

“LAMENT” : A study Concerning Grief and Loss

July 10-31, 2022

WEEK 1: The Heart of Lament – Definition – **The perceived absence of God.**

A time of lament actually allows us to live faithfully with our own faith and our cultural world. The two don't have to be separated.

Lament is often confused with regret. Lament is analytically defined as an emotional state of grief or sorrow.

Lament is often focused on a point in time:

- An act of the past
- A natural disaster
- A personal tragedy
- A cultural tragedy
- A death that is unexpected or one that is completely expected

Lament can occur during our past, our present, our future.

- Unexpected death of a loved one
- Any one of our 233 mass shootings that have occurred in 2022
- George Floyd – a cultural tragedy that has a name
- Uvalde shootings
- 9/11 and acts of terrorism
- Viet Nam or Korea or more recently Ukraine – war

The events that draw us into a circle of candles or filling our sanctuary to ask “why” and we mourn the loss of life or innocence.

Lament can be expressed either publicly or privately. What might that look like?

When we experience public lament we witness teddy bears, candles with the Virgin Mary glowing in the evening sky, balloons floating skyward, tears and shredded Kleenex, public outcry, words of testimony and witness, crosses planted at dangerous intersections, marches and vigils. Public lament demands to be heard and seen.

When we experience **private lament** we witness:

- Rocking chairs,
- Darkened rooms
- Dark glasses on cloudy days
- Absence from life around us
- A vacant chair at the table
- Poor sleep
- And might also include:
- Prayer

- Hymns and songs
- Dance
- Artistic creation in all forms for the purpose of self-expression for the purpose of bridging our heart with our lament to God.

Lament is NOT:

Not whining

Not demanding that the prime focus upon our own story.

Not blowing off steam

Not appropriate for events over which we have control.

LAMENT THEN, IS THE EXPRESSION OF GRIEF OR LOSS TO GOD AND IN WITNESS BEFORE OTHERS.

It is the unique and often intensely personal conversation between the lost soul and God.

Lament can and does happen during our worship time on Sunday mornings. During our Prayers of the People, you will hear the lament of the Body of Christ before our Creator. Our deep sense of bewilderment, our shock at the understanding of the pain being experienced by another, our ever-present question – WHY LORD? Our time in worship should offer us space for lament. Our petitions to God reflect our real need to address God over such conditions.

Our faith journey has led in this direction. Our scriptures echo with words of lamentation:

The entire Book of Lamentations. In his introduction to the *Book of Lamentations* Eugene Peterson offers these wise words and descriptors.

“Lamentations is a concentrated and intense biblical witness to suffering. Suffering is a huge, unavoidable element in the human condition. To be human is to suffer. No one gets an exemption. It comes as no surprise then to find that our Holy Scriptures, immersed as they are in the human condition, provide extensive witness to suffering.” OFFER THE REST OF THE INTRO READING FROM HIS TEXT.

But God has offered God’s self in the form of Jesus for us to let us know in no uncertain terms, that God gets it! The suffering of Jesus is also our suffering. When Jesus utters the words, “Father forgive them, for they know NOT what they do.” He is offering the lament that will be said for countless generations yet to come.

SO WHY LAMENT?

- Because lament is open, direct communication with God
- It expands our prayer life – sometimes beyond ourselves and on behalf of others
- Lament is a connection between the world we live in and the God we believe in
- It helps us focus on real situations
- Gives us the opportunity to confess our faith in God – for if we have no faith, why pray to God?

Remember: Lament is the perceived absence of God in any situation – loss of life or in many other instances.

Now let's begin to search and recognize scriptural lament. Let's do some work together:

Psalm 22: 1-19

Common Elements of scriptural lament:

Lament addresses God and announces the relationship with God

Injustice or grievance is described to God

Includes statement of trust in God, based on God's saving grace in the past.

Therefore proclaims our relationship with God both past and present.

There is a call for God to act.

A lamenter is not reluctant to say how they feel and what they want from God. Consider if you will, those moments in time where you have felt alienated from God.