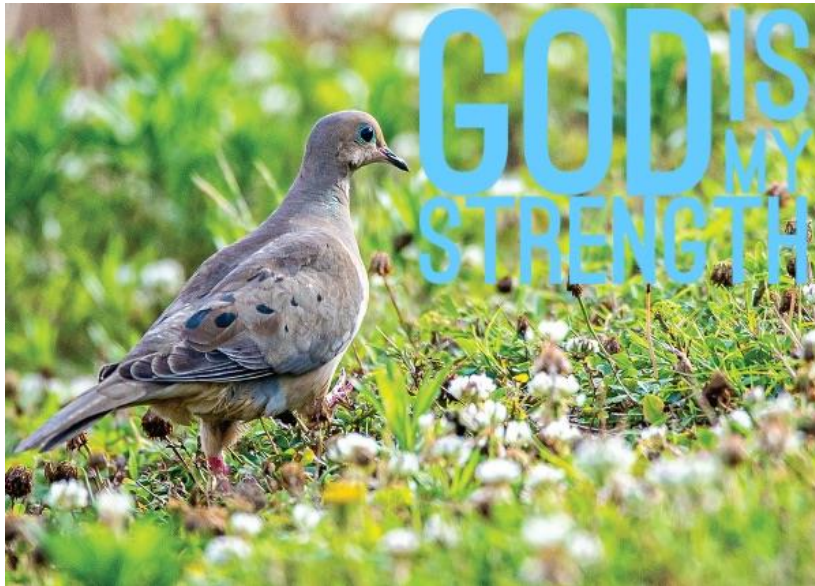


HEARTBEATS- Staying Connected 3-27-2021



Dear Friends in Christ,

We've gone through a lot in the past year. A pandemic. Protests over treatment of race. An insurrection. So much. At times we may feel like giving up or simply crying out in despair. I'd like to try to say something about that feeling that may also help us understand some of what we have been going on in our country.

In the Bible, despair is addressed by lament. It is a process by which God's people try to navigate pain and suffering. It is a way of calling out to God for help to deliver from distress. A number of psalms do this very thing, asking God to intervene in what often feels hopeless. Psalm 22, a psalm we will hear on Good Friday, is an example of that very thing: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish...But you, Lord, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me."

Protest, or more specifically peaceful protest on the other hand, seems to stand in contrast to lament. Lament reflects resignation. It accepts the situation and the pain of loss, and recognizes that I can do nothing in this. Only God can bring about an alternate ending. Peaceful protest, though, is actually an act of hope. It acknowledges the trouble that brings that pain and suffering, but it insists that

things have to and can change. Protest sees what is wrong and seeks to call nonviolently for something new to emerge. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was a kind of peaceful protest that called for change from the religious practices that created barriers between people and God. It sought to show that God's love is available to all unconditionally.

Normally, we don't seek out difficulty or hard times. Yet when they come for us or for others, we need to evaluate first of all, whether there is any action we can call for or take. If not, lament and prayer should be our response. But if there is an outcome we can work for, then peaceful protest should be considered. This can be difficult, but it is also hopeful. Paul, in Romans 5 tells us, "We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

When we see the response of people to the challenges of life, we can tell what they are feeling by the way they act. And when we face our own challenges, we also can identify our feelings by how we are moved to respond. Lament is the action that leads to prayer. Protest can be the action that leads to change. When it is done as a peaceful call to transform current situations, it can help our society to move more fully toward what God wants for all of us.

In Christ's love,

Pastor Jeffrey