

From Lament To Hope: Lord, in Your Mercy, Hear Our Prayers
A Call to Prayer & Reflection
Historic Evans Chapel – November – December 2020

Lamentations 1:1-2a,
“How lonely sits the city that once was full of people!
How like a widow she has become,
she what was great among the nations!
she that was a princess among the provinces
has become a vassal.
She weeps bitterly in the night,
with tears on her cheeks”

WEEK 1: From Lament To Hope – prompting questions – Relational

Psalm 137 -

¹By the rivers of Babylon—

there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion.

²On the willows there we hung up our harps.

Psalm 137:1-2 - reminds us of how a community of faith comes together to lament – to mourn – to remember a time long ago when all was well with the world. In their minds, they can only praise God in the temple in Jerusalem.

We, too, can feel as though we can only praise God in the sanctuaries of our churches, and as we relate to our ancient ancestors, we can better empathize with them. How they must have felt being so far away and unable to return to their beloved Jerusalem temple.

We, too, have been separated from our places of worship, not because of captors, but because of an invisible virus. Our ancestors who survived the global influenza pandemic of 1918 might have felt the same as we do. In each case, this psalm of communal lament might have drawn communities of faith together in times of separation from usual places of gathering, fellowship, and worship.

Together, they will remember;
together, we will remember, too:

Reflection Questions:

- Have you felt as the psalmist felt? Have you, too, experienced the same emotions?

People of God - it is our communities of faith that can help to draw us near to God again. When we feel these emotions, it is time to reach out to those whom we trust to hear our laments, to lament with us, and to come back around to a sense of hope.

Together, they will come back around to seeing God's hope for their future;
together, we will come back around to seeing God's hope for our future, too.

Reflection Questions:

- How can we best care for one another during this pandemic time?
- What might you do today to care for someone?

Holy God, we are grateful that you gave your children the gift of each other.
May we be knit together,
bear one another's burdens,
and express our shared sorrow in shared lament,
remembering that we are not alone.
Amen.

WEEK 2: Lament for Family

2020 presented new challenges and new routines for families: schools shutting down, parents learning how to teach their own children, working from home... learning a new meaning to work/life balance, extra-curricular hobbies and sports canceled, vacations canceled, celebrations and rites of passage canceled, summer camps canceled, adjustment to communication via the virtual world...children in front of screens for hours, separation from friends and grandparents and relatives....

Reflection Questions:

- How has the quarantine and shut down affected your family?
- What have you and your family missed?
- What has become your joy?
- What has become important?
- Have you and your family remained healthy?
- Have you and your family remained mentally and emotionally healthy?
- Have you maintained healthy relationships within your family?
- What has been the role of faith in Jesus Christ for your family?
- Where will you lead your family from here?

WEEK 3: Lament for Society

This year has seen a resurgence in societal unrest, anger, protests, and division. In our country, there have been massive demonstrations against what many believe are connected (systemic) events of continuing injustice against racial minorities by police and people in power. Many others, conversely, believe that the tragic, regrettable, and sometimes unjustifiable deaths of a few do not constitute wholesale racial oppression but are, instead, isolated events with many layers of complicated explanations. No matter how you see it, most people would agree that during this year there has been an increase in anger and anxiety in our society, which manifests itself in numerous places. In the media, on social media, on college campuses, and on the streets, there is animus and division between people of different races, backgrounds, and economic stations.

Jesus said: "Love your neighbor as yourself;" and "Love your enemies, and pray for those who hate you." (Mark 12:31 and Matthew 5:44).

Reflection Questions:

- Do you contribute, in thought, word, or deed, to hostility in our world?
- Are you able to engage in "enemy-embracing" love? What does that look like in practical terms in your life?
- What should you do to be a peacemaker among different people, especially those different from you?

WEEK 4: Lament for Creation

We celebrate God as maker of heaven and earth and all things in them. We are awed and grateful for the wonders of God's good creation on the planet – a complex web of life with water, soil, air, plants, and animals, and everything needed for creation to flourish. We were given the gift of stewardship over creation, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). But we have been reckless with our gift. We have abused, polluted, and corrupted what God has created. Our world suffers from contaminated water, air pollution, toxic landfills, plastics in the oceans, and global warming that threatens the sweetness of the earth. Creation is damaged, depleted, and destabilized. The harm inflicted on creation overwhelms us with loss. We grieve for the injury and damage caused by our actions and inaction.

Reflection Questions:

- What must we do now God?
- What can we do to make different choices for our earth so that we reflect your glory in creation?

God, help us to be more aware of our connection to the sacredness of creation. Fill us with a spirit of gratitude and discipline that we might care for creation and not misuse it, that we might faithfully respond to your charge to be stewards and caretakers of your good creation.