**Birth Pangs for Justice**

November 17, 2024

Lamentations 3:19-24 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Romans 8: 18-25

This week COP 29 began meeting to continue to address the impacts of Climate Change. A main focus of the meeting is getting commitments from richer countries to help with the costs of loss and damage in poorer countries who feel the impacts of climate change more significantly. The conference is meeting in Aberbaijan, another oil and gas rich country, until November 22. The initial speakers emphasized the dire reality of climate change and the importance of continued action and an ambitious climate finance goal that sees a surge in climate action. We witness the crisis of the planet almost daily in the news and in our lives. One of the reports out this week at the conference, by the International Cryosphere Climate Initiative, named the accelerated loss of ice across the planet is driving unprecedented risks to the global economy and climate. Regine Hock, a glaciologist and one of the authors said on Tuesday: “The drastic changes we are seeing in the cryosphere while mountain and downstream regions all over the planet are suffering floods, droughts, and landslides provide the most compelling arguments we could have for immediate climate action”. The planet is suffering and the crisis gets worse and worse as the fossil fuel industry and too many countries and jurisdictions seem to ignore the crisis, continue business as usual or only do the minimum required toward meeting targets when we are in an emergency.

The Romans passage we read today indicates that there is suffering that the community is going through and that the creation suffers as well. Paul describes the creation groaning in labour pains as it births something new. We are called to hope in the midst of suffering for God in Christ is with us, in the adoption of us all as children of God, and the message of God’s loving forgiveness through Christ. As we move through these times we find hope in the God who calls us to care for the earth and stand for love and justice.

Lamentations as well offers a message of hope amid suffering. The author is houseless and suffering but has hope in the steadfast love of God, which they know never stops, and understands God’s mercy to never end. The author knows God’s presence, that God is good, and that there is hope that things will get better. Both these passages offer hope in the face of suffering, and encourage us to live into that hope by working to make things better, as we live out being faithful followers of God in Jesus.

Last week, the US had its election and some may have been surprised to see Trump elected for a second 4 year term. While a majority of Americans who voted, voted for him and will be happy for now, a large number of Americans are in deep despair, disappointment and grief. They are greatly disturbed by the potential impacts of this presidency not only for the poor and vulnerable, especially immigrants and transgender folk, but also for the fate of democracy. Many hope that Trump does not live up to his statements of being a dictator if even for a day and that the indicators of being a fascist autocrat don’t pan out. We have had our own elections here in Saskatchewan and with the Saskatchewan Party win, some have similar concerns for the poor and vulnerable, especially the transgender community and the poor. At our Warm Welcome Coalition meeting this week, we acknowledged that there would not be a warming centre at Carmichael Outreach last year, if we had not approached and pressured the governments to fund it. There was no cold weather strategy in place. With our city elections, there is hope that the new Mayor and council will do better at working collaboratively toward addressing houselessness.

With the feelings we might have of grief, despair, and distress about the possible future following the elections, it is important to acknowledge them, be with them, and experience them, but not wallow in them. We can use them as motivation to struggle for justice and make a better world within an unjust system and during a scary time. As this week, November 20, is the Transgender day of Remembrance we acknowledge with sadness those transgender people who have died or been killed because of who they are or due to mental health illness brought on by transphobia. We can use this sadness to commit to continuing our efforts to create safe space for all, including transgender people as part of our intentional, explicit and public welcome. Our emotions can move us to envision a better world and work toward that vision as we fight for justice and freedom in love and peace. The love of God in Christ sustains and gives us hope even amid despair as named in Lamentations. It is love that can move us to support those in need, and to envision what is possible in a challenging time.

At Eastside’s Open Minds, Open Hearts, Open books study, we recently began a new book, called 2020’s Foresight, Three Vital Practices for Thriving in a Decade of Accelerating Change. In the first chapter it outlines the three practices of Anticipating, Reflecting, and Innovating as a new way of strategic planning as we move through this decade. First, we look to Anticipating how new issues are likely to face those we work with or support in the next five to ten years. What might emerge that may create challenges for those in our communities? Next Reflecting on the aspirations and biblical values of our faith is an important part of this process. What do we most value? Finally, we can research what innovations are being used in other communities, churches, or organizations to address these needs or concerns. We might use this process to help address our despair and concerns of those who will be impacted by the most recent elections rather than being overwhelmed or paralyzed by the negative possibilities. What might we anticipate the implications to be of the recent political decisions on our communities? Who will be impacted, what might they need, how might we address or support that need? Who could we work with? How might we respond? We might identify how the most vulnerable could be impacted and consider what our faith might be calling us to do about that. It could mean looking at others who could help or who are helping and working with them or inviting others to work with us. Out of crisis and challenge new things can be birthed. It can be painful and challenging, but in the work and envisioning there is hope and God’s love is present with us through it all.

May we draw on God’s steadfast love to support us in the challenges we face, the suffering that we may experience or be worried about, and gain hope from that love. May we tap into the energy of our emotions, to motivate us to work for change, to create a better world, and support those in need. May we work together to anticipate the impacts for the future, so we may be ready to make change and address the needs, living out Christ’s call to love and live in hope.