

Week Four

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LAMENT

Call to Worship

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his 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 him.” The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

[LAMENTATIONS 3:21-26]

Confession

Almighty God, you created the world, and it was good. But our first parents fell into sin, and we have inherited their corruption. We confess that we have turned our backs on you; we have served our own idols; we have sought our own glory. Forgive our sin, O God, and renew us by your grace, that we might bring redemption to the world, in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

[MARK 12:41-44]

DEVOTIONAL

Lent is a season of sorrow. More than usual, we are aware of the frail and fallen condition of our world, and certainly in our own body and soul. Our reflection during this season stirs a deep sense that something is wrong. Something greater than just our individual sin, it is the pervasive effects of sin. Distraction. Deception. Discord. Despair. Disaster. Death. These are deep wounds.

What are we supposed to do with our pain, anger, grief, and confusion? Can I bring these things before God? People like Job, David, Jeremiah, and even Jesus reveal to us that these emotions can be turned into prayers of faith.

First, hear the good news: “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18). Not only does God hear and understand our pain, he is especially

inclined toward those who are hurting. We often think that being a Christian means we must always be happy in God, sweeping our grief under the rug of God's sovereignty. Yet, God desires to enter into our pain: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Romans 8:26).

Second, the Scriptures teach us to lament, to wail and mourn and plead before the God who draws near to the brokenhearted.

- » Jeremiah lamented over the plight of Israel because of her sin: "All her people groan as they search for bread; they trade their treasures for food to revive their strength. Look, O LORD, and see, for I am despised ... For these things I weep; my eyes flow with tears; for a comforter is far from me, one to revive my spirit; my children are desolate, or the enemy has prevailed" (Lamentations 1:11,16).
- » The psalmists lament in times of trouble: "With my voice I cry out to the LORD; with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD. I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him" (Psalm 142:1-2).
- » Jesus lamented over Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37).

Lament is not about getting things off your chest. It's about casting your anxieties upon God, and trusting him with them. Mere complaining indicates a lack of intimacy with God. Because lament is a form of prayer, lament transforms our cries and complaints into worship. Walter Brueggemann says that undergirding biblical lament is "a relationship between the lamenter and his God that is close and deep enough for the protester to speak in imperatives, addressing God as 'you' and reminding him of his covenantal promises." Anyone can complain, and practically everyone does. Christians can lament. They can talk to God about their condition and ask him to change things because they have a relationship with him. To lament is to be utterly honest before a God whom our faith tells us we can trust.

Biblical lament affirms that suffering is real and spiritually significant, but not hopeless. In his mercy, our God has given us a form of language that bends his ear and pulls his heart.

REFLECTION

1. *What breaks your heart? What about your own brokenness frustrates or grieves you?*
2. *How do you normally deal with these emotions? Can you say these things to God?*

Closing Prayer

We hear Jesus say: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And we too at times pray: “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.” We hear the words of the ancient psalm even as we see Jesus: “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!’” And we too pray: “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.”

[WSB]

Call to Worship

Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul. I cried to him with my mouth, and high praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!

[PSALM 66:16-20]

Confession

Lord, we have not kept watch for you. We have occupied ourselves with our own concerns. We have not waited to find your will for us. We have not noticed the needs of the people around us. We have not acknowledged the love that has been shown to us. Forgive us for our lack of watchfulness. Help us to wait to know your will. Help us to look out for the needs of others. Help us to work and watch for your coming. Amen.

[WSB]

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.

[MARK 13:1-8]

DEVOTIONAL

The best way to learn this language of lament is to enter into the prayers made available to us. These are intimate windows into the human soul, the creation condition, and the heart of God. Let's consider Psalm 13, a lament of King David:

David is at the end of his rope. He is tired of trying, almost to the point of despair. In the midst of his physical and emotional fatigue, he cries out to the Lord: "How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long

must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?" (13:1-2).

How often have we wanted to ask this very question: "How long! How long must I carry around this burden, how long will this conflict continue, how long will I be single, how long will I go unrecognized, how long will the oppressed be silenced?" We have asked these questions with wet cheeks and clenched fists, but have we directed our cry to God?

Though he wonders if God has removed his hand from his life, David's words are decidedly addressed to God: "Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death" (13:3). He is not just venting. He wants answers. He wants to see a light at the end of the tunnel, the light of God's presence, the light of justice. Anything else feels like death.

If God seems distant and if David has been running in his own strength for so long, what hope does he have for crossing the chasm that seems to separate them? What hope does he have of being delivered from his circumstances and sorrow and into the light of God's presence? What reason does he have to believe that God will bridge the divide and answer his cry for help? He leans not on his present experience of God, but rather the eternal character of God: "But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation" (13:6).

The Hebrew word for "steadfast love" is *hesed*, a rich, complex word that means so much more than what we often mean when we say "love."

