

Reflection for September 21, 2025-Creation 3 Sunday by Jennifer Irving

We've just started a new Bible Study and this week on Tuesday morning (heads up--this coming week we will be meeting at 1:30pm on Wednesday afternoon—all are welcome—maybe especially those who wonder if the bible is worth reading at all anymore). Anyway, this past Tuesday morning, we gathered together and opened our bibles to the reading from Jeremiah for today—the one you just heard—filled with sorrow and anguish – wondering if there is no healing to be found, no hope for the people—where all seems lost.

And universally we were like—“talk about depressing!” And honestly, I think I can say, we were all a little (or maybe a lot) disappointed. Left wondering how we were supposed to find the good news in this passage—where was the hope?? We could relate to the way the writer of this passage was feeling—after all, isn't it how most of us feel if we can still bring ourselves to watch the daily news?

It's utterly depressing that after thousands of years—2000 of them spent with many people around the world supposedly equipped with the good news of Jesus Christ—and many, many more trying to live by the golden rule (found in some form or another in every major religion) to love your neighbour as yourself! How can the words of Jeremiah still be finding an echo in our hearts and minds? Why is there still all this trouble and sorrow in the world that sucks away our joy and leaves us heartsick and wondering “where is our God?”

I'm not going to lie, we thought maybe if we turned to the reading in the Gospel of Luke for today we might get a little more light and love. Well, if you were listening during the scripture readings, you'll know we hoped in vain.

The parable of the shrewd (or more accurately: dishonest) manager who, who finds out he's getting fired for “misappropriating funds” let's call it, goes around and cheats his employer out of even more. Which just left us all thinking we had another bible passage pretty much describing the state of the world today—and totally confused about what Jesus is trying to tell us with this parable... Is it a Robin Hood Story? Is money evil? What are we supposed to do with this?

I read this week that apparently, Amy Jill-Levine (one of the most wise and respected Jewish New Testament scholars alive today) says this parable “defies any fully satisfactory explanation”—so a few of us around the table at a Centennial United Church Bible Study could hardly be expected to come up with one.

All this to say, don't worry if you come to church on Sunday morning or wake up on a Tuesday or read the paper on a Friday and you don't know how you are supposed to live, and you wonder where God is, and you are feeling somewhat less than joy-full, you are not the only one.

Life is hard. Life is confusing. Life can suck the life right out of you and leave you feeling a soul-crushing despair that fills you eyes with tears that you are pretty sure would flow for days if you let them start. Like poor Jeremiah lamenting:

Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?
Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored?
O that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears,
so that I might weep day and night

Oh boy, can I relate. When Neelah was at General Council this summer, I volunteered as a steward so that I would have something to do while she was there acting in her role as a youth commissioner (the only youth commissioner from our tri-region I might add). My job as steward was to make sure the people at the table groups to which I was assigned had everything they needed to participate fully in the meeting and frankly, I was not needed! So, I basically got to listen to the General Council meeting. Now, my first day as steward, I cried so much that the head steward secured a box of Kleenex for the Steward's table. So yes, I can relate. There is a lot to lament—from the way the United Church has treated the LGBTQIA+ and 2 Spirit Community even while claiming to be welcoming (I invite you to read the apology here <https://generalcouncil.ca/document/2025-apology-2s-and-lgbtqia-people-and-communities>) to the ways we have fallen short of our commitment to right relations and anti-racism. Even as we work to live in loving relationship with one another as God desires—honouring diversity, seeking equity and modeling radical inclusion and live into our bold discipleship, daring justice and deep spirituality, we fall short.

And the beautiful thing that I have discovered and I hope you have too—is that we can lament. We can cry and cry out and find ourselves in good company. I mean, they brought me Kleenex at General Council! And it is much better to feel for one another than to harden our hearts and close ourselves off from the pain (and thus the joy) of living.

When I hear the compassion and empathy of Jeremiah, that is what gives me hope and brings me comfort.

The people of God are not cast out or cast off by their prophet—their intermediary to God—not even a little bit—Jeremiah joins them in their lament, he feels their pain, he continues to call out to God on their behalf.

That is what I love most about church—about coming together on this Sunday morning—it reminds us that we are not alone—we don't have to face hardships and griefs of this life by ourselves and we don't have to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps when we are feeling low. We can turn to one another and see in the tears in each other's eyes the love of God that will not let us go!

Now, just to get back for a minute to our gospel reading for today, The Salt Project.org suggests that what the dishonest manager does might be self-serving but that:

“Genuine self interest, Jesus insists, always involves the health of the broader community and the state of our hearts, and so while sharing our resources may on the surface seem to make us individually poorer, in fact, on another level, we thereby receive “true riches,” ... Our hearts become more healthy, more human, and more beautiful. Our communities become more kind, more generous, and more vibrant.
True riches!

The commentary argues that “Tight-fisted greed, as it turns out, isn't truly self-serving at all — and in the long run, because it's so corrosive, it's actually the opposite: self-destructive.”

It is when we feel each other's woes as Jeremiah does that we find ways to respond to God's call to bear each other's burdens and to care for one another and all creation. And our lives are made all the richer and fuller when we do.

Thanks be to God.