

Life is brutal, but it is also beautiful. There is threat and danger lurking all around, and also safety and comfort in this world. We see this dynamic within creation all the time...the wild, chaotic elements, along with the peaceful. These are truths that we humans learn, sometimes very quickly or when we are young, that we carry with us as we live our days. These are also truths that seem to be evident in the environment that is described in our scripture reading today. Jesus speaks of the unquestionable element of danger in and around Jerusalem. And we know where his path is leading in this place...to a cross and death. It is not safe to be a prophet speaking of a vision about good news for the poor, release of captives, sight for the blind, and freedom for the oppressed. The forces of power and authority clearly had it out for Jesus, and yet he pressed on with his mission. And certainly, Jesus is not laying out an easy road for those who followed in his path. But yet, in the midst of this, there is the promise of being gathered into God's care, like a hen bringing chicks under her wing. What a radical contrast this is, but important for us to hold and recognize.

A window for me into this sense of honesty about our reality and what we have inherited is through the phenomenon of collective trauma. I was listening this week to a talk by Thomas Hübl, a teacher, author, and facilitator from Germany who integrates insights of the wisdom traditions and mysticism with discoveries of science, and has focused much of his work on collective trauma. He was speaking about the conflict in Ukraine as a collective trauma resurgence in Europe, painfully resurfacing the unintegrated wounds of past conflicts. The memories and experiences of war in the not-so-distant past have not been completely healed because these experiences and atrocities were so overwhelming. These memories that are not healed become trauma

that is carried in our bodies, stuck in a frozen state because they are so overwhelming. This could certainly be said to be more intense for those in Europe today, but is also a real possibility for people whose ancestors, like many of ours, came from Europe and lived through wars in the past.

What is happening to us now as this danger is rekindled and trauma revisited? To varying degrees, we are feeling this unsettledness within ourselves, witnessing the horrors of war, and feeling our hearts break for innocent lives being devastated. We are all together longing for restoration and peace, waiting, hoping, praying for an end to conflict that seems next to impossible.

And still, there is the promise of being gathered into God's care, like a hen bringing chicks under her wing.

In God's design, we have been created to know, receive, and share this kind of care promised by Jesus. The great mystic Julian of Norwich spoke of this motherly vision of love in Jesus like this: "We are brought again by the motherhood of mercy and grace into our natural place, for which we were created by the motherhood of natural love. A mother's service is nearest, readiest, and surest. It is nearest because it is most natural. It is readiest because it is most loving. And it is surest because it is most true. We realize that all our mothers bear us for pain and for dying. But our true mother Jesus—all love—alone bears us for joy and for endless living, blessed may he be! He sustains us within himself in love and hard labor, until the fullness of time."

So, how can we tap into this love that holds, sustains, and heals us and all of creation, even as we exist with the presence of collective trauma?

Thomas Hübl suggests that we begin with ourselves and our rootedness in our identity. In this we come back to our belovedness and being made in the image of God. We need to feel the elemental love God has for us in our very bodies, because this is where danger and unsettledness lands for us, as well. Connecting with your breath, or wrapping your arms around yourself are just some of the ways that you can self-regulate, slow down, and return to the experience of God's care for you. In this, we can proclaim like the psalmist in Psalm 27: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

But we are not designed to be self-sufficient or exist in just a "God and me" relationship. Rather, we are wired to connect and called into community. In healthy, life-giving relationships, we find the co-regulation and mutual support so desperately needed in the face of trauma. God has formed us for this kind of life together. It is in community that we find belonging and have these core needs met, as Parker Palmer articulates: that "I am seen. I am heard. When I express myself, I am taken seriously." Parker also talks about a recovery of small things, of small ways in the many interactions of our daily lives that we express the kind of Christ-like care that heals and transforms. Dr. Bessel van der Kolk also shares the phenomenon that after a collective trauma, people throughout history and across many cultures have tended to sing and move and dance and eat together. Unfortunately, this is not as common in North America and has been inhibited because of the pandemic. But I think we can all agree that engaging in songs and prayers and other rituals in worship can help us feel at one with the people around us and are very powerful, very comforting ways of being connected with others and with God.

Finally, we are called to heal and integrate trauma on a larger, collective level. This happens when we feel moved by the Spirit to find ways to give and help people we don't even know. Perhaps you have been inspired to contribute to relief efforts for those who have recently become displaced from their homes or refugees. We have seen stories this week, like the Polish moms who left strollers at the train station, for Ukrainian moms who may need them when they arrive in Poland with their children. Or the boy who traveled alone for 600 miles as a refugee with his phone number written on his hand, and was embraced by loving volunteers as he arrived in Slovakia. There are stories throughout history of the reality of people being deeply inclined to be good to one another. If you're interested, there is a whole book dedicated to this optimistic take on humanity and our history called "Humankind" by Rutger Bregman. Evolutionary theorists posit that it is actually our benevolence and care for one another that has allowed us to survive throughout time, rather than our competition.

Despite the undeniable truth that there are threats and strife in our world, God's Spirit is moving in and around and among us, so that we may know and feel the love from which nothing can separate us. As you and I are faced with fear, God draws us near, like a hen gathering her chicks under her wings, as we find grounding within ourselves, connect in close relationships, and reach out to care for others across the world.

I'm going to close with this blessing from one of my favorite authors, Kate Bowler:

So here is a blessing for us the anxious and careworn and exhausted all who longed for peace and joy and hope, and maybe God to surprise us when we're running

on fumes. Blessed are we who feel paralyzed by fear. Afraid our pasts might creep back to haunt us. Afraid of what might happen next. Afraid of what might not. Afraid for our loved ones, our kids, our friends, our parents, our jobs, our country and our world. Afraid because so many of our worst fears have already been realized. Blessed, are we who confess I don't know how to stop this spin cycle of worry. God, you know, our anxious minds. You promise us your peace and the quiet of your love. Blessed are we who need to be reminded that we are loved, loved, loved. May we find one another here in the landscape of the unknown. May we feel the comfort of a God that is good. A God who promises to hold us when there is no steady place to stand. Bless us, God. Surprise us with love when we least expect it. Joy when we haven't found many reasons to laugh. Hope when it's in short supply. And unexplainable peace when it makes no sense at all. Amen.