

**Title: The Saturday of Bewilderment**  
**Date: 0912.2021 Location: First Presbyterian, Kirkwood**  
**Texts: Jeremiah 3.19-22a Luke 23.48-56a**  
**Series: Questions Of Displacement.....Responses Of Hope!**  
**Delivered by: Dr. William M. Smutz**

Luke 23:48-56 (NRSV)

*<sup>48</sup> And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. <sup>49</sup> But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.*

*<sup>50</sup> Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, <sup>51</sup> had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. <sup>52</sup> This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. <sup>53</sup> Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. <sup>54</sup> It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. <sup>55</sup> The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. <sup>56</sup> Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments.*

Crisis always comes  
with a cost.

At first, the shock  
of a crisis  
leaves us stunned, bewildered,  
perhaps even paralyzed.

We're not sure  
what to do.  
We're not sure  
which way is forward;  
or if forward  
is even an option.

This time and place  
of uncertainty, of stuckness,  
can be fatal.

All too easily and quickly  
we can become  
the deer in the headlights,  
the worm on the sidewalk,  
the starfish washed up  
on the beach.....

Without hope and without future!

Friday, March 13, 2020  
was the beginning of crisis  
for many of us.....

The day upon which  
covid became a tipping point  
in many places  
across our country.

Until that day,  
covid had mostly existed  
in faraway places  
and on the evening news;  
beyond the bounds  
of our conscious thought  
or imagination.

But in the span  
of a few hours  
on that Friday,  
a sense of urgency  
descended upon us  
like unnatural darkness.

Businesses and schools  
and even churches  
began to close up.

For how long,  
no one knew.

And we were told  
to shelter in place,  
and find masks,  
and stay away  
from one another.

And everyone –  
as individuals, as institutions,  
as governments  
began making crisis-induced choices.....

Choices which,  
for good or for bad,  
continue to have impact,  
continue to set direction,  
continue, in many  
places and lives,  
to foster chaos still today.

Crisis always comes  
with a cost!

The line of war prisoners  
stretched beyond sight

in either direction.

And the utter shock  
of these Jerusalem elites  
was palpable and unnerving.

Babylon was hundreds  
of miles distance.  
Surely, they would not be  
forced to walk  
the entire way!

They were not in shape  
for such heavy lifting;  
being used to their servants  
making needed physical exertion  
on their behalf.

A few hours in,  
and the blisters  
on their feet  
are already unbearable.

This particular crisis  
is also one of confusion  
and lack of understanding  
for those caught  
in its web.

Surely God is?.....was  
on their side?  
Maybe?!

But where did God go?  
Was God defeated?  
Did God purposefully  
not stick around;  
in effect abandoning God's people?

Are the people of Israel  
no longer "chosen"?

Sure, the collective behavior  
of the people has not  
been particularly faithful  
for a long time.

Justice for the poor  
and marginal members  
of the community of Israel –  
who are also God's people –

has been almost non-existent.

And yes,  
there was that annoying prophet,  
Jeremiah,  
who kept shouting  
that God was not happy  
with God's people;  
and that a  
day of judgement  
was swiftly approaching.....

And that repentance  
was still a possibility,  
that repentance was necessary.....

But God wasn't really serious  
about all that,  
was God?

Crisis always comes  
with a cost!

Crisis again descends  
on the people of Jerusalem,  
on the nation of Israel,  
even on their Roman occupiers.....

On a Friday  
when those considered criminals  
are executed on a cross.....

On a Friday  
when the sky turns black,  
and the curtain  
in the temple –  
the one that  
covers the entrance  
to the Holy of Holies,  
the place where God  
is believe to dwell.....

The curtain in the temple  
is mysteriously torn in two.

Is this a sign that God  
has left the building?  
That God has  
left God's people?

This crisis of presence

brings even deeper bewilderment  
to the followers  
of the crucified one  
who is said to be  
the child of God,  
the return of Elijah,  
a Holy One who employs  
great compassion and grace and love  
on behalf of God's people.

Jesus' followers thought  
he would usher in  
God's Beloved Community  
of Heaven on earth.....

They had committed  
their lives to him,  
and to his vision  
of a better world.

And his death  
is an existential crisis  
for their community,  
and perhaps even  
to their lives.

Crisis always comes  
with a cost!

Each of these  
moments of crisis  
bring a sobering  
and desperate awareness  
of what is lost,  
of what is gone forever,  
of what shall be no more.

For those in charge,  
those with abundant  
economic and educational  
and social resources –  
like us –  
the crisis represents  
a lost world of privilege,  
of security, of certitude.

For those who  
live at the margins,  
those who are strangers  
to wealth and power and expectations,  
the crisis represents

the complete loss  
of the few resources  
they could count on.....

As well as the lessening,  
and a loss unto death  
of the marginal existence  
they already knew  
before the crisis.

In either scenario  
there is no way  
to encounter such loss  
except with despair.

When crisis comes,  
there is no  
simple or easy way  
around or through it –  
even for folks like us  
who enjoy better  
access to resources than most.

When it comes to a  
Saturday of Bewilderment  
there is no short cut.....

There is only  
living in it,  
dwelling in it;  
being stuck between what was,  
and the wondering  
of if there will be  
a future.

While such crisis time  
cannot and must not  
be moved beyond too quickly,  
our Saturday's of Bewilderment,  
our being stuck  
in discomfort and uncertainty and despair,  
does not simply  
have to be empty time,  
does not have to be  
useless time.

For what the  
people of Israel learn  
in the stuckness of Babylon.....

What the followers of Jesus

begin to realize  
in the awful  
silence of Saturday.....

Is that the  
stuckness of crisis  
creates and allows space  
for overlooked and unimagined possibilities.

For when people –  
including people like us –  
are frantically busy  
with day to day routine.....

We rarely, if ever, pause,  
and look around,  
and consider that  
there might be other possibilities  
for our existence.

The stuckness of crisis, however,  
creates room and opportunity  
for imagination,  
for dreaming,  
for praying about newness  
that only God  
can make possible.

As scripture reminds us  
again and again –  
particularly in Jeremiah,  
and particularly on the Saturday  
following Jesus' Friday crucifixion.....

Stuckness is a time  
which, like no other,  
engages the imagination of God.....

A time when new thoughts –  
like return and resurrection –  
bubble to the surface  
of God's ceaseless creativity.

If we will embrace it,  
the stuckness of  
crisis and despair  
can make ALL the difference.

Here in the midst  
of the ongoing covid crisis.....

A crisis which  
at this point,  
at least in our country,  
has become a crisis  
of human fear and ignorance.....

How, in the midst  
of this strange  
and despairing time,  
do we pay attention  
to the imagination of God,  
and to the new possibilities  
that rise up  
from God's creative mind  
and loving heart?

And how, in turn,  
do we use  
our collective imagination  
in these stuck days?

How do we dream of  
and pray for  
new possibilities?

Newness that isn't just  
what we want and desire;  
but rather newness  
which is born  
in the possibilities of God?

Such imagining, and dreaming, and praying  
seems like good  
spiritual homework for us  
in the week ahead.

Let's use these days well!

Amen!!!

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Resource: *Preaching Jeremiah: Announcing God's Restorative Passion*, by Walter Brueggemann