



Stone Communion
A Service of Lament and Solidarity

March 24, 2019

Written by Rev. Kerry Greenhill for Reconciling Congregations

Traditional Worship at 8:15 & 9:30 AM

Prelude

“Gather Us In”

Jeffery Honoré

Welcome and Announcements

*Passing the Peace of Christ

***Call to Worship**

Leader: We gather this morning as people with high hopes and deep longings.

People: May the God of hope meet us here this day.

L: We gather as people with bruised spirits and half-healed hearts.

P: May the God of healing meet us here this day.

L: We gather as people who have tried to do the right thing and failed, and as people who sometimes don't have the energy to try at all.

P: May the God of mercy meet us here this day.

All: We gather together to meet God in this place, to tell our stories and connect them with God's story. We come seeking an experience of the living, loving, healing God made known in Jesus Christ.

***Opening Hymn #2236**

“Gather Us In”

Time with the Children

Elaine Dawson

Proclamation of the Word “The Gifts of Stones and Water”

S1: Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

R1: But we came hungry, and were turned away.

R2: We believe, and still we thirst for justice.

S2: The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

R3: They came and said to us, “If you truly believed in the Son of God, he would answer prayer and change you so that you do not fall in love with people of the same sex.”

R1: And we answered, “Is it not written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’?”

S3: “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

R2: We asked for bread, and they gave us stones.

R3: We asked for a place at the table, and they said, “Not until you change.”

R1: We knocked, and knocked, and the door was opened just wide enough for us to see the beauty and joy that lay inside, only to be told, “You are not welcome here.”

S2: Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

R3: We have been begging for crumbs, on our knees, under the table, for our whole lives.

R2: We cry out for healing, for welcome, for inclusion, and they say, "Send them away; these people who keep shouting at us are not part of our family."

R1: Even the ones who speak for Jesus say we are no better than dogs.

S1: As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?" And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." ... Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all. And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

R2: We came hungry, and they said, we can't possibly feed everyone.

R1: But still Jesus instructs the church: You give them something to eat.

S2: And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' I tell you, even though he will not get up and give you anything because he is your friend, at least because of your persistence he will get up and give you whatever he needs.

R3: We asked for bread, and they gave us stones.

R2: We knocked, and the door slammed shut in our face.

R1: We cry out to God, and God responds: I knit you together in your mother's womb.

R2: We cling to the promises of Jesus, and when we need to, we go to a different house, for a neighbor less stubborn, less deaf to our cries.

R1: We asked for bread, and they gave us stones.

S3: "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.

R2: The stones they gave us are hard, and heavy.

R3: We cannot eat them; they do not satisfy our hunger.

R1: We curse the stones we cannot eat.

S2: On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

R3: We came to the feast, in our best garments, bringing our gifts.

R2: We came with gifts for preaching, for teaching, for music, for counseling.

R1: We came with loving relationships, the desire to nurture children, the fruits of the Spirit.

R3: We saw them pouring the wine, filling the cup of the covenant, celebrating new life.

R1: But when we came forward to drink, there was no wine for us.

R2: "No," they told us, "you are not worthy of wine. You may come to the table, but we cannot let you drink what the others drink. And we cannot let you offer the bread and cup to others."

R3: They said, "Sure, you can participate. But don't expect us to be happy about it. Don't expect us to say you're the same as everyone else, that your lifestyle is okay with us, or with God."

R2: They said, "Your gifts are tainted. You are mistaken about who God wants you to be."

R3: They told us, "The cup of the covenant, the wine of God's blessing and sacred promises, is not for you."

R1: "Here," they said. "Have some water instead."

S1: The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

R2: But we are not one body. We asked for bread, and they gave us stones. We reached out for the cup of blessing, and we were told we are not worthy.

S3: For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together.

R3: What shall we do with the stones they gave us? They are hard and heavy, and we cannot eat them. Shall we throw them away? or gather them together?

S1: As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

R1: We cried out for justice, and they told us to be quiet. We asked for a place at the table, and they told us to go away. We knocked, and the door was slammed in our faces.

R1-3: But if we are silent, the stones will shout out.

S3: "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'?

R2: We, too, have been rejected.

R3: Will we ever find a place at the table, in the center of things?

R1: We carry the stones that we cannot eat. We stumble and fall over the obstacles in our path.

R2: But still we keep walking, still we keep knocking, still we keep searching and shouting and praying.

S2: When the entire nation had finished crossing over the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua: "Select twelve men from the people, one from each tribe, and command them, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet stood, carry them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you camp tonight.'" Then Joshua summoned the twelve men from the Israelites, whom he had appointed, one from each tribe. Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan, and each of you take up a stone on his shoulder, one for each of the tribes of the Israelites, so that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off in front of the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the Israelites a memorial forever."

