

Order of Worship with Texts
Sunday, July 5, 2020
Lamentations Part 3

Countdown

Prelude

Psalm 90 (The Message)

God, it seems you've been our home forever;
long before the mountains were born,
Long before you brought earth itself to birth,
from "once upon a time" to "kingdom come"—you are God.

So don't return us to mud, saying,
"Back to where you came from!"
Patience! You've got all the time in the world—whether
a thousand years or a day, it's all the same to you.
Are we no more to you than a wispy dream,
no more than a blade of grass
That springs up gloriously with the rising sun
and is cut down without a second thought?
Your anger is far and away too much for us;
we're at the end of our rope.
You keep track of all our sins; every misdeed
since we were children is entered in your books.
All we can remember is that frown on your face.
Is that all we're ever going to get?
We live for seventy years or so
(with luck we might make it to eighty),
And what do we have to show for it? Trouble.
Toil and trouble and a marker in the graveyard.
Who can make sense of such rage,
such anger against the very ones who fear you?

Oh! Teach us to live well!
Teach us to live wisely and well!
Come back, God—how long do we have to wait?—
and treat your servants with kindness for a change.
Surprise us with love at daybreak;
then we'll skip and dance all the day long.
Make up for the bad times with some good times;
we've seen enough evil to last a lifetime.

Let your servants see what you're best at—
the ways you rule and bless your children.
And let the loveliness of our Lord, our God, rest on us,
confirming the work that we do.
Oh, yes. Affirm the work that we do!

Greeting

address the 3 week series topic of LAMENT each week

Happy Independence Day - July 5

independence vs interdependence, liberation, freedom in Christ to live beyond ourselves

Opening Prayer (Randy)

O God, our God, look with mercy upon your people. Hear our prayers of confession, of repentance, and of grief at what we have done to one another and to your creation. Give us courage to seek you humbly and to act with justice as followers of Jesus. Receive our grief and weariness, O God, as this year has been simply too much for us to bear. Help us to stand with those whom you call blessed - the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the persecuted, and the peacemakers who see the places where your kingdom breaks through. Call us into your presence as we worship this day. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Words of Grace (Sam J)

May God, who pours out loving kindness upon our weary spirits,
and whose mercy endures forever,
free us from our sin
and inspire us to a new life together in God's kingdom
of justice, equity, and peace.

Song: Take Your Shoes off Moses (Jug Band)

by J.D. Jarvis, ©1967

Sayin' I am the Lord Thy God

When God spoke to Moses
at the burning bush, the burning bush, the burning bush
When God spoke to Moses at the burning bush
Sayin' I am the Lord thy God

Take your shoes off Moses
You're on holy ground, holy ground, holy ground
Take your shoes off Moses
You're on Holy ground
For I am the Lord thy God

Go yonder Moses
Smite that rock, smite that rock, smite that rock
Go yonder Moses, smite that rock
For I am the Lord thy God

Take your shoes off Moses
You're on holy ground, holy ground, holy ground
Take your shoes off Moses
You're on Holy ground
For I am the Lord thy God

Stand still Moses
See salvation work, salvation work, salvation work
Stand still Moses see salvation work
For I am the Lord thy God

Take your shoes off Moses
You're on holy ground, holy ground, holy ground
Take your shoes off Moses
You're on Holy ground
For I am the Lord thy God (x3)

Joan Introduction Video

Offering and Prayer of Dedication (Laura - use same recording for 3 weeks)
General Fund, United for the Community, Minneapolis Relief

Song: *Who Will Sing for Me (Jug Band)*

***Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou**

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.
Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,

Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

Scripture Reading: Lamentations 5:1-7, 15-22 (Laura)

Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us;
look, and see our disgrace!
Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers,
our homes to aliens.
We have become orphans, fatherless;
our mothers are like widows.
We must pay for the water we drink;
the wood we get must be bought.
With a yoke on our necks we are hard driven;
we are weary, we are given no rest.
We have made a pact with[b] Egypt and Assyria,
to get enough bread.
Our ancestors sinned; they are no more,
and we bear their iniquities.

The joy of our hearts has ceased;
our dancing has been turned to mourning.
The crown has fallen from our head;
woe to us, for we have sinned!
Because of this our hearts are sick,
because of these things our eyes have grown dim:
because of Mount Zion, which lies desolate;
jackals prowl over it.

But you, O Lord, reign forever;
your throne endures to all generations.
Why have you forgotten us completely?
Why have you forsaken us these many days?
Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored;
renew our days as of old—
unless you have utterly rejected us,
and are angry with us beyond measure.

Message: *Restore Us to Yourself, O Lord*

Today we finish our series on the book of Lamentations. I know some of us are cheering the end. We are sick and tired of grief. We are sick and tired of talking about what has changed, what is changing, what we've lost or what we fear we might soon lose. We are sick and tired of feeling sick and tired.

