**Trouble the Teacher**

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Texts: Lamentations 3:22-33, Mark 5:21-43

Don’t trouble the teacher. That’s what the men told Jairus.

Don’t trouble the teacher. Your problem isn’t worthy of the teacher’s time.

When Lily was four years old and the school year had just begun, she reported that her teacher had informed them that, in the big kid class, they should only cry if they were hurt or bleeding. Now, if you know me and my crusade to have us feel all the feelings, you can anticipate my indignation. “Well, there are lots of ways to hurt. And it’s okay to feel sad.”

Lily continued her story, saying that one of the kids started crying because his friend didn’t want to be his friend anymore. The teacher said that was silly and big kids don’t cry unless they are bleeding. Likely, she was overwhelmed after a day of being troubled by all the tearfilled problems that get in the way of the lesson plans in preschool classroom. Understandable, she’s only human.

But I said, “Oh, man. I would be so sad if my friends went away. I might cry too. It’s okay to feel sad. I would cry if Rebecca or Stephanie said they didn’t want to be my friend. I would cry, then I would breathe and I would find a safekeeper, a teacher, to help because I lost my friend. It’s okay to feel sad. It’s okay to cry. There are lots of ways to hurt that don’t bleed.”

There are lots of ways to hurt. I’m sure this is not news to you.

In his book, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*, Francis Weller names five ways that grief enters into our hearts. We can’t talk about all of them this morning, but let’s explore a few of them in light of the scripture this morning.

The first type of grief is the one we are the most familiar with - the loss of a person or thing that is dear to us. Major illness or disability exists at this gate as well…the loss of the future we thought would be and is now fundamentally changed.

This is the grief felt by Jairus in today’s story. His daughter is sick and his heart aches for her. Without her, his life will never be the same. In hope for healing, he appeals to Jesus.

The woman’s grief is a little different. She, too, is plagued by an unknown illness that, in trying to find a resolution, has stripped her of any financial security she once had, and left her on her own. But she also suffers another type of loss too. See, she doesn’t even feel worthy enough to be noticed. She makes herself small. There is nothing to indicate she shouldn’t have been there, but something inside her makes her feel as if she doesn’t deserve space.

We feel sorrow for the places in ourselves that have never known kindness and compassion, either from the community or just from ourselves. These are the parts of ourselves we hide because we know them to be defective and unworthy. Perhaps you remember the words of a parent or peer that made it clear to you that something about your very being was wrong and you tucked that part of yourself away so no one could see it…unloved and seemingly unworthy of love. Regrets live here too – poor choices we made, the friends we lost, the dreams we abandoned. These are the things that make us feel shame and cause us to hide in plain sight.

And then there is the grief we feel for the world. The horrors of war that flash across our news feed, political unrest, homelessness and poverty across our nation and world, the loss of habitats and extinction of the animals that used to live in them, the hurting earth polluted by human greed and lack of common manners toward the land that sustains us.

This is the kind of lament we hear in the book of Lamentations. The book of Lamentations is, as its name implies, a really long lament. The author enumerates the personal and communal struggles of the people of Israel following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. He does not mince words, outlining all of the struggles, all of the trauma, all of the grief. For three chapters, he lays it all out and calls God to task for it.

My experience is that most of us are really bad at lament. We assume that no one wants to hear it or are afraid we will sound selfish if we do. We’ve been taught that we are to be of service and feel bad accepting the service of others. And this bleeds into our prayer life too.

A few years ago, I watched a friend lead a group of Presbyterian Women in the practice of lament. It did not go well. The group struggled, naming something that troubled them but quickly turning the focus on someone who struggled more. “Well, I lost my job and the bills are piling up. But compared to the people starving in Gaza, we should be grateful. I’ll be fine. They need our prayers.”

We’ve been taught to count our blessings, to remember that others have it worse. And this may be true, but our grief is ours and worthy of attention.

We are taught not to be burden, to assume that others don’t want to hear it. Don’t trouble the teacher unless you’re bleeding, right?

But when we silence our grief, we stifle the chance for connection with others. I wonder what you would do if a friend were to share their story of deep sadness with you? I suspect you would be honored to hold it. Yet we don’t trust that that works the other way. We hold it inside and let it eat at us. With lament, we discover we don’t have to hold it alone. And we open ourselves, in the laying down of our burdens, to hear the stories of hope from those who have walked this path before. Because in every lament, there is hope.

See, when there is hope, we have reason to call out. The woman hoped for healing and that’s why she reached out to Jesus. Jairus believed that Jesus could heal and that’s why he sought him out. Our lament is a sign of our hope.

In the verse right before we joined the author of Lamentations this morning, he says, “but this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:” and continues “the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore I will hope in him.”

The scriptures show an unending cycle of struggle and redemption across generations. We have hope because things have gotten really rotten, really dark, and God has been there and redemption has come in the morning. Not always as quickly or in the way that we wanted, but God was always there and hope glimmers.

And that story of the people of God continues today. Our testimony of God’s loving faithfulness over the whole of our lives, through the times of deepest despair and moments of glorious light, give others hope. When we lament and share, crying out in anguish because we have hope that someone is listening, we model that faith for others. That story is a gift, not a burden.

What I’ve learned about sadness and loss was that you can’t fix it. I can’t erase a moment we regret. I can’t bring back to life that which has died. I can’t even make mom appear before the end of the school day. The only way to bandage those wounds is with the presence of love. For those young children, that was me. They needed a physical lap and arms that wrapped around them, reassuring that they were not alone in their suffering, giving them space to let it out, and helping them keep hope that they were held every minute until brighter times.

No matter how old we are, we need a safekeeper to hold us in times of sadness. In faith, we learn to trust in God, who is our safekeeper, our safe space.

I don’t know what struggles each of you carry into worship today. But I wonder what it would feel like for you to bring those things to the teacher. To climb into the lap of Jesus and cry it out. Not to silence them with “it’s worse for other people” or “God has a plan” or “I don’t want to be a burden” but instead to shout “this is hard for me” and “if this is God’s plan, it’s a crummy one” and “help because I can’t carry this load any longer.” Even if you think your load is smaller than someone else’s, you can hand it to Jesus because Jesus’s lap is big enough for us all. It’s big enough to hold the victims of war and the one who lost a pet. It’s big enough to hold a marriage that is falling apart and the loss of a toddler’s lovie. It’s big enough to hold the one who is dying and the one who was skipped over for a promotion.

You are not troubling the teacher. Did you notice Jesus’s response in the story today? He’s busy. He’s in a crowd of people who are surely bumping and rubbing against each other in the crowd. She barely touches him, her hand merely brushing against his cloak. Yet he knows. He stops and looks for her. He takes time for her. He doesn’t respond with anger, but with curiosity…”Who touched me?” He seeks her out, not to berate her, but to see her and connect with her. His reaction is one of compassion and deep connection – “my daughter, my child, your faith has made you well.”

You are not troubling the teacher. Did you notice Jesus’s response in the story today? When Jairus’s friends tell him to stop troubling the teacher because his child has died, Jesus ignores the men. Instead he speaks directly to Jairus – do not be afraid, have faith – and stays the path with him. This story embodies what we hear and see in the whole of the scriptures. God is with us through it all.

You are not troubling the teacher. No burden is too small. No fear is too big. No grief too deep. Jesus can hold all it and all of us.

So don’t be afraid, have faith, and lament because you have hope. Trouble the teacher. Cry out, yell at God, believe that God hears you and walks with you through every hard thing. Amen.