When my father was dying, my mother and I were with him. My mother took my father's hand and said, "You can't die. I don't know how to do all the things I need to do." And she began to list the things she didn't know how to do, one of which was how to put gas in her car at the self-service pump.

After my father died, we grieved for him. To use an Old Testament word, we lamented for him. Of course, the lament was even longer and more profound for my mother because everything about her daily life had suddenly changed. She had been married to my father since she was 17 years old – all of her adult life. She no longer had his companionship, his presence, or his help. She'd have to learn to do new things – such as how to pump the gas in her car. And she'd have to learn how to do tasks in new ways. Cooking for one is different than cooking for two. Although we knew that my father was in a better place, we cried out to God with the pain of losing him.

The passage in Isaiah, and the Psalm, are laments. The Isaiah passage was written when the Israelites returned from having been in exile from their homeland. The Israelites had high hopes for their return that weren't immediately realized. Things were not as they had been in the past. They faced a difficult journey of rebuilding and knew that what they built would be different from what they had left. Their lives had changed, and they felt that God wasn't doing God's part to restore things to the way they had been fast enough. Getting back to normal was taking too long. Some things were lost forever. They lamented what had been lost.

We are facing a difficult journey. Our lives have changed because of the pandemic. God isn't making this thing go away fast enough. It's as if we've experienced the death of someone close to us (and, perhaps, we have) or we've experienced an exile, or maybe a combination of both. We feel that getting back to normal will take a long time, and some parts of our lives are lost forever. We'll have to learn to do new things and do old things differently, just like my mom had to learn to put gas in her car and cook for one instead of two; just like the Israelites had to learn to find God in new ways. We wait for God to help us, and we lament.

Ah! But here's the good news in times of personal and corporate loss. It's found in what Paul writes to the Corinthians:

"You are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him, you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord."

So, God has provided for us as we wait for God to help us. God has provided for us the gift of strength. God is faithful. God is here.

If we look closely, we see God in how many of us have given up personal desires for the collective good. Closing our church again to in-person worship is an example of that. We closed because we wanted to keep the infection rate down to try to keep businesses open as long as possible into the holidays. We want our neighbors who are small business owners to be able to salvage their year. We also want to keep the infection rate down so that we don't flood the hospitals with too many cases, meaning there's not enough care to go around. God is in our decision to sacrifice for our neighbors.

We also see God's spirit working in us to create something new. Church will be different even after everyone has the vaccine and we can sing again. We will have built virtual relationships that will continue. We will re-envision ways of being the church, including more collaboration with sister churches and a close look at what "church" really means. In fact, we've already begun that work as we realize that church isn't so much about the building as it is about our church family and our impact on the community.

God creates anew. This creation is a continual process; once in a while, these life-changing experiences move that new creation forward quickly. We will rebuild anew after this pandemic, and what we build will be Spirit-filled, lifegiving, and relevant to the world around us. We'll rebuild just as the Israelites eventually rebuilt their world, just as my mom and all other widows eventually, with God's help, find a way to create a new life for themselves.

After my mother and I had our cries, and a few days had passed, I took her to the gas station and showed her how to pump gas. It signaled the beginning of her new life as an adult, independent of anyone else. Although she always missed my father, she had a new freedom. She could and did make changes in the home – creating a sunroom out of the porch and putting mauve draperies and carpet in the living room – something my Dad probably wouldn't have gone for, but that she really enjoyed. She also spent more time in outreach ministries that blessed the community.

Waiting for God to complete God's transformation in our lives and in the world sometimes is frustrating. And during that waiting time, it's all right to lament what we've lost. But, in the fullness of time, we move forward and, with God's help, give birth to something new.