

Summerland United Church
 Season of Creation
 September 21, 2025

Threshold and Christ Candle

This is the season of creation. On our church liturgical calendar, we see this long expanse of green growing time. As we enter deeper into autumn we begin to look towards harvest, the results of earth's bountiful creation. It is a time to reap what we have sowed. For good or for ill, depending.

In the Hebrew calendar this is the month of Elul. This calendar follows the cycles of the new moon. Tomorrow is the new moon marking the end of Elul and the High Holiday of Rosh Hashanah – the Hebrew new year. Like the Christian practice of Lent – Elul is a time of preparation, a time to take an accounting of the blessings and mistakes of our previous year. A spiritual reaping of what we've sown.

Today we'll hear two passages from the Hebrew Bible a psalm of praise to God for our bountiful lives in creation and a lament from Jeremiah, heart sick for both the people who have lost their way and for God who is filled with grief for those who have lost their way. These two passages are sides of the same coin – life filled with ups and downs, blessings and miss-steps, bounty and loss. And through it all is the presence of God ready and willing to accept those who have lost their way and are ready to return.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 113 and Jeremiah 8: 18 – 9:1

Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, myth, metaphor or story, listen for the meaning it has for you on this day.

Psalm 113

¹ Alleluia

You faithful of YHWH, give praise.

² Blessed is the name of YHWH,
 both now and forevermore.

³ From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets,
 the name of YHWH is to be praised.

⁴ YHWH is exalted over all the nations,
 your glory above the heavens.

⁵ Who is like YHWH our God,
 the One who sits enthroned on high,

⁶ who stoops down to look
 on the heavens and the earth?

⁷ You raise the poor from the dust
 and lifts the needy from the ash heap;

⁸ You seat them with rulers,
 with the leaders of your people.

⁹ You give the childless couple a home
 filled with the joy of many children.

Alleluia.

Jeremiah 8:18- 9:1

My grief is beyond healing,
my heart is sick within me.

¹⁹ Hark, the cry of the daughter of my people
from the length and breadth of the land:
“Is YHWH not in Zion?
Is the ruler not there anymore?”

“Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images,
and with their foreign idols?”

²⁰ “The harvest is past, the summer is ended,
and we are not saved.”

²¹ For the wound of my people is my heart wounded,
I mourn, and dismay has taken hold on me.

²² Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?
Why then has the health of my people
not been restored?

⁹ O that my head were waters,
and my eyes a fountain of tears,
that I might weep day and night
for the slain of my people!

Reader: May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

All: Thanks be to God.

Reflection

During my holiday I participated in a course on a Jewish Spiritual Practice called T'Shuvah. T'Shuvah is the practice of return to our souls, a practice of becoming who we are meant to be. It is a practice of repentance, and spiritual recalibration. By practicing T'Shuvah we tend to the inner workings of our soul – the inner spark where God dwells within us.

As mentioned it is practiced prior to Rosh Hashanah during the month of Elul. The practice is similar to our practices in Lent. Lent being a time of introspection, a time to assess who we are as spiritual and faithful people. But T'Shuvah itself is a little bit different than what we do in lent.

To do T'Shuvah is to practice forgiveness. To take an accounting of our blessings and our sins from the previous year and pray for forgiveness. From the creation perspective reap what we have sown.

Maybe it will be a surprise to you that reform Judaism is as uncomfortable with the word sin as we are, or maybe not. So, in our first class we had to define what sin means. Myself, I believe sin to be actions or inactions that take us away from our relationship with God. They are the intentional or (and more often than not) the unintentional mistakes, missteps, whoopies that occur regularly in our lives. Some are very small and some are much bigger.

The Rabbi's teaching this course suggested similar interpretations along with suggesting that when we're honest with ourselves about the mistakes we've made, the faults, bad habits, and other foibles that make up the human condition, that honesty to ourselves and God brings us closer to God.

Unlike, Christian tradition, sin doesn't carry the same weight of shame in the Jewish faith. Yes, its bad, but it happens. Yes, one must feel *regret* for their sins, but *shame can* make us unwilling to admit wrongs, make us unwilling to ask forgiveness, which further removes us from God.

And so the practice of T'Shuvah creates the space to notice and know we do make mistakes, we make choices from places of anger and fear, and T'Shuvah also provides the space and opportunity to make amends, correct the behavior and hopefully not repeat the same actions.

It's a difficult thing to look honestly at ourselves in this way – to take an honest look at the regrets we carry, the shame we carry, the things we do or don't do that are bad for us or others. But that's what the practice of T'Shuvah asks people to do.

While also asking us to consider others we need to forgive for their actions, inactions, faults and mistakes.

