

Words have been my life for well over 25 years. Just in my time as an ordained pastor, I've heard them, I've read them, I've sung them, I've studied them, and I've proclaimed them more times than I can possibly remember. I guess that makes sense, given that on June 10, 1994 at my ordination I promised before my bishop and the entire church that I would "be diligent" in my study of the scriptures, faithful in the use of the means of grace, and always in prayer for God's people. You might say that words and I go back a long time. I'm a pastor in the church; the very place that Luther once referred to as God's "Mouth House." So, why am I at a loss for words now?

I suspect it has something to do with the world in which we find ourselves living. You and I have not seen one another in person for over six months. In what can only be termed as antithetical to everything we have cherished about our communal life, we know that in order to keep each other safe, we must stay away from each other. I miss you. I miss standing in front of you on Sunday mornings in worship. I miss singing hymns with you. I miss seeing your faces during my sermon, (*even the sleeping ones!*) I miss sharing a cup of coffee and a donut at fellowship with you; I miss our times spent in discussions at Adult Forum; I miss working alongside you at Mustard Seed Kitchen and RAIHN. I miss holding your hands and praying with you in the hospital; I miss placing a piece of bread in your hand declaring Christ's passionate love for you. There, I said it. I miss you! Add to this profound sense of loss the overwhelming numbers of people who have tragically lost their lives to the Covid virus. Then there's the flagrant loss of civility in our political discourse; racial tensions continue to escalate; wildfires ravage the west and hurricanes continue to grow in both frequency and intensity. There are some mornings I wake up and honestly don't know what to say or what to pray.

Then it happened. At yesterday's ordination service for Wayne Shipman, I read these words:

*"We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves...groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies...the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:22,26).*

I know I'm not the brightest lightbulb in the box, but you'd think these words from Paul would have jumped out at me before now. It's not like I've never heard them before. They've been a regular staple in my faith diet, and yet for some reason they were nowhere to be found until yesterday. In the midst of Wayne's ordination liturgy, came a sense of healing knowing that when all words escape me, God's got this! Or put another way, In the midst of my prayer paralysis, God's got this! Not only does God "got" this, but God knows and understands the groaning that comes from the deepest places in our hearts, and God does something about it. God is the friend who jumps down in the hole with us and says "I've been here before. I know the way out. I've got this. Follow me."

In the midst of our grief God's got this. From the smallest of losses to the cosmic ones, God's got this. None of this is to say that I won't from time to time find myself inwardly groaning, overwhelmed by the events of the world around me, but when I do, I pray that the sighs of the Spirit too deep for words will find their way back, gently reminding me that in the midst of it all – the good, the bad, and the ugly, God's got this!

Peace and Love  
Pastor Doug