

**Devotions for the Fourth Week of Lent -- Sunday, March 31 to Saturday, April 6**  
**Contemplations on Exile, Alienation and Disconnectedness**

**Lament**

I have become a stranger to my kindred,  
An alien to my mother's children.  
Do not let the flood sweep over me,  
Or the deep swallow me up,  
Or the Pit close its mouth over me.  
Answer me, O Lord, for your steadfast love is good;  
According to your abundant mercy, turn to me.  
Do not hide your face from your servant,  
For I am in distress—make haste to answer me.  
Insults have broken my heart, so that I am in despair.  
I looked for pity, but there was none;  
And for comforters, but I found none.

**Psalm 69: 8, 15-17, 20**

**Readings**

*The most important [commandment] is this: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these.*

**Mark 12:28-31**

*The city called me to say they had a problem [with a homeowner.] The grass in her yard was five feet tall. They had sent ... several letters asking her to take care of her yard, but to no avail. The city was at the point where they were going to have to send out workers to take care of the yard [and charge her, at great expense.] As a last ditch effort, they reached out to [our church].*

*[We] learned that this woman had recently survived stage-four cancer, and she was taking care of a nine-year-old girl in foster care.... I was happy that our church was going to help her.... In a few hours, we had the yard looking almost as good as new. We prayed for the homeowner, and we felt great about what we had done.... [Later,] I called the woman to see how she was doing. While I was silently congratulating myself, the Holy Spirit said, "This is nothing to be proud of. This should never have happened."*

*I immediately knew the full meaning of this gentle rebuke by God.... If we as a church had done a better job of helping our people learn to love their neighbors, then I never would've received a phone call from the city in the first place. At the very least, when her grass started to get a little too tall, somebody would've gone over and checked on her to see what was going on. Better yet, what if the grass never grew too tall because neighbors knew one another and knew the moment their neighbor was diagnosed with cancer? They would've stepped into action, taking care of her, praying for her, bringing her food, visiting her in the hospital, taking care of her yard, and helping to support her foster daughter.*

**The Neighboring Church**, by Rick Rusaw and Brian Mavis

*"Some of the biggest problems we see in our community are loneliness and isolation."*

**From an interview by CFUMC Outreach Team with a Chelsea community leader**

## Reflections

It is an ancient church teaching that we are – all of us – living in a state of exile and alienation from the life that God intends for us. In our own time, we recognize that our sense of exile is made worse by social isolation and disconnectedness. And also, ironically, by “social media.”

- What in your life gives you your greatest sense of connectedness and true belonging? Has this changed over the course of your life, or stayed constant?
- What forces in your life seem to work against a sense of connectedness and belonging?
- Have you ever walked into a group of people you don't know, and quickly felt a strong bond? Was it something you had in common? Was it the way you were welcomed?
- What aspects of church life, for you, provide a profound sense of home and belonging? Are these experiences that can be accessible to a newcomer? Or do they require time and nurturing?

## Hymn

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,  
calling for you and for me;  
see, on the portals he's waiting and watching,  
watching for you and for me.

Why should we tarry when Jesus is pleading,  
pleading for you and for me?  
Why should we linger and heed not his mercies,  
mercies for you and for me?

Time is now fleeting, the moments are passing,  
passing from you and from me;  
shadows are gathering, deathbeds are coming,  
coming for you and for me.

O for the wonderful love he has promised,  
promised for you and for me!  
Though we have sinned, he has mercy and pardon,  
pardon for you and for me.

Come home, come home;  
you who are weary come home;  
earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,  
calling, O sinner, come home!

Come home, come home;  
you who are weary come home;  
earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,  
calling, O sinner, come home!

Come home, come home;  
you who are weary come home;  
earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,  
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### **United Methodist Hymnal #348, Softly and Tenderly**

Hear a stunning version in the final credits for the film, “A Trip to Bountiful,”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAdn7ZSzVWw>

## Prayer

Heavenly, Most Loving God,  
You comfort me in my moments of loneliness; you walk beside me every step of the way.  
I find my home in you.

Help me extend myself to my neighbors; to truly see them, to gently inquire into their wellbeing, to share in Christian fellowship and mutual compassion.

In Jesus' gracious name, Amen