R3: We will carry our stones, and gather them together. We will pile them up as a

memorial to our God, just as Moses, and Joshua, and Samuel all did. We will keep piling them up until they cannot be ignored.

R1: And when our children ask in time to come, “What do those stones mean to you?” We shall reply, “The waters of justice were cut off in front of us. We asked for bread, and these are the stones they gave us. We were within sight of the promised land, and this is the barrier we could not cross. But God has promised we will not hunger forever.”

S3: “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

R2: The cup we have been given is not the cup of the covenant. We are still waiting to join in the fullness of the feast and celebration. But this cup of water, this un-transformed wine, still will quench our thirst for now.

S1: And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

R1: This water is not wine, but it is the water by which we have been baptized. And like Jesus, we have known the presence of the Spirit of God in our lives, claiming us as beloved, as blessed, as holy.

R3: By the waters of our baptism, we proclaim: We belong!

R2: By the waters of our baptism, we know God’s grace is for us also.

R1: By the waters of our baptism, we have been marked by the Holy Spirit and claimed as Christ’s own forever.

S2: But Jesus had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”

R1: We asked for bread and they gave us stones.

R2: We reached for the cup of blessing, and they gave us water instead of wine.

R3: But this cup that they have given us is more powerful than they realize.

R1: For Jesus has promised us living water, a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

R2: And though we will keep asking, searching, knocking, until we, too, can lift up the cup of the covenant, still this is water that truly satisfies!

S1: When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.

R3: The stones they give us are hard, and heavy. We cannot eat them; they do not satisfy. We stumble over them, and they weigh us down. They seal us in the cold and dark of the tomb. Who will roll away these stones?

S3: When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.

R1: We do not know who will roll away the stones. We only know that a stone could not keep Christ in the tomb, and it will not keep us quiet either. Death has no hold on us! We will live, and live abundantly! The stone has been, is being, and will be rolled away – Alleluia! Amen.

S1: Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.... Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them.

S2: When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

R2: We asked for bread, and they gave us stones.

R3: We came hungry, and were turned away.

R2: So we traveled the road in sadness a while.

R3: And it was on the road, in the street, in the park, in the community center, in the Pride parade, in the bar, that we met Jesus.

R2: And he told us a story about how God has been at work in the world since the beginning of time, not primarily through the rich and the powerful, but through the outcast and oppressed, through the slave and the foreigner, through women and children and tax collectors and sinners, and even through people like us.

R3: And we did not even know it was Jesus until he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to us.

R2: And we held it, soft and broken, in our hands, and we lifted it to our mouths, and we ate.

R3: And it was not a stone.

R2: And we wept with joy.

[pause]

R3: And then we knew we had to tell our story to all those locked-up, closeted, skeptical disciples, hiding and waiting in fear and desperation to hear the good news that God is doing something new.

S3: Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ..." While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

The Lament of Exclusion (*Pastor Jess leads the congregation to join together in ALL lines*)

ALL: Can anyone withhold the bread of life and the cup of blessing? Can anyone keep Jesus locked inside that tomb?

S2: Who among you, if your child asked for bread, would give them a stone?

S1: How long will we pretend there is not enough bread to go around? Not enough love? Not enough grace?

R1: How long will we have to pile up the stones?

R3: How long will we let the stones cry out in our place?

S3: How long will our neighbors have to keep knocking before we fulfill our duty of love

to give them bread?

S2: How long will we turn the celebratory wine back into water?

R1: How long will we close our eyes, our minds, our hearts, to those whom Jesus loves?

R2: What will we tell our children when they ask us, “Why are there so many stones piled up?”

R3: Let us live so we can tell them:

ALL: We heard our neighbors knocking, and we opened the door.

S1: We heard their cries of hunger and thirst, and we welcomed them to the table.

S3: We found we had more than enough bread to go around.

R1: We celebrated the mystery of God’s blessing together.

ALL: We who had lost all hope ran to tell our fearful friends the good news:

R2: the stone was rolled away,

S2: the tomb could not contain the transforming power of God’s love,

R3: and we have met the risen Christ on the journey!

ALL: Amen.

Prayer Song #560 (9:30) “Help Us Accept Each Other”

Invitation to the Stone Communion

Today we come to the table, set with bread and covenant cup. But what we will receive is stones and water [to remember our baptism and the baptism of others]. Today we fast from the means of grace in solidarity with all who hunger and thirst for God’s grace but are turned away.