This is also difficult to do (I'll admit, I wasn't sure I wanted to do it). But the Rabbi's insisted that by engaging in the practice the chains the bind us to unhealth beliefs, practices and people would begin to release. T'Shuvah cleanses the soul of the hurts, the pain, the grit and dirt that mistakes, regrets, shame leave on our soul.

And so I persevered and practiced. Each day (well, ok, almost everyday) I sat with myself in prayer and considered my regrets, considered the promises I've made myself to do this, or that. Be better, get up earlier, think more kindly towards others – all things I've failed at. And in prayer asked for forgiveness. We were given some prayers to read at bedtime or the evenings. This is one of them:

Ribbono Shel Olam! I hereby forgive anyone who has angered or who has upset me, or has done me any harm; who has harmed my physical body, my possessions, my honor: anything pertaining to me; whether accidentally or intentionally, by speech or by deed, in this incarnation or any other; any

human being. And may no one be punished on my account. May it be Your will, Adonai my God, and God of my ancestors that I continually walk upon the path of holiness and that I do not lapse into unconsciousness or indifference. May I receive the power to transmute past unconscious thoughts, words, and deeds into radiant awareness and loving right action.

During this practice I came to realize regrets that I've been carrying around for a long time, that by holding onto them I am not serving myself or God well. One of these realizations brought up a memory from long ago. The full story is too long to share here today, but here's the nut shell. 23 years ago I was on a road trip with my boyfriend (later husband) and our friends. We were all in our early 20s. During the trip a dear family member died and I was full of sorrow and grief. I retreated from the group; I took time to myself to grieve and rest my broken heart. This did not go over well with the group.

I was, and I quote "Bumming them all out", killing the vibe of the trip. They wanted fun and sparkles, and my emotions were inconvenient. Within days of learning of this death, our (supposed friends) continued on their trip and made it very clear to me and Lorne were not welcome to travel with them.

What I carried from that trip to now, the chains that bound me, bound my soul was a belief that my grief, my sorrow, my shadow emotions were inconvenient and invalid.

I realized that because of this belief that I have not let myself fully grieve the death of my friend Brenda (a year ago now), or other deaths and sorrows – because I do not want to inconvenience others or make them uncomfortable, make them end friendships because I'm too much to deal with all these pesky human emotions.

The practice of T'Shuvah brought this all to the surface. AND also provided the tools for me to pray in a way that unbound those chains. Last week I was sitting by the lake and I read the words of Jeremiah – *My grief is beyond healing, my heart is sick within me* – and I realized that this was true for me. And for me to really let myself feel the fullness of my sorrow I needed to forgive myself for believing those people from long ago. I needed to forgive myself for believing my emotions were inconvenient. Rather they're the opposite of that; they are – convenient, suitable, reasonable, fitting.

When I did this – when I forgave myself for believing this untruth, I kid you not, I felt a weight lift. I felt those chains break and I felt more connected to my soul and to God than I have for a very long time. I was cleansed and began to feel that maybe my grief is not beyond healing after all.

For that I praise God, my poor heart was raised from the dust, my needy soul was lifted from the ash heap as the psalm says.

Jeremiah is sharing the lament of people who have lost their way, who have sinned and turned from God. He is also sharing the lament of God who grieves that people have turned away from the holy presence. God asks the people, through Jeremiah – is there not a balm in Gilead, a healing oil. Is there not a physician here? The answer must be

yes, there is balm, and yes healing is possible, because God then asks – why then have my people not been healed?

The people know what they need to do to heal, but have resisted. They know what they need to do to return to God. Pray. Ask for forgiveness. Be honest with themselves and what's holding them back from true return, repentance and renewal of the soul. I can hear Rabbi Victor shouting over zoom – they need T'Shuvah!

Tomorrow as Rosh Hashanah starts and the shofar will trumpet the new year Jewish people around the world will gather to celebrate, remember and pray. They will put T'Shuvah in to practice as communities of faith and they will remind themselves, as I remind you today that God is ever present in our lives, ready with love, compassion and forgiveness, whenever we are ready to receive it.

Two final notes of T'shuvah. First, Rabbi Kook says, *“Teshuvah, even if only entertained in thought, effects a great reparation. And one can reach full liberation only when the potential of teshuvah is translated into action.”* We can't just pray, but we must also act and live out forgiveness in our lives. And second, according to Rabbi's Nadya and Victor Gross, *the beautiful thing about T'shuvah is even if you can't accomplish it all this year, there's always next year, so don't be too hard on yourself. (paraphrase)*

Blessing

May the Holy One bless you and watch over you.
 May the Holy One surround you with light and be gracious to you.
 May the Holy One fill you with light and grant you shalom.

We Sing: VU 267 Like a Mighty River Flowing