

Call to Worship Psalm of Lament for Today

Out of the depths I cry to you; O Lord, now hear me calling. Incline your ear to my distress in spite of my rebelling. Do not regard my sinful deeds. Send me the grace my spirit needs; without it I am nothing.

Weary of all trumpeting, weary of all killing, weary of all songs that sing promise, non-fulfilling, we would raise, O Christ, one song; we would join in singing that great music pure and strong where-with heaven is ringing.

Prayer of Invocation

Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations, through Christ the Lord, Amen.

The Word

Psalm 22:1-11

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.

Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;

"Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver— let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"

Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast. On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God.

Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

Living the Word

The WHY? Ruth Duck asks 'why God?' Psalm 22 asks 'why God?' Do you ever ask that question? There is so much that we just cannot know. God created us and this world filled with wonders beyond our understanding. Some might tell you not to question God. But God is open to you sharing yourself in an authentic way, including with your honest laments.

It is OK to cry, yell, rail at and get angry with God. Because God already knows your pain and has promised to go through it with you...it is OK to feel it honestly and express it openly. In fact, often God understands better than us humans do for each other in times when we need to cry out. Your Creator has given you the emotions to express whatever you are feeling and sometimes healing comes as you have the ability to get it all out.

Ruth Duck wrote: 'Why stand so far away my God?' Though God is present with us always, there are times when it seems as if we aren't being heard.

When we look again at Psalm 22, we find that the author never denies God, no matter how miserable he gets. It is a plea to God, but the knowledge is there that 'his' God is somewhere. The psalmist has a personal

relationship with God, personal enough to call him 'my God.' He feels that he is suffering unjustly, beyond what is deserved and cries out to God, "Where are you?"

This ancient Hebrew psalm was quoted by Jesus as he hung on the cross. The use of this psalm by Jesus is often thought of as a cry of neglect. Though the Gospels of Matthew and Mark only record the first of the psalm as coming from Jesus, as writers they would assume that the readers of their day knew that the whole Psalm was implied.

Though Psalm 22 begins in this way, if you read to the end of it, beyond where we went when we shared it today, in its entirety it becomes an affirmation of faith. Even so the lament is still present at the beginning.

Think of the years of slavery in the south. It was more difficult than any of us can imagine, yet the people sang lament after lament to God and it still continued for years - for some people, their lifetime. Their songs of lament were sung slow to the cadence of their hard labor. The notes were often sung in the minor keys, making them dark sounding. But they continued to sing in the midst of 'man's inhumanity to man.' Remember I told you that our thoughts about God, our theology, are written into the hymns. Those spirituals were part of what is named 'Liberation Theology' – a deep mournful cry to God.

I invite you to turn in *The Faith We Sing* to the American Folk Hymn/Spiritual: #2112 *Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley* (Sing)

For those slaves this song helped them relate to Christ's suffering. The concept of Jesus walking this lonesome valley symbolizes the fact that He left heaven and came to live on this earth: (Phil. 2.5-6)

He had to walk it by Himself in that He came to His own and His own received Him not: (Jn. 1.11) Nobody else could walk it for Him because only He, as the sinless Son of God, could accomplish God's purpose: (Heb. 4.15)

Stanza 2 says that we likewise must walk this lonesome valley, which symbolizes our lives upon this earth: (2 Cor. 5.7) We have to walk it by ourselves in that the world will not love us if we follow Christ: (Jn. 15.18-21) Nobody else can walk it for us because each one of us must take up the cross and follow Him: (Matt. 16.24)

There are many other stanzas beside those we've just sang. But they can be for another day. As this and many other Spirituals have been sung, it was not only a cry to God, but a sharing with others the burdens being lamented.

The slaves mourned their lives together. In doing that they shared the grief and the affirmation of their faith in a God who was present with each one of them. Life was tough, but they slogged through it together through their community songs, their cries, lifted to God, and they found strength in lamenting as a community of faith to their God, who was present and crying with them, even when God seemed far away.

When we are between the personal laments of our lives, we often find ourselves crying to God for others. As we share our 'Joys and concerns' on most Sundays, as we take our list of prayer requests home and pray for others, we lament for them and their needs.

We cry out to God for the unfairness of lives taken too young, and for all of the inhumanities we inflict upon each other and for decisions that are made, by those we elect to represent us, who we think are instead failing us. We realize that many of the things we want changed are out of our personal control – and we beg God to 'take care of it for us.'

But just as God has created us all different, just as some of us want rain when others want sunshine, there isn't always a solution to please everyone. Until we can come to a place of compromise and surrender, asking for God's will, not our own – the lament continues.

It takes recognition that we can't do it all as individuals. We can do more with others, and yet...we are called to begin with us. It is still a song of lament, coming from an ache in our soul for change, but if we can get there – we can now offer ourselves for God's purpose, not just our own.

Jill Jackson Miller wrote 'Let There Be Peace on Earth' in 1955. Jackson, who had been suicidal after the failure of a marriage, later said that she wrote the song after discovering what she called the "life-saving joy of God's peace and unconditional love."

She yearned for others to discover those same feelings, so this lament to God, is to be overheard by everyone seeking God's peace. It also becomes a sign of her surrender; saying that she is ready to stand up to doing her part toward making peace happen.

I have long loved this song, but while my son was in Iraq and I was lamenting multiple times a day to God about the injustice to myself as his mother and for his safety, it was chosen, by another to be sung in worship.

When I saw it in the bulletin, I thought O good, I like that one... But as we sang, my heart was soothed by the community of faith that surrounded me in my struggle. In the Hymnal #431 Lets sing together this Song of Lament: Let There Be Peace on Earth. (Sing)

It is a communal lament for the world as we ache for something that seems out of our reach to change; so many things:

- Poverty, yet which some of you step up for, by working with the Food Shelf, Salvation Army Thrift Store, Habitat for Humanity or Ruby's Pantry;
- Disease and illness, even so we are making progress through education, some of which is found in the Library, with some off your volunteer assistance, and the hospitality that is shared by some at the hospital.
- Care of our earthly resources – a number of you work directly to preserve the water and the land in our area.

Each person can do a part, to change what we have to lament about. This last couple of weeks have been for us a time of heavy rain followed by hot sun. Some of you may have cried to God for damages to your plans or your plants or your sun burned skin.

But think of the cries of those who have lost their homes to fires in California, or the volcano in Hawaii in Colorado Springs or to floods in Houston Texas.

Imagine the pain that would be stifled if it couldn't be let go of in some way. We have the need to lament; to yell and cry and get angry, so we can then move out of that stage of grief and start to heal. In the Bible, there are a number of Psalms of lament, but there are many other examples of the people of God crying for help.

Recall how the Hebrew people yelled at God when they had escaped Egypt and now found themselves without food or drink in the desert? There is even a whole book of the Bible called Lamentations!

Because the people were so human, just like us, they needed to get it out of their systems, just like we do. A good portion of the book of Job is a lament for the injustices of his life; yet Job never denied his God...In fact his lament becomes the communication connection he needs to have with God, in order to be reminded that God is present.

We are about to share in some prayer time, I invite you to share your laments with us all during joys and concerns if you want, yet for sure with God in as you pray. Today after we have shared aloud, we will go into a time of silent prayer. I invite you today to take that time of silence to cry out in your soul for God – whatever is on your heart – for yourself or for another.

Then let whatever it is go. Leave it with Christ, if even only for a few minutes and know some of God's peace.