Come, all who are hungry. If the bread that you seek turns out to be stones, keep coming. Keep crying out. If the cup of salvation is filled with ordinary water instead of celebratory wine, keep coming. Keep crying out. For Jesus Christ is the Bread of Life and the Living Water, the stumbling block that became the cornerstone. And if we have not yet learned how to be the Body of Christ, then by the Holy Spirit we can seek that gift as well.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart, and we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have failed to see your image in the whole human family, especially those who are LGBTQ, placing rules and restrictions on their participation in the life and leadership of your church. We have closed our eyes and ears to those who have been shut out, shut down, closeted, bullied, persecuted, shamed, and silenced. We have failed to respond when others call for or joke about violence, when basic civil rights are denied, and when the church has said “You are not worthy unless you promise not to be in relationship.” Forgive us, we pray.

**Open our eyes to see your vision of inclusion;
Open our ears to hear your children crying out in pain;
Open our hearts to love and compassion for our neighbor, to anger and courage to speak out for justice;
Open our hands to give and receive the gifts we might share when we truly welcome all your children in your house.
May the bread we offer truly nourish, and the cup we share quench our thirst for belonging, as we welcome all to your table in your name. Amen.**

Words of Pardon

Leader: Hear the good news: Christ lived, and died, and lives forever that we might know the depth of God's love for us, and for all. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

People: In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

All: Thanks be to God. Amen.

Offering our Gifts

Offertory "Create In Me A Clean Heart" Victor Johnson

Sanctuary Choir

Doxology #621

***Be present at our table, Lord; be here and everywhere adored;
Thy creatures bless, and grant that we may feast in paradise with thee. Amen.***

Prayer of Thanksgiving

The Great Thanksgiving

The Spirit of God be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Let us give thanks to God our Creator!

With joy we give our thanks and praise!

God of Creation, eternal Mystery, when there was nothing but darkness and chaos, you spoke, illuminating the darkness, creating the beautiful diversity of our world. When your people were oppressed as slaves, you led them out of the place of their suffering, setting them free from the powers that bound them, teaching them to worship you and to love one another. Throughout the ages, you have spoken through the prophets, calling for justice and mercy, overturning systems and structures, offering a choice between life and death, blessings and curses, calling us to choose life for all people. And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy God, Our life, our mercy, our strength,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Praise and glory to our God, who saves us!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest!**

Holy are you, and blessed is Jesus, who revealed to us the depth and breadth of your love. By your Spirit he proclaimed good news to the poor, liberation to those who were imprisoned, and recovery of sight to the blind, welcoming all who had been outcast to join him in feasting and proclaiming God's good news.

He spoke comfort to the afflicted, and the afflicting truth to those who were comfortable. He announced that it is not strict observance of the laws and traditions that determines whether people are pleasing to God, but the state of a person's heart and the way they treat their neighbors and enemies.

When his preaching and healing and feeding and welcoming had gotten him in as much trouble as a person can be in, Jesus gathered for one last meal with those he had welcomed into his inner circle. He did not send the women home, and he did not cast out the one who would betray him. But he spoke to all of them, giving them a sign by which to remember him for after he was gone.

Taking the bread, he gave thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take, eat; this is my body which will be broken and given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to God, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Drink from this, all of you, this cup of promise and remembrance: in this way my blood will be poured out as a sign of the new covenant available to all for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering of love, as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of stones and water. May they be for us holy symbols of the strength and abundant life you offer, even when we do not receive what we seek; and a reminder of the work still to be done for all your children to be fully welcomed at your table. By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, proclaiming the mystery of your kin'dom emerging among us, whenever we welcome our sisters and brothers in your name. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

And now, with the confidence of children of God, let us pray...

Giving the Elements

Prayer of Sending

God of covenant promise, today we have received stones instead of bread, water instead of wine. We believe this is not your desire for your children, because in Christ you have offered abundant life to all. By your Spirit, help us work together to open the Body of Christ to all people, of all ages, races, orientations and gender identities. Guide us as we go from here to proclaim the good news of your love and abundant life to all whom we meet. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

*Closing Hymn #3149 "For Everyone Born" See insert

*Benediction

Postlude "Forth in Your Name" David Paxton

Speaker 1: Peg Rizzo (8:15), Linda Cooper (9:30)

Speaker 2: Barbara Roguski (8:15), Marion Kleiner (9:30)

Speaker 3: Jess Naulty (8:15), God Squad Reader (9:30)

Reader 1: Keith Heimann (8:15), Angel Chasco (9:30)

Reader 2: David Henritzky (8:15), Anne Hughes-Hinnen (9:30)

Reader 3: Tom Davidson (8:15), Evan Courtney (9:30)