

2025. 1005. Lamentations 1:1-6. Luke 17:5-10

I don't often preach from the book of Lamentations except during funerals, and only if the family requests it, as it addresses a grief so intense and chaotic that it feels beyond human control.

Last week, I preached on a passage from Jeremiah that was full of hope. Today, however, the book of Lamentations focuses primarily on the anguish of the Hebrews following the conquest of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple.

It may seem like a completely contrasting story, yet it is a fully connected one that offers us a profound message, especially relevant on World Communion Sunday.

This poem reflects on the pain caused by Jerusalem's fall to the Babylonians and the deep anguish that followed. The subsequent exile left Israel not only displaced but facing a lack of empathy and compassion, which intensified their suffering. Thus, what Israel, now grieving, most wanted and needed was a witness—someone who could see and acknowledge its pain and loss.

Today's passage speaks of bearing witness to the suffering and pain experienced by Israel during the exile, and of giving voice to that pain. The witness acknowledges suffering for what it is, without denial, brings it to speech, and transforms it into a story of endurance.

This act of witnessing brought hope amid lament. By trusting in God's faithfulness and enduring hardship each day, hope remained with the people throughout their exile. This hope paved a new way for them, rather than returning to the ways they had lived and acted.

Despite the challenges exile brought, many Judeans eventually prospered, adapted to foreign life, and preserved their culture and faith. When permitted to return home, many chose to remain abroad, leading to the formation of enduring Judean communities in the diaspora.

When suffering was acknowledged and spoken aloud in Lamentations, rather than being silenced or denied, it served as a crucial act of witnessing—important for any potential renewal in a world rooted in suffering and abandonment.

Today's Gospel makes it clear what the faith Jesus taught is about and reminds us of the role of faith.

Jesus' disciples asked him to increase their faith when he taught them about the importance of not causing others to stumble and forgiving those who wrong them. Their request was for the strength needed to follow Jesus' challenging teachings. They wanted stronger faith to fulfill their responsibilities toward one another and to help each other remain accountable. They understood that growth and strength were essential for their continued faithfulness.

When I lived in Korea, my mom sent me many plants because she had a green thumb. She wanted my place to be like a greenhouse. Unfortunately, whenever she sent me plants, I ended up killing them all. I never managed to keep them alive.

When I moved to Canada, I missed those times, so I decided to try gardening. However, after a few weeks, I realized it wasn't my best idea. I bought some seeds and planted the entire packet in one container at once, much like spreading a layer of cheese on lasagna. I should have learned how to plant seeds first. A few weeks later, the container was overflowing with baby sprouts, all packed together with no space between them. I thought I was doing well, but most of the sprouts died. That's when I learned they needed space—for water to circulate around their roots, for sunlight to reach them, and for them to breathe.

Today's gospel teaches us that we need to create space in our faith lives instead of rushing growth or demanding quick bearing fruit for the faith. We must allow room for compassion and empathy to truly see and hear what needs our attention.

Jesus taught that even faith as small as a mustard seed can move mountains. He emphasized that, though our faith may seem insignificant, it is more than enough to bring our dreams into our faith lives and much more. Faith is not something measured in greater or lesser amounts; instead, it's about recognizing the small places in us that long for compassion and empathy, and then filling those spaces with God's creative love throughout our lives.

We are one body and one church in Christ, yet I reflect on our world today, where many voices are forgotten, silenced and ignored because compassion and empathy seem to be diminishing. On this World Communion Sunday, we continue to witness persistent poverty, immigrants risking everything to escape violence and seek safety, people pursuing asylum for their faith, others forced to hide their true selves due to their sexual orientation, the threat of a planet made

uninhabitable by climate change and endless war. However, many Christian churches have remained silent and ignored these issues. If we allow our faith to blind us from acknowledging and bringing them to speech, we will never be able to move mountains, as Jesus said.

As Jesus' disciples sought to deepen their faith, nurture accountability among themselves, and cultivate a sense of communal care and relationship, let us lament what hurts and saddens us—both in others and in the world—and give voice to our sorrows so they may be heard and seen. Therefore, we respond with both encouragement and challenge, feeling uplifted and renewed as we come together for the work of God's people.

As witnesses, our response to faith draws us into the presence of the One who heals, restores, and unites us.

Thanks be to God.