hands of the forces around them. When I read out the words, I feel myself proclaiming a powerlessness and a plea to be saved. But verse 3 makes clear that ‘the depths’ that are being cried out from are wrapped up in part with the psalmist’s own sinfulness. It tells us a more complex story, **“If you kept track of our sins, Yhwh, who could stand before you?”** The community *is* suffering at the hand of oppressive forces, but the psalmist is also recognizing that they must confront their own actions. The word used for ‘depths’ here names the chaotic forces that confront human life; with destruction, and devastation, and death. There are chaotic forces and institutions outside of their control, but the destructive forces are not merely circumstantial. They are also traced in part to the psalmist’s own iniquities.

Knowing this changes how I read today’s call to worship. It continues, not dismissing the wrong, but declaring that God’s grace makes possible the renewal of the broken covenant, a (re)remembering of the promises to be a faithful people. It declares a forgiveness that refuses to forget, but instead names the brokenness present so that it is possible to move forward. The psalmist cries out, echoing Exodus language, asking to get out of the depths and does so by shifting from human inadequacy to the character of God. Out of a place of desolation, the psalmist clings to hope in the midst of trouble, knowing that the future does not depend on their own worthiness or ability to save, but is brought forth out of the love of God. This Psalm reaches into the heaviness of this week, into my awareness of my settler identity and the legacy of Christian-run residential schools. It demands to turn away from despairing at the chaos and looking instead to choosing the dawn of hope.

Our 2 Corinthians text felt further removed from the immediacy of our circumstances. Where I can relate to the psalmist, I felt confused by the affirmations and

encouragements pronounced in this letter. The passage begins by naming the things this community is rich in, what their strengths are and then invites them to share these gifts, these riches and use them for the world around them. The list includes being rich in faith, in discourse/speech, in knowledge, and in love that is inspired by God. It is after this self-assessment, listing what the community has, that Paul then encourages them to live as the people of God.

This letter becomes an act of taking down the defensive walls that can spring up in us when we are called to do the work of loving our neighbour. When looking at the racism prevalent in this week's news stories, my own reaction was to quell at the largeness of them, to focus first on what I lacked "I don't have the words or expertise or insights to address this well." I think of the faults and failings of my previous and current efforts. In staying stuck in this mindset we can prevent ourselves from acting at all, shielding ourselves in our deficiencies. But Paul gives us a different way in. Let's start with what you do have, what you do well, **"not out of what you do not have."**

Taking scripture as our example, I started to sit down and list out what I have. Not what I'm lacking but what I can bring into the coming days/months/years to address the racism pervasive in society. I speak on Sunday morning, I have a schedule that allows me to attend the coming vigils and demonstration this week, I have money in the bank I can put towards different causes and business that support and are run by Indigenous and Muslim members of our community. But as I got into this exercise, I realized that I was still missing the point. Paul isn't listing out the strengths of individual people; he is naming the strengths of the community, asking for their collective response. This realization terrified me. It is one thing for me to get out a to-do list for myself of practical tasks and actions. It is another to attempt to do this as a group. But I think that's what we are being asked to do, because that is actually one of the strengths of this community that I would name when starting off an assessment.

Mennonites and OMC have a strong sense of community, a history of coming together to face the hard and painful events, and to celebrate alongside one another the beautiful ones. We are not left alone crying out from the depths, because what God has

blessed us with is the support of one another and this is the gift that we can turn around and give to the world around us. So, in our collective strengths assessment, I started by listing the sense of relationship and community support. I also named a devoted section of historians who faithful seek to uncover the events of our past that make up our present. We have a history of social action within our communities, a history of organized and individual service. I am not including a comprehensive list, because as a single piece of this community I can't, but I hope you'll join me in thinking through what it is we do well, what we bring. I know this practice goes against Mennonite instincts, but I'm not asking you to be prideful. It is a practice of naming the gifts that we have so that we can use them and share them well.

Paul is so incredibly gentle in this the letter, making clear that he has no order or command, only suggestions and invitations. When reading it I couldn't help thinking I did not deserve such grace. But this approach is not simply a nicety but a necessity, for love cannot be formulaic or compulsory, it has to be created anew in response to the context at hand in order that it can be practically applied. Paul quickly gets right to the issues at hand, one of economic disparity in our text, and starts giving practical suggestions for how they can start approaching these matters, looking at what actions can be taken. We turn and ask who we are, and then look at how we can show up. Now this is the part that makes me nervous, because I'm not sure how we should all show up as a collective, and looking around at the people that make up our congregation I do not think I'm the best source of suggestions. But I believe that the strength of this community can do much more than any of us alone, so I hope to invite us all into a conversation about what we can do together as a collective.

Paul urges the community to finish the work that we have already begun, to look at the actions we have been taking and to keep working at them. To continue supporting and participating in the work of Indigenous partnership with organizations like MCC and Walking the Path, to hold space for workshops in our church around Active Bystander Training, and Sunday school topics on racism. To continue having a church library filled with books educating us on these topics. To keep learning where we are doing things

harmfully and to change our ways. To invite each other into our personal wrestling, through book studies and podcasts, and sharing about different events we can attend alongside one another, staying accountable to our growth. To pray, to sing, to cry, to march. To lay our weary broken hearts before God and wait confidently in the renewal and replenishment that comes with sacred rest. To know that we will be nourished enough to keep going until the dawn breaks and suffering is no more.

It is with this in mind that I'll turn to our last scripture text of this morning, Lamentations. For those of you familiar with the book, these couple verses do not fit the general theme of the book of sorrow and lament. In fact, before the verses printed in your bulletin, there are 21 verses of hopelessness and despair in this poem. The speaker is feeling the acute pain of the destruction of this world, but then turns sharply, even fiercely, to claim hope. **“Yhwh’s favor is not exhausted, nor has God’s compassion failed. They rise up anew each morning, so great is God’s faithfulness. ‘Yhwh is all I have,’ I cry. ‘So I will wait in patience.’”**

To me this statement is the bridge between the heaviness I feel in my heart, echoed in today’s Psalm, and the choice of framing in our epistles. The verses of Lamentations name the personal exhaustion, the theological dilemma of believing in hope when in moments of crushing despair. The verses, allow us to be human, because we are tired and uncertain and exhausted. Our patience runs short and we feel overwhelmed. Here we are reminded that we don’t need to depend on our own capacity or capabilities. When we are exhausted, Yhwh is not, and when we stumble and fall and fail in our attempts, our guide remains faithful and patient. What we cannot do today, we will gain strength for once more, replenished for the task at hand. Because the love of God for this world and those in it is our endurance and we do not approach this work alone. We choose the hope proclaimed in our scripture text and in the last hymn we sang **“Hope we must carry, shining and certain through all our turmoil, terror and loss, bonding us gladly to one another, till our world changes, facing the cross.”** Amen.

*Sources Used: New Interpreters Bible Commentary, Healing Haunted Histories by Elaine Enns & Ched Meyers; Mennonite Church Sask. Press Release*

**Benediction** *(Adapted from VT #822)*

May the God of endurance and encouragement  
grant you to live in such harmony with one another,  
in accord with Christ Jesus,  
that together you may with one voice  
glorify the God of Love.