

# “God Grieves with Us”

*Jeremiah 8:18-9:1 & Timothy 2:1-6*

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**Prayer for Understanding** God of grace, you promised to never break your covenant with us. Amid all the changing words of our generation, speak your words of eternal love. Amen.

Where is God in the midst of suffering, pain, and loss? The prophet Jeremiah gives words to our God who grieves with us. God says: **Jeremiah 8:18-91 NRSV** “My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick. Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land: **“Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not in her?”** (“Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their foreign idols?”) The people cry. **“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.” For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor 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 for the slain of my poor people!**

God is assuring you that God is always with you. God cries every tear with you. God grieves every loss with you. Numerous scriptures in both the Old and New Testament proclaim, “God will never leave nor forsake you.”

God is sending a message of love to us through the prophet Jeremiah: God’s love is so enormous that God’s love will sustain us through every tragedy, God’s love will get us through every crisis, God’s love will recover all that is lost, God’s love will resurrect life from every form of death. God’s love has no limits, no end, no restrictions. Even if you are in the valley of the shadow of death, God is there. God will shepherd you to lush green pastures where your soul is restored, every form of love, joy, and goodness is restored.

God is speaking through Jeremiah with the words, “My joy is gone, my grief is upon me, my heart is sick.” These are God’s words, God’s grief, God’s heartsickness -- not simply the feelings of a human prophet. When God says, “For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me,” the Lord is expressing the hurt of someone who is deeply in love. In love with you. In love with everyone.

“Why have they provoked me with their images, with their foreign idols?” asks God. These are the words of a lover who has been betrayed, who wants to heal the relationship. God’s love is perfect, steadfast, ever faithful. God’s love for you endures forever. God’s love forgives us of everything. God’s love heals every hurt. Our love for God is often fickle. We ignore God. Sometimes we trust money, power, self, idols, more than God. Sometimes we engage in fearful, hateful behavior. God grieves: “O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people!” God grieves with you. God cries with you.

Is God grieving with us a way that God’s love endures forever? Is God suffering with us a way that God’s love expands for eternity?

Joyce Rupp wrote: “Suffering in itself has no value. It is what we do with our suffering that makes the difference. Suffering can be beneficial when it leads to some kind of ‘resurrection’ in us, when a sleeping energy in us is aroused, when talents before unknown are recognized, when a clarity about life’s purpose and direction becomes keener for us, when a stronger sense of compassion for others deepens in us. There is so much within us that needs to come to life. Moments of suffering, times of goodbye can cause us to peer inside our own tombs of unfinishedness or incompleteness and we can discover vast storehouses of resiliency, vitality, fidelity, love, and endurance.”

God’s love endures through every form of suffering. God’s love sustains us through all our grief. God’s love is the life of the cosmos. God’s love is the transformative power that is cleaning up the mess of the world and wiping away everyone of your tears.

Bishop Michael Curry in his sermon in 2018 for the royal wedding of Harry and Meghan said: “I’m talking about power. Real power. Power to change the world. If you don’t believe me, well, there were some old slaves in America’s South who explained the dynamic power of love and why it has the power to transform. They explained it this way. They sang a spiritual, even in the midst of their captivity. It is one that says, “There is a balm in Gilead ...,” a healing balm, something that can make things right. “There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole, there is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.” And one of the stanzas actually explains why. They said: “If you cannot preach like Peter, and you cannot pray like Paul, you just tell the love of Jesus, how he died to save us all.” Oh, that is the balm in Gilead! This way of love, it is the way of life. They got it. Jesus died to save us all. Jesus did not die for anything he could get out of it. Jesus did not get an honorary doctorate for dying... Jesus was not getting anything out

of it. Jesus gave up his life, Jesus sacrificed his life, for the good of others, for the good of the other, for the wellbeing of the world ... for us.”

The Apostle Paul wrote: **1 Timothy 2:1-6 NLT “I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. For, there is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. Jesus gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone.**

One of Jesus titles is suffering servant. Scripture proclaims: **1 John 3:16 “We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So, we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.”**

Everyone is dying. Quick, call 911. Is there a physician that will save everyone? Yes, Jesus is the great physician.

Everyone is hurt. Is there no balm in Gilead? In Jeremiah’s time the best medicine was a resin, harvested from the trunks of balsam pine trees that grew in the Gilead region. A fragrant ointment refined from that pine sap was good for all kinds of ailments. You could say it was the Vicks VapoRub of the day — my mother used that oily goo for everything. Sometimes I told my mom I was healed just by the offer of Vicks vapor rub. Son, do you have a cold? I have some Vicks I can rub on your chest. Often, I would reply, suddenly I am feeling better. My Father-in-law’s balm of Gilead was WD-40. In addition to WD-40 fixing many mechanical issues and cleaning many things, my father-in law also used WD-40 as medicine. Got a sore joint, then spray some WD-40 on it, rub it in and you will be better in no time.

