



“AS THE WORLD CHURNS”
SCRIPTURE: PHILIPPIANS 2: 1-13
GRACE COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NC
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The tumult of these days on earth can be
Exhausting
Exasperating
Terrifying
Traumatizing
Wearying
Worrying

You may have other words to describe your feelings right now as we look back at just this week on the planet earth. Share those words/feelings in the chat.

(Share Images #1- #8) - cycle 1 every 15sec

(Read some words from the chat)

A churning world can be hard to trust.

A churning world can generate anxiety.

A churning world can make you wonder what to hold on to, where to turn.

VIDEO - Water Churching (on loop)

Our bodies are taxed from all the churning.

Just for a moment, let's be together, let's hold these sensations together

The sensations of our churning world--and how it can wear on living things--on people and animals and trees and the soil and the air and on bodies and cells.

We are holding this tumult together--with the whole family of things. It is moving through our bodies, it is breaking our hearts. It is heavy, it is incessant, it is beyond our control.

We are here together in the churning. Together with our siblings all over the world. No matter who they are, this tumult, this churning is moving through their bodies, too. There is no way to escape it. This is our churning world.

Breathe.

Try to ride this out--the discomfort, the sadness, the anxiety, the confusion, the fatigue.

This is where we are together right now on this planet.
(end water churning video)

Now let your imagination stretch deep into the mysteries of creation. You don't need to know the answers here. You are just invited to imagine an energy that yearns for this world to exist--in all of its complexity, in all of its beauty, in all of its intricacy.

IMAGE - (show image #9)

Maybe it is hard to imagine that primal place--that love that dreamed of a world where everything is connected, where we gestate in ancestral waters, where we share oxygen, where we love and learn, where we suffer and sing, where we carry delight and despair.

What words or feelings are surfacing for you now? Please share those in the chat.

Imagine that persuasive, powerful love that gave birth to all of us, to all of this. To the world that is our home.

Let's be here together.

Touching into a shared reality we can forget we exist in. We can forget this shared reality when we are overwhelmed by the tumult.

We are one--seeping and flowing into each other and into all things with no effort, with no intention. This oneness is given, even if it is forgotten.

(back to just MMS from the picture)
Pop Chat in (words from the chat)

It is in the churning and in the flowing that Paul invites the church in Philippi to find their way back to love in the midst of hostility, in the midst of the challenges of living out the gospel in a world of suffering and injustice.

Paul and the Philippians understood each other--and his letter was surely a welcomed word--the voice of a trusted leader that that congregation needed to hear from.

They were in it together--the life of discipleship in a tumultuous world.

Paul reminds them of their shared condition and their shared experience. Their experience of Christ centered community fed his spirit and sense of well-being from a distance. Their interdependence was a given for Paul.

This letter would have been read aloud in worship--a focal point, a sacred intention.

Paul's words may well have been a song--the music of God's mystery and love for a suffering world.

Let's be here together now--in this space that Paul invited his siblings in Christ to abide with him in the midst of tumult.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross. (2: 5-8)

Christ's self emptying, or kenosis, is not something to grasp at for understanding. It is the rushing water and the still water all at once. It is the power of love to let go in order to come close. It is the sands of love over time emptying into our shared life.

The tumult of the world didn't repel God's love. The tumult, the churning, made God want to come closer to us--closer to what it feels like to live in this world. And in the mystery of Divine Love, it is in the emptying of Divinity that Divinity becomes fully present.

Paul is creating theological poetry where words fail us--perhaps it's more sensation than proclamation.

Christ is the embodiment of God's desire to be with us, to understand us, to feel what we feel, to see what we see, to be mired in the tumult, to be right here, right now.

The triumphalism that this passage boasts can distort the sensations Paul is inviting the church to remember. Especially now for us in our historical moment. Because unlike Paul, we live in the wake of Christianity's history of colonization and in the wake of this faith tradition's unfortunate acumen at being an apologist for systems of oppression that still have our world in their grip.

It's hard for us to remember that Paul didn't write this letter from a place of dominance.

He was not a chaplain to the Empire. He was speaking to those pushed to the margins by the powers and principalities, to those taking risks for the gospel, to those who did not know safety or security in this world.

Paul wasn't writing from the hallowed halls of institutional church. He was an agitator. He was regarded by some as an enemy of the state. He was someone who challenged the status quo. He gave his life to a vision of transformation and he asked the church to do likewise.

These words about Christ's self emptying are about a revolution that originated in God's very self--a revolution of love birthed out of power emptying itself into mutual relationship. That is the God we worship--the God who doesn't grasp at power, but let's power wash away because love wants to be with its beloved.

That's the love that defines us. That's the love that Christ pours into our bodies and souls and relationships.

God is not a God who relishes distance or separation. God yearns for connection, for proximity. God yearns to walk in our shoes and know the innermost workings of our hearts.

We can get it all so twisted up, can't we? We can lose touch of the gift of being created and loved by such a persuasive force--we were made to be loved and we were made to love.

So the question for us today, as the world churns, is what are the barriers to seeing Divinity in others and in yourself? What is standing in our way of letting this self-emptying love flow freely through us?

This is not a love that grasps at power--it is a love that shares power, that empties itself of any capacity for dominance. This love is the antidote to the disease of supremacy. This love is the medicine this world needs.

Let us be here together. Washed in the love that yearns for the world to know herself to be beloved. Let us be here together, letting that love flow through us--feeling the sensations together of being held close by the mother of us all.

Let this love flow freely, siblings in Christ, so we might be a conduit of this love in the week to come.

When you don't know what to say this week, say "You are loved."

When you don't know what to feel, remember what it feels like to simply float in an ocean of love emptying herself to hold you.

When the tumult of the world feels like too much to bear, breathe and drink in the mystery of this love that is pouring out the power even now that can heal this broken world.

VIDEO #2 - calm waters (run video two times through--about 50 seconds of silence with video)

(sermon ends with quiet video and then go to David B's solo)