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The First Congregational Church of Old Lyme
Texts: I Corinthians 12:12-14, 27; I John 3:18-24
October 15, 2023

Pastoral Prayer for October 15, 2023

This community of faith has had a partnership with the people of Israel and Palestine for over twenty years. We have friends there who are suffering grievously now... and the way ahead looks increasingly dire.

In weeks like this one just past, a pastor sits down to try to find words to say what needs to be said in a hurting world. And this quote from T.S. Eliot intrudes upon our minds: "Words strain, crack and sometimes break under the burden, under the tension. They slip, slide and perish and decay with imprecision." Yes, Mr. Elliot. Yes. (from *Burnt Norton*; the *Four Quartets*; T.S. Eliot) We are without adequate words.

But I take solace in Paul's letter to the church at Rome, in the 8th chapter, where we find these words: "When we do not even know how we ought to pray, through our inarticulate groans, the Holy Spirit pleads on our behalf." (Romans 8:26)

Would you join me in prayer, God of incalculable mercy, we come before you now with insufficient words to frame our reality. We are fearful and confused. And we wander in search of some action or at least some truth that we can engage in to turn an upside-down world right-side-up. Help us all, we pray. Help us to know – to believe with all our hearts - that the Holy Spirit is indeed at work, giving shape and form and voice to our confusion.

We step outside into a world of beauty and peace- quite mornings, clean air, changing colors, migrating butterflies and birds, and we are painfully aware of the sharp distinctions that shape the difference between our world and the war-torn world of the Holy Middle East. And words, slip, slide and decay with imprecision. We are without speech. So we pause in absolute silence, to allow ourselves to feel the collective power of the Holy Spirit interceding on behalf of all of us. Silence...

The children who gathered moments ago to begin their pilgrimage to Sunday School remind us that there are children the world over that are every bit as cherished by those who love them as our own children are to us – and so we pray now for all the children of the world.

We see young families coming in the door of the Meetinghouse this morning holding the hands of their little ones, and we pray for all the families of the world.

We know that the elders of our community have seen – yet again in their long lives - the unfathomable pain wrecked by humanity upon itself. And we pray for all the elders among us who stagger with fatigue, disbelief and confusion.

As the Holy Spirit intercedes for all of us, we pray that that same spirit of peace and wisdom might rest upon the shoulders of all who shape governments the world over. For all those whose decisions shape the course of our future, we pray for guidance. We pray that they might have the courage to seek the pathways of peace over violence. May they have the wisdom to find the justice that is real and lasting and that rolls down like mighty waters.