We thought, back in March, that it would be awful to have our lives disrupted for a few weeks. Now, we are counting by months and the disruptions keep on coming. We are ready to move on with life, take the risks as they come, and see what happens.

And we are tired of reading poetry in worship about grief and loss and struggle.

Meanwhile, protests continue in our city and around our nation and world. The cries for racial justice have not faded. The feeling of urgency continues to build in our communities. Are we ready, this time, for change that will last, for justice that will cost us more than a few uncomfortable conversations?

So let's be done with lamenting. Let's be done with grief. Let's wrap up this series with a bow and get on to something else. There's probably a reason, after all, why Lamentations isn't commonly the subject of sermons. It's so angry, so sad, so full of unanswered questions. That's not why we come here.

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And yet, that is exactly where we are. This is where we live right now. In a world that is swirling with anger, with sadness, so full of unanswered questions.

The people of Israel were in exile in Babylon for seventy years. Years, not months. Seventy. Years.

The poems of lament we have read these last three weeks reveal the deep grief of those years. The questions that remain unanswered: where is God? Why is this happening to us? How can this be our reality? Is God doing this to us? Have we done this to ourselves? Have we done this to God?

And even as we come to the end of Lamentations, we do not get to tie this series up with a bow and tuck it away. Grief just doesn't work like that, as I think many of you know.

Grief doesn't resolve. It doesn't end. It stays with us, and the deepest griefs stay with us forever, sometimes changing shape and form, but never disappearing from our lives.

There is no satisfying ending to the poetry of Lamentations. Many of those who were taken into exile would die in exile, with a prayer on their lips that God would someday restore their children or their grandchildren to Jerusalem. Any happy ending to this story would be far into the future, and even then fleeting at best.

And so, this series does not resolve neatly with a catchphrase or a solution. And so the coronavirus does not resolve with our sheer will that it would go away. And so our conversations about race, the work of anti-racism, and the role of the church in dismantling unjust systems do

not resolve and go away. We may be weary. We may be ready for easier or happier topics. And still, this grief remains. Still this work remains.

This final poem in Lamentations does not follow that same pattern as the previous poems. The A-Z acrostic style is abandoned. Instead, the poet uses the same number of lines to list grievances. Unwilling to walk away from God, however, this list is brought before the Lord, whom the poet says reigns forever. Even in the lowest of lows, even wondering if and why God has made or allowed these awful things to happen, the poet still acknowledges God's sovereignty.

And in the final three verses of the book, we see the consequences of that assertion. If God is still God, then we must have been forgotten. Forsaken. Rejected. God's anger must be beyond our capacity to understand.

Restore us to yourself, O Lord, cries the collective voice of the people.

And while the grief does not end, and while this book of lament gives us no answers to the painful questions it raises, it does offer us a reminder of what the people of God do when all hope is lost, when the suffering is too great, and when there are no answers.

The people of God turn to God.

That might seem simple. We know this. It doesn't take 3 sermons to get there.

But do we LIVE this way? Beyond our words and platitudes, beyond the prayers we recite, beyond the ways we try to present ourselves to others?

Are we ready to lay it all on the table before God and release what has held us back from living in and building God's kingdom together? I want this to be entirely so.

More often, I'm met with resistance in myself and in others. Resistance to acknowledge how utterly selfish I am in the way I see the world. Resistance to ideas and views that challenge my comfort zones and make me feel defensive. Resistance to stories that reveal how my world views and experiences are far from universal. Resistance to change that might unsettle the space I occupy. Resistance to trust and believe and follow teachers whose depth of knowledge and experience of marginalization leaves me feeling inadequate or ashamed or uncertain how to proceed.

Do I really want to turn to a God who clearly takes the side of the oppressed again and again and again? Do I really want to name my selfishness in front of a God so selfless and so willing to sacrifice everything? Do I really trust God enough to tear open my grief and lament and admit the ways I have been numb to the suffering of others?

Not really. And yet, this is our work to do, church.

In the fifth poem of Lamentations, we take in a list of the pains experienced by the people living in exile. There are painful images as the new reality they have encountered has forced them to see how they had taken God's goodness for granted. It was hard to appreciate clean, fresh water when it was free and plentiful. Now, it must be paid for. The laws of the Sabbath felt strict and uncompromising; now there is never a moment to rest from the grueling work of servitude. It was easy to look down on servants before, seeing their station as part of the order of things. Now, even those servants have higher position.

Our ancestors sinned, writes the poet; they are no more. And we bear their iniquities.

As we bring this series to its close, I want to take a moment to share with you just one small part of my own story, of awakening to my own whiteness and the legacy I had inherited as a person who lives in a white body.