We are very loose with the word "love". I love my wife, and I love coconut in my chili. You know there is a difference, of course, but you have to infer the meaning based on the context. Spousal love is much different than love of food. Even when I do not have warm, fuzzy feelings for my wife – hypothetically speaking – I am still committed to her in a way that I am not committed to anyone or anything else. And my loyal love flows from that commitment.

If you take away the context, then it's easy to reduce love to something that is basically sentimental, which is how many people think of God's love. Most people would say that God is a loving God, but their notion of God's love lacks substance because it has been removed from the context of redemptive history, wherein his mighty deeds toward his people flow from his covenantal commitment to them. The *hesed* of God is a combination of strength in action, fierce commitment, and tender emotional care. God is a mighty warrior, a faithful husband, and a wise Father. This is love that David remembers and trusts in his time of need. This is how he can begin with "How long?" and end with "my heart shall rejoice."

The goal of deliverance is always worship. May the love of God fill us up and turn our complaints and rants into a prayer of faith and a song of praise.

REFLECTION

1. *What are your “how long?” questions?*
2. *How have you experienced God’s love in the past? How do you need to grow in your understanding of God’s love in order to trust him now?*

Closing Prayer

Remembering Jesus, we make bold even in our lament to offer words of trust and praise: “I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him. From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.”

[WSB]

Call to Worship

Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody! With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord! Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

[PSALM 98]

Confession

Gracious God, we affirm that you alone are good. But we have sought our good in other things. We have pursued joy in the creation rather than in the Creator. We have not loved what is truly good. Forgive our sin, O God. Forgive us for refusing to believe that You are good, and that You do good. Have mercy upon us, according to Your goodness, according to Your unfailing love. Amen.

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

“But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

[MARK 13:9-13]

DEVOTIONAL

Perhaps the most notable lamenter in all of Scripture is Jeremiah, known as the “weeping prophet.” As a prophet and a priest, he lived in the tension of representing God and the people. The people were unfaithful to God, and would not heed the prophet’s warning. He longed for them to repent, but he could see the judgment of God coming. There would be no deliverance, only captivity and exile.

The book of Lamentations captures the pain and sorrow and prayer that are bound up in the heart of the one who weeps for his beloved city. In the first chapter, we see the plight of Jerusalem. She has been ransacked, and left desolate in shame. Her people have been enslaved by the enemy. There is no rest for their eyes, nor bread for their stomach. They are reaping the destruction of the sins they had sown. Jeremiah knows it is just, but he is also one of them: “You have brought the day you announced; now let them be as I am ... for my groans are many, and my heart is faint” (1:21-22).

It is an honest view of things. The futility of creation and the injustice of our world are ultimately products of the fall. We are products of the fall, and some of our suffering is the Lord’s discipline. Our sin is ever before us, and we cannot say we deserve to be spared.

In the second chapter of Lamentations, “The Lord has become like an enemy ... he has multiplied in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation” (2:5).

The Apostle Paul asked the rhetorical question: “If God is for us, then who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). But what about when it feels like God is against us? Then who could be for us, and how could it possibly matter? It is an unbearable thought, one that prompted Jeremiah to question God: “With whom have you dealt thus?” (2:20). In other words, why must we suffer as no one has ever suffered? It was a desperate interrogation met only by deafening silence.

In chapter three, Jeremiah has lost all hope, the fount of words and tears bone dry (3:16-18). But then, “having poured all of himself out in lament, he finds in his emptiness a greater hope than he could have imagined: the surprising hope of *hesed*” (Michael Card). Cherish this oasis in the wilderness of Lamentations: “But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his 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 him.’ The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him” (3:20-25). None of us would choose exile, but Jeremiah says, “It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD” (3:26).

Lent is a season of waiting, and it is hard to engage these heavy themes week after week. We are not accustomed to this kind of burden. Our soul is impatient for Easter, but Jeremiah says we need to sit in our lament for a while. Waiting, even when we don’t feel God’s presence, has a way of teaching us this important truth: “The Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men” (3:31-33).

We must learn this first-hand, so that we will “not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” (Hebrews 12:5-6).

REFLECTION

1. *What are you waiting for?*
2. *How is God using that to draw you near to himself?*

Closing Prayer

Where are you, O God? We are lost in the night; have you cast us from your presence? Temptations surround us; their masks grin through the darkness. We run from them, but which way should we go? Where can we hide when all lies in shadow? Have mercy on us, O God. Our eyes are swollen from tears; our bones are cold with fear; our souls have been broken—do you not hear, Lord? Save us! According to your steadfast love, answer us! Do not hide your face, but draw near and redeem us!

