Mourning as Practice of Resistance and Hope

Christian theology, when reflecting on early Jesus movement responses to crucifixion, can assist churches in reclaiming and developing practices of sustained collective mourning that generate both empowering remembrance but also hope-filled resistance. Communal mourning is essential when experiencing social suffering – here termed, ‘dispossession.’ Grief unmourned has a way of unmooring us from one another, thus also tearing the wider social fabric. In the U.S., grief and needed subsequent mourning are often preemptively foreclosed. Historians document a rise of funeral homes in late-20th century USA, which occasioned a de-linking and distancing of collective rituals of mourning from church practices and other practices that previously enabled collective lamentation and prophetic protest. Affective expressions of grief articulate the damaged sense of future often reported by dispossessed peoples. Remembering grief and mourning are twin practices that are spiritual, social, somatic, political and theological. I connect this persistent experience of collective unmourned grief with the earliest responses to the experience of the cross in Christian tradition. Early Jesus movement responses to crucifixion and other traumatic, violent deaths provide cues for Christian Protestants today seeking to recover works of collective mourning for theological and political resistance and hope.