



**"NO SHAME"**

**SCRIPTURE: LAMENTATIONS 3: 19-26; 2 TIMOTHY 1: 1-14**  
**GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC**

**October 6, 2019, World Communion Sunday**

The Rev. Dr. Marcia W. Mount Shoop, Pastor

**Lamentations 3:19-26**

3:19 The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall!

3:20 My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me.

3:21 But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:

3:22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end;

3:23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

3:24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

3:25 The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.

3:26 It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

The Word of the LORD.

**Thanks be to God.**

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**2 Timothy 1:1-14**

1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

1:2 To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

1:3 I am grateful to God--whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did--when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

1:4 Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.

1:5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.

1:6 For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you

through the laying on of my hands;

1:7 for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

1:8 Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God,

1:9 who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

1:10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

1:11 For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher,

1:12 and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him.

1:13 Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

1:14 Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

The Word of the LORD.

**Thanks be to God.**

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My grandmother's hands were skin and bones—arthritic fingers, wrinkled skin.

Her wedding rings clinked together when she reached for a napkin or a piece of paper. She would spin her rings with her thumb just like my mom does. Perhaps unconsciously savoring her long-lasting love for my grandfather.

Maybe circling, cycling, turning through the twenty plus years of quiet grief she knew after his death.

He was 16 years her senior. And he died decades before she did.

With a silver fork my grandmother's hands turned bacon over in her electric skillet every morning before the sun came up in southern Mississippi. Being married to a

farmer all those years—her body never stopped shuffling into the kitchen in her bedroom slippers to make breakfast just after four in the morning.

I was too young to remember my other grandmother's hands—they held me when I was a baby, and steadied me in her lap when I was a toddler. No doubt my grandmother's hands were meticulous like I've been told she was. Exacting, maybe frustrated, always dutiful. She was a pastor's daughter and a pastor's wife.

And she carried the weight of her English and Scottish and Scots-Irish roots—stoic, emotions tamped down, avoided as burdensome, shameful even. Denying emotion can make you sick. She dropped dead of a heart attack just sixty years old while her hands gripped the pan she used every morning to make my grandfather his breakfast.

The hands of my grandmothers both gripped whatever was close by in childbirth—the intensity of childbirth coupled with the fear that must have set in when it was clear something was wrong. Both of my grandmothers hemorrhaged giving birth to their first child and almost died on the birthing table. Both were told they should not have more children—trying again would be too dangerous.

My grandmothers held pain and promise in their bodies—just like your grandmothers and their grandmothers, and theirs before them. There is no shame in admitting it. The Gospel is really all about the trauma and redemptive capacity that we carry, that Jesus carries.

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“To Timothy, my beloved child... I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands.” (2 Timothy 1)

Paul's hands instilled purpose and authority into Timothy's life as a teacher and evangelist. While it may well be that Paul, himself, did not write the words of this pastoral letter to Timothy, the spirit of Paul's deep connection to Timothy is honored in the lineage of those who wrote in Paul's name.

Timothy needed encouragement and a reminder of where he came from and the history that defined him. His grandmother's faith, his mother's faith nurtured and in-formed him. And Paul's passion for Christ's Gospel had molded and shaped Timothy as a follower.

Paul laid his hands on Timothy—sharing the faith, the mysterious anointing of Christ centered-living, of Holy Spirit call.

“... for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice,” the letter continues, “but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord... but join with me in suffering for the gospel... I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust...” (2 Timothy 1)

The suffering that following Christ carries along with it was not an easy weight to carry—when these epistles were written, the emerging movements of Jesus followers were struggling to find their voice and their place in a religiously multifarious world.

Staking your life on someone who was publicly executed meant encountering resistance in all sorts of way, in all sorts of places, including within yourself. The three pastoral epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) were written as these Jesus following movements were starting to take on some structures of leadership, teaching, and accountability.

Paul’s legacy was a passionate conviction that following Jesus meant suffering with Jesus—because the Gospel pushes the world around us that way, because Jesus revealed the deep woundedness within us that needed to be healed. Paul radically asserted that suffering was not a source of shame as the early Mediterranean culture taught, but part of the truth of human existence, and a portal to the healing and freedom that Christ can give us.

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“She was a small woman, but she had very thick, stubby fingers.” That’s therapist, author, healer Resmaa Menakem describing his maternal grandmother.

[Her fingers] were the result of picking cotton as a sharecropper’s daughter, beginning when she was four years old. Cotton plants have burrs in them that will cut you wide open. Eventually, her hands adapted to the repeated trauma in a way that protected her. But her hands looked odd, almost deformed, as a result. My grandmother loved us with her whole heart. But, like so many Americans, she had a lot of trauma stored in her body, and she passed on some of that trauma—as well as her love and resilience—to her children and grandchildren.<sup>1</sup>

My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies is the next book this congregation is invited to read together in our racial justice book series. In the two years since this book was published, it has become a unique and powerful resource in racial equity work all over the country.