[WSB]

Call to Worship

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

[PSALM 100]

Confession

O Lord, do not rebuke us in your anger or discipline us in your wrath. For your arrows have pierced us, and your hand has come down upon us. Our bodies waste away because of our sin; our guilt overwhelms us. We confess our iniquity; we are troubled by our sin. O Lord, do not forsake us; be not far from us, O God. Forgive our sin, and make us new, that we might have peace with you, peace with each other, and peace within ourselves.

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

“But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that it may not happen in winter. For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. And then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.

[MARK 13:14-23]

DEVOTIONAL

We are past the halfway mark in Lamentations. Jeremiah has been revived by the remembrance of God’s *hesed*. His situation has not changed, but his outlook has. God will show up eventually, because that is what he does. He cannot deny himself. He will not forsake his people.

Having seen the light of God's mercy, Jeremiah turns his eye back to the desolate city. It is a pile of ashes where once a glorious fire was ablaze. Those who never gave a second thought to their next meal are stealing from the mouths of children. The wealthy are impoverished, the beautiful disfigured, and the compassionate show no mercy.

The final chapter is an extended plea that the Lord "remember." It is not that God has forgotten or is unaware. Memory is not the issue, but rather presence and power. Jeremiah is asking the Lord to look and see their plight in hope that he will do something about it.

Recall Israel's captivity in Egypt: "During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew" (Exodus 2:23-25). The text does not say what God knew. It simply shows us God burning in a bush, calling Moses to deliver his people. God knew what he had to do, because he remembered what he had promised to do.

What follows Jeremiah's plea for the Lord to remember is a detailed list of what he hopes the Lord will not forget: "they are orphans; they are weary; they are bearing the punishment for their father's sins; their women have been ravished; their princes crucified. All joy is gone. All dancing has turned into mourning. The rubble still smolders. The starving children still wail in the night" (Card). Lament is a sacred space to name our disappointments and sorrows. In fact, the most common form of lament in Scripture is poetry. Provocative imagery, vivid language, passionate expression, this is the language of love and lament, of prophet and priest.

Jeremiah was torn between his love for his own people and his commitment to his God. God's own heart had been broken by his unfaithful people, and Jeremiah could do nothing but fill that abyss with his tears. His life points us to our ultimate hope, the Great prophet and High priest, Christ Jesus our Lord. "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17). Jeremiah proclaimed the coming judgment of God. Jesus bore the weight of God's judgment in our place. His blood speaks a better word" (Hebrews 12:24).

When Jesus stood in that awful gap between God and his people, the curtain of the temple was torn asunder. The presence and power of God was made available to all who would come in faith. Their mourning would be turned to laughing. "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18).

REFLECTION

1. *What do you want the Lord to see in your life, in your town, and in our world?*
2. *What promises do you want to remind him of?*

Closing Prayer

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

[PSALM 13]

Call to Worship

The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

[PSALM 103:6-13]

Confession

O God, from ages past no ear has heard, and no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him. But we have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. Yet you, O Lord, are our Father; we are the clay, and you are the potter; we are the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember our sin forever. Restore us, we pray, through the grace of our Lord Jesus, in whom we place our hope and trust. Amen.

[BASED ON ISAIAH 64]

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

[MARK 13:24-31]

DEVOTIONAL

On any given Sunday, we worship next to people who are struggling. They are going through the motions of the service, but inside they are confused or hurting or even angry with God. The music is upbeat. The message is well meant, but does not address the depth of loss they feel. The masses are happy, so it seems.

It is one thing to lament in the privacy of our own home or mind, but it takes a different kind of courage and faith to lament with and for another. Michael Card comments, “We’re afraid of other people’s pain. Like Job’s friends, we’re afraid when we don’t have answers. Job doesn’t get any answers for his sufferings, but he gets God.” To enter into someone’s suffering, and to lament with them, is to seek God with them.

Unfortunately, Card is right. We are uneasy with pain and sorrow. Eugene Peterson weighs in: “Why are so many Christians embarrassed by tears, uneasy in the presence of sorrow, unpracticed in the language of lament? It certainly is not a biblical heritage, for virtually all our ancestors in the faith were thoroughly ‘acquainted with grief.’ And our Savior was, as everyone knows, ‘a Man of Sorrow.’”

His answer: “For at least one reason why people are uncomfortable with tears and the sight of suffering is that it is a blasphemous assault on their precariously maintained American spirituality of the pursuit of happiness. It is a lot easier to keep the American faith if they don’t have to look into the face of suffering, if they don’t have to listen to our laments, if they don’t have to deal with our tears.”

In the same way that our failure to lament cuts us off from the heart of God, it also cuts us off from each other. If we are to love one another as Jesus commanded, we must learn to “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15).

Much of contemporary Christianity has sought to insulate itself from the real, broken world. If we’re not careful, we’ll lose touch with reality. King Solomon says it this way: “It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure” (Ecc 7:2-4).

