

SERMON: "LEARNING TO LAMENT"

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4/29/20

Scripture: Psalm 42

"As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.

²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?

³My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me all day long,
"Where is your God?"

⁴These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One^[d]
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.

⁵Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.

⁶My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you
from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.

⁷Deep calls to deep
in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers
have swept over me.

⁸By day the LORD directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.

⁹I say to God my Rock,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?”

¹⁰My bones suffer mortal agony
as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”

¹¹Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.

Patti

In these weeks of quarantine, Jeff and I have had the opportunity not only to be together on Sundays, but to collaborate on some things together (On the 9's devo's at his church).

So we thought it might be fun to do a sermon together where we invite you into a discussion of a particular text and topic.

In these past weeks, we've been drawn to the Psalms, especially **communal psalms of lament**, where the writer expresses deep sorrow for the suffering of his nation.

Psalm writers like David gave his people words of prayer that were set to music – words that expressed their deepest longings as well as cries for God's blessing and intervention...

Like Psalm 27:7, which says, “Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud....”
Or Psalm 28:2 - “Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to you for help....”

These LAMENT PSALMS seem especially relevant for us right now, as the pandemic has shut down so many of the markers by which we navigate our lives:

the routine of daily work and Sunday worship;
 a stock market that moved ever upward;
 outings to our favorite restaurant, game, or ball park.

High school proms, college graduation ceremonies, & family gatherings -
 even our confidence in modern medicine to
 quickly offer a miracle drug or vaccine...
 All these have been taken from us.

And we can only imagine the plight of the poor,
 who had so little before this nightmare began...
 or those who have lost jobs and businesses.

Jeff

Yes. And the question is, "How should we as believers
 respond to all of this?"

It seems to me that there are two ditches to avoid here.

On one side of the road, the ditch is to focus too much on the problem.

It's easy to become obsessed with the news, and
 "what-if" scenarios, to the point that our hearts
 become full of anxiety, fear, and despair,
 instead of the Holy Spirit, and the
 hope to which we are called.

The ditch on the other side of the road is the notion that,
 as Christians, we should not complain or grieve at all
 because as we know, God is good... (all the time)
 And all the time (God is good).

He's in control, and to complain or mourn
 or acknowledge our pain in any way is
 somehow unfaithful.

Patti

As I mentioned at the outset, the Psalms suggest
 a third way that can keep us on the road of authentic faith.
 And that third way is **LAMENT**.

Biblically, to lament is to “**cry out in grief,**” or “**mourn aloud.**” And while Eastern cultures have practiced this type of “**wailing**” for thousands of years (there is even a wailing WALL in Jerusalem), we westerners have often been too reserved or sophisticated to engage in such expression.

Yet crying out to the Lord is modeled by the writers of Scripture and even encouraged by the Lord himself, who lamented over the city of Jerusalem, and at the death of his friend, Lazarus.

There is even an entire book of the Bible called **Lamentations**, written by the “weeping prophet” Jeremiah.

Biblical writers, especially in the Psalms, do not shy away from expressions of complaint and anguish, but model for us how, in the midst of difficulty, we can turn to our Creator and his great promises.

If you have a bible or your phone nearby, turn to **Psalms 42 and 43**. Originally written as a single Psalm, these are beautiful, but heart-wrenching examples of lament in times of trial. And they teach some important principles.

Jeff

1. Proper Lament Remembers

The writer, a son of Korah says in v. 4, “These things I remember as I pour out my soul:” He’s recalling how worship used to be, when he was in the midst of a crowd of familiar faces, all up their praises to God.

In v. 1, he says, as a deer pants for streams of water, so his soul pants for the presence of God as experienced in the midst of his people

I think we can all relate, right?
It is good to remember what we are missing in this “in-between” time of waiting.

It's good to remember that in between the day that Jesus died on Good Friday and rose again on Easter Sunday, There was Saturday. The day of uncertainty and waiting.

The day where we find ourselves now and where we spend so much of our lives.

Lament remembers what is lost, but also what God has promised in His Word, and in His body and blood given for us.

Patti

2. Proper Lament Asks "Why?"

v. 9 - I say to God my Rock, "**Why** have you forgotten me? **Why** must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"
The writer believes he is experiencing abandonment by none other than God!

Have you thought that? Where is God in the midst of this pain? Am I being punished? Why does the Lord seem silent? These are questions the Psalmists ask repeatedly, and they are common to us all.

Faith is allowed to ask God about the causes of his displeasure. Faith is even permitted to argue with God... remind Him of His promises, and to ask why, apparently, they are not being fulfilled.

Even Jesus, from the cross, engages in LAMENT, thereby giving us permission to do so when he cries out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (And yet, "MY God...")

The Psalmist does not stop with "why?" though. As he laments, he remembers who God is and this comforts the soul.

Jeff

3. Proper Lament Proclaims God's Faithfulness

The hero of this Psalm is actually the God of the universe. It would be easy to get lost in all the sadness and spiritual depression here.

After all, the writer of this Psalm is a son of Moses' cousin, Korah, who led a revolt against Moses, and died when God caused the earth to swallow up him and his co-conspirators.

That is a tough spiritual legacy to overcome.
 But whatever was eating at the psalmist,
 he recognizes the Lord as
 the Living God of steadfast love. (42:2, 8)
 The One who gives song in the night. (42:8)
 The rock amid turmoil. (42:9)
 The God of justice. (43:1)

These are just a few of the ways this lamenter demonstrates a robust view of God's character and attributes. There is nothing like the pain of anguish to reveal the depth and content of your belief system.

So we need to ask ourselves,
 are we storing up biblical truth for times of
 affliction and questioning?

Patti

4. Proper Lament Clings to the Promise That There Is Always Hope

Trust in God is not a passive. It's a choice to lay hold of God's promises and cling to them no matter what. The writer does this as he fights with his soul to remember there is a future.

⁵Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. (42:5).

Even if some days or months or even years seem bleak,
 We can have confidence.

"Christ will come again!" we confess in our liturgies...
 His kingdom is not shaken.
 Nor is He surprised by what we are
 experiencing at any given time.

Are you fighting with your soul to maintain an eternal perspective?
Are you fueling your faith and starving your fear?

The Psalms, especially **Psalms of Lament** can help us
in times of **fear, loss, and uncertainty**.

When we don't know how to pray, the lament psalms
can give us words,

and join us to believers across time and space,
who have cried out to
God in trust and in hope.

Ultimately, these Psalms point us to Jesus and his Easter victory.
Christ's defeat of sin, death, and the power of the devil means that
the worst thing that can happen to us is never the last thing.

The one who has promised us eternity reigns.
Our life in him is secure.

We may not know exactly what the future holds
as we wait out the coronavirus pandemic,
but we know for sure who holds the future.

Prayer:

God thank you for these remarkable Psalms and their testimony to us in times of
sorrow, loss or uncertainty. Teach us how to lament so that we won't perceive our
questioning as a lack of faith. Empower us by your Holy Spirit to neither deny our own
pain, nor your sufficiency. Help us to confess both, confident that all authority in heaven
and on earth belongs to you, our Redeemer and Healer. In Jesus' name. Amen.