The author, Resmaa Menakem, wrote this book after years of work as a therapist and trainer in all kinds of communities—police departments, public schools, African Americans, European Americans, US military bases in Afghanistan.

He invites us into a body-centered way of healing generational trauma, what he calls, "White-body supremacy trauma."

He describes that trauma as, "a trauma that we all – including white identified individuals, communities and systems – integrate into our bodies and structures. We need to address this trauma directly in our bodies - not just in our minds."<sup>2</sup>

Menakem says, "I have been to that suffering edge. That is where I found what I was made of. That I am more. That I must build up others and myself. Small consistent challenges to comfort is how I grew – and how you can grow too."

Our bodies carry trauma and resilience. And the less we acknowledge this reality of our bodies, the more prone we are to hurt each other because of it. The more space we make for these truths, the more room there is for our world and our bodies to heal.

It is a Gospel message really—that invitation for us to get real about the trauma and resilience we have in our bodies, that has been passed down to us and that we carry around the world and pass on to others. God's healing opportunities define the story of who we are.

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Lamentations is ancient poetry singing, groaning, complaining, resisting, protesting in a collective voice as a nation collapsed.

The voices of lamentation are the community—they are no one person, but a culture crying out "How?" How can this be happening to us? How can you let this happen, God? How could we not see it coming? How are we supposed to go on?

The imprisoned, shamed voice that speaks the verses we read today is sinking down into the memory of the trauma of losing everything. He is heartbroken, he is resentful, he is in pain.

And in the next breath he taps into something deeply true for him and in him.

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." (Lamentations 3)

We hold in our hands that legacy, that promise.

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In the 1933, the world must have felt like it was coming apart at the seams. The grip of the Great Depression was at its most intense that year in America. Hitler became the chancellor of Germany in January of that year and the first concentration camp

was opened in Dachau and by the end of the year he was made dictator and banned all other political parties except his own. Dust storms swept across parts of the United States and decimated crops.

It was in 1933 that Presbyterian Minister, Hugh Thompson Kerr, who was serving as Moderator of the Presbyterian denomination, proposed Worldwide Communion Sunday. His congregation, Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, PA, embraced his idea. Other nearby congregations joined them. A resolution went to the next GA and was adopted. Worldwide Communion Sunday was celebrated across the country and in some other countries for the first time on November 1, 1936 and soon became an annual international practice shared across the church.

In 2019 we come to this practice living in a tumultuous, traumatized world—climate change, impeachment hearings, surging nationalism around the globe—the ruptures of our current day have eerie resonance with the world in 1933 that prompted Pastor Kerr to call in Christians around the world to a concrete, embodied act of solidarity and proclamation. To say to the world, we resist your hatred, your violence, your hoarding. We come unashamed to a Table where there is plenty of room, plenty of food, and plenty of welcome for the whole wide world.

My colleague in ministry, Jeffrey Geary invites us to imagine the Communion Table being 25,000 miles long—the circumference of the earth. He invites us to imagine that today, “World Communion Sunday began seventeen hours earlier on the other side of the International Date Line on Sunday morning in the churches of the Tonga Islands, Fiji Islands, New Zealand, Australia, and so on towards us. It continue[s] for another seven hours as the meal moved west. It is a moveable feast, a progressive dinner, in which Christ is our host.”<sup>3</sup>

This shared practice was born of the impulse to embody the healing reality of the Gospel—that brings a ruptured world home to its own capacity for healing and resilience. We are called to bring our brokenness—and to hear about Jesus’ brokenness. We are called to trust the power of speaking truth here—about betrayal, about suffering, about forgiveness, and about freedom.

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My grandmothers’ hands knew how to cherish. And my grandmothers’ hands knew loss. My grandmothers’ hands held hymnals, communion bread, and tiny thimbles full of grape juice.

They passed things on to what these hands could and would be—just like your grandmothers, and their grandmothers, and theirs before them.

We hold those lives in our hands, in our bones, in the mysteries of why we are the way we are—and what healing can be for each of us and for all of us together.

So make room within yourself for the beauty and wonder and mystery of how the generational, geo-political, enfolded reality of Eucharistic living settles into your body, into our gathered Body, into the Body of Christ that stretches and stitches itself through centuries and across borders and into the deepest shadows of trauma, resilience, and new life being born.

Tears. Solidarity. Truth-telling. Truth-being. Finding joy. Cultivating just and merciful communities. This is the Gospel that calls us to be reborn.

The world does not need our shame or our guilt. The world needs our settled, healed bodies. The world needs our courage—the courage to fully embrace the redemption story the world needs us to tell.

Thanks be to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies*. (CRP, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.resmaa.com/about>

<sup>3</sup> <https://revgeary.wordpress.com/2013/10/06/notes-on-world-communion-sunday/>