

# Let Us Lament

Psalm 88:1-6 Lamentations 2:18-19a; 3:19-24  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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*[Turn around, face stained glass window, and cry out in anguish]*

Today, I lament.

Today, perhaps you lament.

Today, College Hill Presbyterian Church laments.

There is power in lamenting. So, we must reclaim this lost tradition, not only privately, but also in public worship. We have cause to lament. Last Sunday morning we lost two very faithful, loving, and longtime members of this community of faith. Alice Stanford, who joined College Hill in 1965, as Alice Thomason, and Jim Brown, who joined in 1972. That's 54 years and 47 years of service to this church. Less than a week before that, 92 year-old Donovan Hamilton passed away. In February, we lost beloved Jeff Ream. Still on our minds are the passing last year of the Rev. Mary McAnally, Donna Richardson, the Rev. Pat Sibley, Bob Lucy, Mark Watson, and Jonnie Bankhead.

Needless to say, we are grieving and have grief work to do, as individuals and as a congregation. We hope to address that in future Adult Church School classes. And I am available for grief counseling as are any number of specialized professionals in town.

**We have faced loss and it hurts. For some, this is accompanied with anger and even bitterness. And so, we grieve. But lamenting is something a bit different. Put most succinctly, to lament is to cry out to God. It is to share our tears, anger, bitterness, and to pour out all our emotions and feelings and stuff to God.**

I had to learn something about lamenting just a bit earlier this year. In February, I received an email from the editor of the devotional booklet, *These Days*, published by the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. We don't carry them here, but some of you long-time Presbyterians may know to what I am referring. I was asked if I would write a week of devotionals for their upcoming October-December 2019 issue. I was informed that the editor got my name from David Maxwell, who works for the publishing company and is a friend. He also happens to be the son of church member Jacque Maxwell.

The lectionary passages I was assigned are for the first Sunday in October. They include a text from the Old Testament book of Lamentations. I've never preached or even really studied the book of Lamentations. So, I had a lot of work to do. I just knew it was a long, bitter lament by those remaining in Jerusalem after it had been conquered by the Babylonians, who destroyed the temple and carried off the elite into exile. For the purposes of this sermon, and as a biblical example of what it means to lament, I think it's best that I just share the devotional I wrote about Lamentations.

Jerusalem has been destroyed by the Babylonians. The city, now a shadow of its former self, lies in desolate ruin, many of its people taken into exile. A lament, in the form of a dirge, is sung as the only way to express the devastation and pain that is so deeply felt by those who remain. A lament, perhaps the most

passionate expression of grief and anguish, originates and cries out from the very depths and core of our being. We don't talk often enough about the power of lament, especially as a way to share our deepest sense of loss, pain, sorrow, mourning, or regret with God. Even as we ask, "How..." we help release to God that grief and anguish, so that it doesn't fester into even more paralyzing pain. Lament is a prayer that ultimately expresses hope and trust in God, who is always with us, and within us, even during times of devastation. Is there a lament buried within you that needs to be released to God?

*Hear, O God, the laments that lie in the depths of my being. Amen.*

When we lament, we actually draw nearer to God through our cries of anguish and pain. Scriptures, especially the Psalms, are full of examples that reveal we can express the full gamut of our emotions to God – without fear. **The very act of lamenting reveals that our cries are falling on the ears of a loving, listening God who is actually with us in our pain. With God, we don't have to pretend that everything is okay,** that we just have to rush through and get over our pain, or get to some kind of instant closure. **Our laments, in effect, reveal our trust in God. And that brings us to a sense of hope.**

Did you notice in the passage I read from Lamentations that after expressing the gut-wrenching emotion, "Let tears stream down like a torrent day and night!" and "The thought of my affliction...is wormwood and gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me," it eventually leads to the words, "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of God never ceases, God's mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in God.'"

**That is where we must place our hope – in God. And that applies to however you understand the nature and character of God.**

So today, we lament. We cry out to God our pain in the loss of loved ones. And yet, as the apostle Paul reminds us in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, a passage I will share during the memorial service this afternoon for Alice Stanford, and on Saturday, May 18<sup>th</sup> for Jim Brown: "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope." Paul continues, "For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died." That is our hope!

**Grieving can indeed be a long and arduous process. But today we simply lament, we cry out as an expression of our grief, suffering, and sadness.** But laments can spring forth from other circumstances besides the death of a loved one. It can follow a tragedy or a national crisis, like the never-ending senselessness of mass shootings, or hate crimes perpetrated against those because of their race, religion, or sexual orientation. Laments can also follow the sense of loss of friends who have moved away, either physically or through dementia, or from one's own lack of mobility and connection with others.

**What do you lament, and how?** In addition to a scream, perhaps your lament may take the form of prayer, or perhaps writing a poem, a dirge, listening to a particular song or piece of inspirational music, creating art, or simply by your tears.

It is enough to simply pause, and as individuals and together as this community of faith, to cry out to God in lament.

Amen.