



Worship Service Theme: Lament

Welcome: Welcome! It's so good to be together to celebrate faith and community today. My name is ____ and I'll be leading our worship time today.

It seems that quite often, our country and world go through a lot of pain, sometimes caused by uncontrollable events and sometimes caused by destructive human choices. So today we're looking at the theme of **lament**. What is lament, do you think? What's the feeling of lament?

Lament is a word for grief or mourning or weeping. We *all* experience lament at some point in our lives. According to the Bible, lament is not only OK and normal, but necessary. We lament, we feel sad, over things that *should* make us sad. We talk about it together and with God. And we place our trust in God for healing and restoration.

Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening Prayer: Great and loving God, we ask your Holy Spirit to bless our time together and to refresh us with your presence. In the midst of a world full of trouble and strife, we thank you for watching over us, guiding us, and as we confess our sins, for forgiving us. Enable us to enter your presence joyfully and reverently, and let us depart today with the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Fill us, O God, with the peace which passes understanding. Amen.

Opening Hymn: Doxology

Statement of Faith: Let us affirm our statement of faith by reciting Psalm 23, "The Lord is My Shepherd," together:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Suggested Hymns:

For the Beauty of the Earth

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us

First reading: Lamentations 3: 17-24

[An entire book in the Old Testament Bible is called Lamentations, a Hebrew word that means "crying." In this book, the writer grieves over the destruction of Jerusalem, sometime around 586 B.C.]

¹⁷ ...My soul is bereft of peace;

I have forgotten what happiness is;

¹⁸ so I say, "My endurance has perished;

so has my hope from the Lord."

¹⁹ Remember my affliction and my wanderings,
the wormwood and the gall!

²⁰ My soul continually remembers it
and is bowed down within me.

²¹ But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:

²² The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;

²³ they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

²⁴ "The Lord is my portion," says my soul,
"therefore I will hope in him."

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Suggested Hymns:

**Great is Thy Faithfulness
Holy, Holy, Holy
Jesus Loves Me**

Second reading: 2 Corinthians 1:8-11

The apostle Paul (St. Paul) wrote this to a group of new believers:

⁸We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. ⁹Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. ¹⁰He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On God we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. ¹¹You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

**Suggested Hymns:
Softy and Tenderly
Leaning on the Everlasting Arms**

Interactive Homily: Let's talk more about lament.

- What words would you use to describe the *feeling* of lament?
 - Passionate sadness, grief, sorrow, mourning.
- We all have these feelings at some point, don't we? What circumstances may rightly cause us to grieve?
 - When someone you love dies: a spouse, friend, pet.
 - When you struggle with something inside yourself that won't go away: anger, selfishness, impatience ...
 - When you see something in the world that hurts. Such as?
 - Natural disasters: people impacted by floods, fires, etc.
 - Societal unrest: war, illness, poverty, gun violence.
 - Injustice on a small or large scale: a single person wrongly accused, whole groups of people harmed.
- Do you think God is aware of our grief and lament? Absolutely! How do we know?

- The Bible is *full* of stories and honest outpourings to God from people who are grieving, either for themselves or for the world around them.
- As people of faith, what should we do with our grief and lament? Should we immediately jump in analyze or try to solve the problems that cause us to grieve? Should we hide from the pain? No... those aren't biblical or healthy responses.
 - First, simply feel grief. It's OK to lament! Pain is real.
 - Second, address our sorrows and complaints *to God*. God can take everything we can dish out. The people in the Bible were honest and clear with God about their grief:
 - Job: "My eye is dim by reason of sorrow." (Job 17:7)
 - King David: "I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. My eye wastes away because of grief." (Psalm 6:6-7)
 - The prophet Jeremiah: "'Woe is me! For the Lord has added sorrow to my pain. I am weary with my groaning.'" (Jeremiah 45:3)
 - Third, turn to God and pray for places of pain. Tell God what you/we need:
 - For personal hearts, that we would repent: because "a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:17).
 - For our cities and country and world: "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jeremiah 29:7).
 - Fourth, decide to trust God. This is an act of the will when your heart is sorrowful.
 - Remember and talk about what God has done in the past. What sorts of things has God done for you in your life? What do you praise God for?
 - Recounting what God has done gives us faith to place our hope in God. God alone can heal and restore.

The story of our faith is that life comes from death, that hope springs from hardship, that joy comes after mourning. That's what God does!

... Let's take a moment to silently pray in honesty and hope.

(Silent Prayer) ... Thank you, Lord, that you do not shy away from grief, but instead offer examples of godly people who suffer and lament, so that we may look to their example and be encouraged.¹ Thank you that your heart is so large for us, for our pain and folly, that you extend mercy for our healing.

We pray that our cities and nation will see miracles of healing, reconciliation and lasting harmony, rooted in truth and in the paths of righteousness.²

We pray for peace — the fullest enjoyment of *shalom*, flowing down from the God of peace, and bought at an infinite price through Jesus Christ.³ We look forward, Lord, to the ultimate restoration of all things. Hear our prayers.

Now let us pray the Lord's prayer together:

Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

Suggested Hymns:

This is My Father's World

It is Well with My Soul

Third Reading: Quotes on Lament

What we need is not simply better gear and techniques but a story that helps us remember another world is possible. The good news is that God's story offers us just that. In the midst of our world's deep brokenness, God's kingdom breaks in to create new possibilities. ...

Lament, which leads to hope, is not a light and easy transformation of suffering. Lament is work. Lament is that deeper engagement with God, when things are not going right. — Father Emmanuel M. Katongole, Ugandan theologian, professor of theology and peace studies at Notre Dame University

¹ https://restoreprayer.com/?ck_subscriber_id=785651132

² <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-sorrows-of-minneapolis>

³ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-sorrows-of-minneapolis>

A lament is an act of worship, a faith statement of trust, in the face of difficulty. It's a wonderfully honest way to acknowledge our trouble to God as we also acknowledge our hope is in him. —writer Linda Evans Shepherd

Lament isn't giving up; it's giving over. When we lift up our sorrow and our pain, we turn it over to the only one who can meet it: our God. —film critic Josh Larsen

Suggested Hymns:

Amazing Grace

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

Fourth Reading: Manure into Fertilizer

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits in 1541, talked about the importance of how we deal with painful experiences. Ignatius said that painful experiences pile up like manure, stinking up our lives, if we don't deal with them. But when we process difficult things with God, the Holy Spirit takes that manure and turns it into fertilizer.

Isn't that a great image? God wants to take whatever stinks in our lives, and turn it into just what we need to grow and flourish, like fertilizer for a beautiful garden. But that can only happen when we honestly face those painful experiences with God's help and presence, and turn to God in trust, faith, and hope.⁴

Suggested Hymns:

I Need Thee Every Hour

Closing Blessing: (Strike bell as you say the word "Lord")

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Closing Hymn: Doxology (Reprise)

⁴ with thanks to Jon Ball for this story.