



Lament and praise in a time of pandemic

Looking back I can't believe how naïve I was. A year ago I imagined that my church's response to the pandemic would require us to stop meeting in person for just a couple months. Now it's been a full year and we're still not sure how long we will be gathering online for worship.

Naïve about how long we would be meeting by Zoom, a year ago I was also unable to foresee the incredible toll COVID-19 would take. The latest figures tell us that the United States has now lost a half million souls to this deadly virus; who can even calculate the number of family and friends who have been left grieving?

A year in and 500,000 deaths later I find myself reeling, wondering how to make sense of all this. Is it true, as some say, that everything happens for a reason? That nothing happens that is not God's will? For the life of me, I can't imagine a God whose will would be the suffering and



Pastor's Perspective

By Rev. Karen Winkel

loss we have seen on so many fronts this past year.

More helpful and appropriate, I believe, is the invitation we find in the psalms (and in Jesus' life) to pour out our hearts to our loving, caring God. Americans are good at bucking up but there are times when we can't and shouldn't hold it in anymore; when those occasions come we learn that to lament is a good, right, and holy thing. The psalms and Jesus' life give us all the permission we need to share with God our sorrows and uncertainties.

At this point in the pandemic, many of us have dis-

covered the power and place of lament and sense that it is time to enter a new season of spiritual expression. Here Paul's first letter to Thessalonians is helpful; he writes "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances...."

This is not to diminish or judge our earlier lamentations. This is not to suggest that we weren't praying enough before or giving thanks when we genuinely weren't feeling grateful. What Paul is urging is what comes after we are present to grief and loss, after our tear-stained cheeks have dried.

What Paul is doing is inviting us to claim our agency. That is, Paul is calling us to step into new understandings of ourselves as people who possess power even when our circumstances have left us feeling powerless (which has certainly felt the case many times in the last year).

With this in mind, I ask: what has this year of pandemic taught or given you that you feel is genuinely praise-

worthy? What has arisen in a year of challenge and hardship that you find yourself feeling oddly grateful for?

You will have to answer for yourself here and I encourage you not to rush. Me? With a year of pandemic under my belt, I earnestly rejoice in many things these long months have given: the deepening of relationships with neighbors, time to be (and not just do), exposure to different kinds of worship music, and opportunities to expand my kitchen skills. Most importantly, I've been blessed to witness the beauty and resilience of the human spirit.

If there is one unceasing prayer I am lifting up for the months and years ahead it's this: Please, O God, let us not "return to normal" but instead help us hold fast to all the good that has come our way even in a time of great loss and considerable challenge. Help us be changed for the better!

Rev. Karen Winkel is the pastor at Community Spirit Church.