Feasting and laughter and pleasure are not wrong, but trying to insulate your life with these things is not really life. It’s a bubble. You need to enter the pain of the world around you because the fall is your reality—“death is the destiny of every man.” Take this to heart and you will be wise. Pretend that Christianity is safety from sorrow and you will be a fool.

The way of Christian fellowship is empathy, which means we must not assume that everyone around us is fine. In our conversations, we must listen for complaints and cries and help them become laments. In our gathered worship, we must acknowledge the hurting and leave room for struggle and silence. In our counsel, we must pray with and over and for the hurting. This is essential to authentic Christian faith: Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

REFLECTION

1. *Who is the Lord bringing to your mind today?*
2. *How can you move toward them with empathy?*

Closing Prayer

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?" These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival. Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

[PSALM 42:1-5]

Call to Worship

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!

[PSALM 107:1-9, 15]

Confession

God of love, it is your will that we should love you with heart, soul, mind, strength, and our neighbor as ourselves, but we are not sufficient for these things. We confess that our affections continually turn away from you: from purity to lust, from freedom to slavery, from compassion to indifference, from fullness to emptiness. Have mercy on us. Order our lives by your holy Word, and make your commandments the joy of our hearts. Conform us to the image of your loving Son, Jesus, that we may shine before the world to your glory. Amen.

Contemplation

GOSPEL READING

“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

[MARK 13:32-37]

DEVOTIONAL

The deepest longing of our soul is the all-satisfying *hesed* of God—not in the abstract, but first-hand knowledge and experience, a *tasting* of God’s *hesed*. Have you been delivered by the hand of God, tasted his mercy, seen his power, heard his word, felt his presence? The degree to which we have known the presence and power of God is the degree to which we get a sense for what it meant that Jesus was the Son of God, and

how devastating it must have been to bear the judgment of God against sin. All lament leads us to Jesus, in whom our sorrow and pain finds ultimate identification and hope.

The apex of bewilderment and spiritual chaos for Jesus was on the cross. The physical pain was excruciating, yet it was nothing compared to the shock and horror of being forsaken by the Father. The wrath of God was poured out on Jesus, the whole weight of the world's guilt bearing down on his shoulders. He felt the pain and loss of humanity. He internalized our anger and shame. He, who knew no sin, became sin (2 Corinthians 5:17).

In that moment, he took up the lament of King David: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). When he said this he not only took our sin upon himself, but also voiced all our laments. For underlying all our laments are two questions: "God, where are you?" and, "God, if you love me, then why?" For the first time in all of eternity, Jesus felt the absence of the Father's presence and the uncertainty of his love. God could not look upon the sin that Jesus became.

Why did it have to be this way? If Jesus was God's answer to ages of laments, how did he end up in the most lamentable position of all?

One approach to the question is to consider why so many ultimately rejected him, even his own people (John 1:11). They had expectations about what it would mean for God to answer their prayers and solve their problems. The disciples, too, regularly stumbled over their expectations. They hoped the Messiah would conquer the Romans and vindicate Israel. Instead, he predicted the destruction of the temple and died for the Romans. They wanted the Messiah to give them answers. Jesus gave himself. He predicted his own destruction, and then endured it in order to conquer our real enemies: Satan, sin, and death. Jesus did not take away lamenting. He took it up. Having endured the cross, he secured for us the one thing we need more than solutions: the presence of God.

"Lament is the path that takes us to the place where we discover that there is no complete answer to pain and suffering, only Presence" (Card).

REFLECTION

1. *Spend some time meditating on the suffering that Jesus endured.*
2. *How would the presence of God be more satisfying to you than answers from God?*

Closing Prayer

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. Return, O Lord! How long? Have pity on your servants! Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil. Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!

[PSALM 90:12-17]

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

The Lord Jesus was born under the law and perfectly fulfilled it. He endured most grievous torments in his soul and most painful sufferings in his body; he was crucified, died, and was buried; he remained under the power of death, yet his body did not undergo decay; and he arose from the dead on the third day with the same body in which he had suffered. In this body he ascended into heaven, where he sits at the right hand of his Father, making intercession, and he shall return to judge men and angels at the end of the age. The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself—which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up to God—has fully satisfied the justice of his Father. He purchased not only reconciliation but also an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven for all whom the Father has given to him.

[WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH CH. 8]



Christ hath risen! Hallelujah!
Blessed morn of life and light!
Lo, the grave is rent asunder,
Death is conquered through His might.

Christ is risen! Hallelujah!
Gladness fills the world today;
From the tomb that could not hold Him,
See, the stone is rolled away!

Christ hath risen! Hallelujah!
Friends of Jesus, dry your tears;
Through the veil of gloom and darkness,
Lo, the Son of God appears!

Christ hath risen! Hallelujah!
He hath risen, as He said;
He is now the King of glory,
And our great exalted Head.

[FANNY CROSBY]