God’s healing comes through all sorts of remedies, medicine, and health care professionals. The ultimate balm of Gilead is God’s love. God has placed a reminder of God’s love that we carry within our own bodies, in reservoirs behind our eyes. Special ducts convey this salty solution from its storage-place when we most need it. Our eyes well up with it, and its droplets roll down our cheeks. Our tears are a reminder of God’s love. Our tears are a visible sign of God’s redeeming grace offered to all people. Our tears are mostly water. The sign of God’s presence with us. The sign that we belong to God’s family. The sign that all our suffering, mistakes, regrets, imperfections, sins will be washed away. The sign that living water is nourishing every thirst. The sign that we will be resurrected with our sibling Jesus. All of this, and much more is symbolized, in the waters of baptism. The balm of grace. You carry the sign of God’s love in the water of your eyes. We all carry God’s grace. The balm of Gilead makes the wounded whole and cures the sin-sick soul.

Come thou fount of every blessing; tune my heart to sing God’s grace; streams of mercy never ceasing. I raise my Ebenezer which means “stone of help.” It is a reference to a monument that the Israelites built to thank God for God getting them through suffering to abundant life, from slavery to freedom. God is our stone, our fortress, our sanctuary. Praise the mount, the stone. I am fixed upon it, the mount of God’s unchanging love. Amazing grace how sweet the sound that save a wretch life me! I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see. Tis grace has brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home. When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we have no less days to sing God’s praise than when we’d first began.

God's love for us is heartfelt, passionate, and personal. God’s love is honest. God goes with us to our darkest places. God suffers with us. God grieves with us. God cries with us. A Jewish proverb says, “What soap is for the body, tears are for the soul.”

The ultimate balm of Gilead is God’s love. All people have been given the gift of God’s love and are commanded to love all people. We gather as a church to express our love to God in worship and to receive God’s healing grace. We gather as a family of faith to love each other. We gather to carry each other’s burdens, to suffer and rejoice with each other. All of us are called to love, care, nurture and support each other, to cry with each other, to laugh with each other. This is why we share joys and concerns to pray for each other. A primary aspect of prayer is putting love into action, being the hands and feet of Jesus, partnering with God in making our prayers reality.

The Presbyterian Church believes expressing God’s love is so vitally important that we ordain deacons to embody the love of God. Deacons strive to make God’s love tangible, to serve like Jesus served, to have the compassion and caring of Jesus. Once someone is ordained as a deacon they are ordained for life. Our active deacons are listed in the leadership directory. The directory is revised every year and is available in the office and is sent out in an email blast. This year’s directory will be available in the next few weeks.

God is always with us. God is eager to comfort and help us. God honors our free will. God waits for each person to accept God’s transformative love. Only you know how you want to be loved and cared for, so please reach

out to a deacon if you desire to experience God through a deacon. Another person gifted in embodying God's love is Roderick.

The Presbyterian Church believes expressing God's love is so vitally important that we ordain teaching elders, ministers of word and sacrament, often called pastors, to teach God's redeeming grace freely offered to all people. One aspect of this is facilitating worship. Another aspect is pastoral care. I care deeply for all of you. I care for all people. My passion is helping someone experience the grace of God. Recently, someone asked me how it is that I am a teacher elder and an introvert. As an introvert, I get my energy by being alone, and I also enjoy being with people. As an introvert, I tend to listen more than I talk. As an introvert, I wait to be invited instead of imposing myself on another. As an introvert, I listen to what you need and then strive to provide it. All of this works well as long as people tell me what they need. I make pastoral care a priority. If you need pastoral care, please email, text, or call me or reach me through the church office or through a deacon or through the elder on call or through Roderick. My email and cell phone number are listed in the church directory. I have been trained in prayer, pastoral care, and spiritual direction. I consider it a great honor to be invited to try and embody God's healing love for you.

I have learned an important distinction to strive to love people not as I want to be loved rather as they want to be loved. We live in a time of a myriad of rules regarding "in person" visits and an array of comfort levels in being in physical proximity, especially when one is hospitalized. I cannot read minds. The only way I know what you want is if you communicate directly with me. I am fully vaccinated for Covid and will soon get my flu vaccine. I am available to visit in any situation. All you need to do is request a visit. The visit can be in person, Facetime, phone, Zoom, email, or text. Furthermore, Leslie and I both enjoy fellowshiping with you. We would be delighted to have a meal together, go for a walk together, or celebrate an occasion with you. We are adventurous. Several years ago, a few of you invited Leslie and I to a ballroom dancing class. The dancing was a disaster as I am severely dance-challenged. I bumped into people and crushed Leslie's feet. And we laughed together. I enjoyed being with the people who invited us.

The song "Lean on Me" says "I'll be your friend. I'll help you carry on... Please swallow your pride. For no one can fill those of your needs that you won't let show. Lean on me. When you're not strong. And I'll be your friend. I'll help you carry on." All of us belong to God's family. We are called to love each other, to lean on each other. There is a balm in Gilead, a love that will heal all. Amen