

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## Lament

## Sermon Reflection Notes

This week we celebrated World Communion Sunday, celebrated the universality and interconnectedness of the church. We heard scripture and songs and creeds in many languages and broke bread together around a table, just like millions of others did around the world. Often, however, we talk about *our* church which is different from *your* church or *their* church. We use the word church when we are really talking about congregations, places where people congregate for worship. We divide the church into different groups that believe different things and those differences do matter. But the historic teaching, the thing we proclaim in our creeds, is that there is one church. The church is not a building or a place or a denomination. The church is people, followers of Jesus, baptized into a life discipleship, sustained by the universal sacrament of God's love in Jesus Christ.

The scriptures for the day may seem like odd choices for World Communion Sunday and in truth, they are not very upbeat or happy. The new sermon series, titled "Whatever Befall" will focus on some practices of lament, and it is a beautiful thing that the scriptures teach us the holiness of lament.

"The book of Lamentations is just that, a lament, five long poems of sadness, grief over the ancient city of Jerusalem that was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BCE. The Jews cried over that destruction, because the holy city was the focus of all their dreams and hopes, the sign of God's presence and fidelity to them, the gathering of all things precious and treasured. And then it was gone, gone by Babylonian invasion, but *they* said, gone by the anger of God...in any case gone!

And so they wept. They wept for loss. They wept for abandonment. They wept in deep hurt and despair. And the book of Lamentations lingers in the Bible, because Jews have never finished weeping over that loss that showed up again in the Nazi holocaust and that likely is still at work in the present Israeli government with its fear and anxiety and brutality." (from *Inscribing the Text*, W. Bruggemann)

Like the ancient authors of Lamentations, we too have reason to weep. We lament the violence in our world, in our country. We lament the shootings, the hatred, the attacks, the very process of waiting to lament until after we determine if the person committing violence is on 'our' team. We pour out our hearts to God with raw emotion, crying out "Why? How long, O Lord? This is how I feel and I'm going to tell You about it!" We needn't always seek glib happiness; we can express our truest selves to God.

And that is where hope springs forth. That is where joy sparks. Joy and lament go hand in hand. Lament is a gift that moves us from brokenness and sorrow into healing. Lament is a gift that moves us closer to God. When we gaze at the cross and think about bread and wine, we are reminded that Jesus takes our brokenness and brings about wholeness. The bread we break reminds us that the church is broken. Yet it is still one loaf. We who are many, are one body, for we all share one loaf. We find our unity, not in our uniformity of nuanced belief, but through the sacred meal in which lament and joy, grief and hope, and above all, love brings us together through the redemptive power of Christ.

## Scripture (NRSVUE)

### Lamentations 1:1-6

<sup>1</sup> How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations! She that was a princess among the provinces has become subject to forced labor. <sup>2</sup> She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers, she has no one to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies.

<sup>3</sup> Judah has gone into exile with suffering and hard servitude; she lives now among the nations; she finds no resting place; her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress. <sup>4</sup> The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to the festivals; all her gates are desolate; her priests groan; her young girls grieve, and her lot is bitter.

<sup>5</sup> Her foes have become the masters; her enemies prosper because the Lord has made her suffer for the multitude of her transgressions; her children have gone away, captives before the foe. <sup>6</sup> From daughter Zion has departed all her majesty. Her princes have become like stags that find no pasture; they fled without strength before the pursuer.

## Discussion Questions

1. According to Miriam Webster, grief means: a deep and poignant distress or the cause of much suffering. Lament means: a profound or demonstrative expression of sorrow. The two are not synonyms. So, what is the difference between grief and lament? What does it mean to lament? What are synonyms of lament?
2. When mired in the rawness of loss, what difference does it make to *lament* the loss?
3. We often think of lament as deeply personal and private, but the Psalms, Lamentations, and many other places in the Bible offer examples of community lament. Where and why is community lament called for? Where have you experienced community lament?
4. We don't hear sermons about the book of Lamentations very often, if ever. We rarely read the lament Psalms in church. Why is that?
5. The Psalms offer a 'blueprint' for lament; they follow a basic pattern. First, the psalmist cries out to God, offers up complaints, asks God to intercede, to 'fix' things. But then (we never know how long) there is a turn...and trust in God is expressed. There is a renewed expression of faith, hope, and perhaps even joy. The thing is, we, like the psalmists, cannot predict or manage or engineer the process or the pattern. The move of the seasons is never obvious, easy, or 'natural.' The *turn* is always a surprise. We cannot make transformation happen. Joy catches us unaware, even in times of lament. Especially in times of lament. Joy breaks through despair. Lament leads us to joy, but it leads us through the dark. Discuss. Thoughts?
6. Even though we can't make the turn happen and we can't engineer our way through the lament, to what do we as Christians cling to help us in the shadows? What practices or texts are the 'solid rock on which we stand'?

## Closing Prayer

Holy God, you are the One from whom no secret can be hid. You are the God of truth to whom the truth must be told. And so we bring to you the truth of the world: the truth of hunger and poverty, the truth of need and abandonment and anxiety, the truth of hurt and dying, the truth of violence and war. All these truths we submit to your more powerful life-giving truth.

So we bid you, truth-doing God, veto the hunger and poverty in our world, override the need and abandonment and anxiety so palpable among us, cancel out the hurt and the dying so pervasive in our world, move peaceably against violence and enact your *shalom* in the face of our threats of war.

We do not hold back from you the truth of our need. Do not hold back from us the gospel truth of your mercy, compassion and forgiveness. Sway us from our deep distortion into your deep goodness, that we and our world may again, by your verdict, be "very good". Amen.

Prayer by Walter Brueggemann

September 19, 2001

from Inscribing the Text, pp. 127,128

*"We can trust our truest selves to God."*