I was about ten years old when my family moved to a new home in a neighborhood of suburban Pittsburgh. I was quickly initiated into the group of neighborhood kids, some of whom have been my lifelong friends. Melanie became one of my very best friends, and she still is one of my very best friends today. Our neighborhood, like our school, was not homogenous, but it was predominantly white. Melanie's black family welcomed me into friendship with their daughter, into their home anytime (and it was a LOT of the time), into their traditions and celebrations. They brought me to church, a black church where liberation was the heart of the gospel rather than comfort, which is how the gospel had been presented in the churches where I had grown up. When I was with Melanie's family, I was never made to feel ashamed or guilty about being white, but neither did whiteness entitle me to anything. I was not shielded from witnessing the real impact of racism in their lives.

Over the years there were many occasions when racism was at work in our school and community in micro-aggressions and in overt words and actions. Over and over again I was faced with a choice. I learned quickly that I could not choose both the comfort of ignoring or participating in casual racism and the beloved community I experienced through my friendship with Melanie.

I am not telling you this to suggest that because I grew up with black friends I am somehow immune to racism. Quite the opposite. It was these experiences that awakened me to how pervasive white supremacy is and how, without even thinking about it I exist in it every day.

I wish I could say that there was one moment that made all the difference, when it all made sense to me and I overcame racism. There was not. Our life wasn't, isn't, a sitcom. I had work to do, taking account of my whiteness and the privilege it so often afforded me. I had work to do in realizing that neutrality perpetuates oppression. And this work has continued for my entire life.

I still get it wrong. I still have more listening to do, more repentance. And every day that same choice has to be made again. Every day.

Like grief, there is no ending here, only transformation. But transformation doesn't happen for the sake of our own comfort. Indeed, it most often comes at the cost of our comfort. At the realization that the choices, behaviors, and legacies of our ancestors are still with us, and we cannot choose both comfort and liberation.

Liberation has not yet been realized for all people, and so the collective lament continues. Loss, suffering, and struggle continue to be part of our shared story, and so grief continues. There are no quick fixes or easy answers, and so the work continues. We cannot do what is being asked of us in this moment without divine intervention, and so we cry out with the poet, *Restore us to yourself, O Lord*.

May we be prepared for all that restoration to God will require of us.

Amen.

Song: *Precious Lord (Jug Band)*

Precious Lord take my hand
Lead me home let me stand
I am tired I am weak I am worn
Through the storm through the night
Lead me on to the light
Take my hand precious Lord lead me home

When my way grows drear
Precious Lord linger near
When my life is almost gone
Hear my cry hear my call
Hold my hand lest I fall
Take my hand precious Lord lead me home

When the darkness appears
And the night draws near
And the day is past and gone
At the river I stand
Guide my feet hold my hand
Take my hand precious Lord lead me home

Precious Lord take my hand
Lead me home let me stand

I am tired I am weak I am worn
Through the storm through the night
Lead me on to the light
Take my hand precious Lord lead me home

Communion Institution (include prayers)

RACHAEL:

As we gather in our separate space, still we share this table to which Jesus has invited us. This is the welcome table of God where all who seek to be at peace with their neighbor and all who seek the mercy of God in Christ are embraced. Come, for we are invited in to this holy mystery. Come.

LAURA:

Jesus said: "I am the bread of life. All who come to me shall not hunger, and all who believe in me shall never be thirsty. We are hungry and thirsty. O Lamb of God, we come!

We remember that on the night of betrayal and desertion, Jesus took his authority as the Christ and offered the bread in thanksgiving and said these words we now speak together:

"Take, eat. This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, and by the same authority, Jesus offered the cup in thanksgiving and said,

"Take, drink. This is my blood of the new covenant which is poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it in remembrance of me."

RACHAEL:

Come, Holy Spirit. Come. Open our eyes to the mystery of Christ's presence in these ordinary things in our ordinary lives. May they be for us the very essence of the living Christ in our midst.

Through bread broken and shared . . .

We participate in the Body of Christ.

Through the cup of blessing . . .

We participate in the new life Christ gives.

These are the gifts of God for the people of God.

LAURA:

Let us pray.

Gracious and loving God, you have made us all, who are so different from one another, one in the body of Christ, and nourished us at your table with holy food and drink. Thank you for

feeding our hunger and relieving our thirst. Hear our prayers as we cry out to you. Hear our lamenting and our sorrow. Hear our fears and doubts. Hear our weariness and loss. Hear the cries of the oppressed, the weeping of those who suffer, and the yearning in our hearts to serve you and your kingdom. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers. Now send us into the world to do the work you have given us to do. Grant us strength to persevere in resisting evil, and to proclaim in all we say and do your good news in Christ Jesus our Savior who taught us to pray:

The Lord's Prayer

Song: *I'll Fly Away (Jug Band)*

Benediction (Rachael - invite to come over for communion elements at church, show how to open them)

Postlude