

Out of the Ashes:
A Service of Lament in a Season of Disaffiliation
Discipleship Ministries
April 20, 2023

We give God thanks for the gifts of technology that allow us to gather together for worship, though we are scattered across the world. During this service of lament, you are invited to use Zoom's chat feature as an extension of our shared worship space to share words of encouragement and extend prayer. Thank you for your presence and participation in worship today.

Permission to Lament

Welcome. In his sermon “On Schism,” John Wesley states, “To separate ourselves from a body of living Christians, with whom we were before united, is a grievous breach of the law of love.” For the last year, we as United Methodists have been inundated with a tidal wave of breaches of the law of love. We also know that the last year has been the fruit of years of arguments, disputes, and discord, signs of, to use Wesley’s words, “love grown cold.” We have much to grieve. And so, as we enter into this time of worship, receive this gift: you have permission to lament. We live in a world that is uncomfortable with hard emotions. When we are faced with pain, grief, and hurt, it is tempting to rush ahead, to set the grief aside, and run toward the next thing. But God is inviting us to stop, to be honest about our grief, to cry and rage and tell the truth because the worst thing we can take with us into the future of who we are as United Methodists is a numbness toward the pain we are experiencing now.

As we gather to lament, pray, sing, and proclaim the Word together, you are invited to gather a candle or flashlight, a bowl or cup of water, and a rock or bead—everyday things that remind us that God is with us in the small and the ordinary. We will use these items throughout our time together to signify and embody our shared lament even as we are separated by location and time.

So, as we welcome the light of Christ in our midst, let us cry to the God who gathers our tears in a bottle and joins us as we sit in our grief and as we rise out of the ashes.

Gathering Music

“There Is a Balm in Gilead”

Steven Lindsey

Litany for Welcoming Our Lament

Dr. Lisa Hancock

In baptism, we are incorporated by the Holy Spirit into God’s new creation and made to share in Christ’s royal priesthood. We become members of the family of the Christ, united as one in Christ Jesus. Faced with the pain of division and grief of separation, we come, again, to the water to answer the call to lament.

Take a moment to touch the water in front of you. Or, if you don’t have any water, touch a table, a cup, or even touch your hands together. Feel the grounding of touch as we call one another into a time of lament:

God, we have spent so much time trying to make sense of our disagreements and divisions, we have forgotten how to feel them.

God, help us welcome our lament.

To our grief, we say:

Welcome.

To our anger, we say:

Welcome.

To our despair, we say:

Welcome.

To our sadness, we say:

Welcome.

To our exhaustion, we say:

Welcome.

We welcome our lament together as members of the Family of Christ knowing that we are not alone. God is with us.

Amen.

Hymn

Come and Find the Quiet Center

TFWS 2128

Come and find the quiet center
in the crowded life we lead,
find the room for hope to enter,
find the frame where we are freed:
clear the chaos and the clutter,
clear our eyes, that we can see
all the things that really matter,
be at peace, and simply be.

Silence is a friend who claims us,
cools the heat and slows the pace,
God it is who speaks and names us,
knows our being, touches base,
making space within our thinking,
lifting shades to show the sun,
raising courage when we're shrinking,
finding scope for faith begun.

Reading**Psalm 77:1-3**

I cry aloud to God,
aloud to God, that he may hear me.
In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord;
in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;
my soul refuses to be comforted.
I think of God, and I moan;
I meditate, and my spirit faints. *Selah*

Instrumental Lament

David Henry

Hymn

Come and Find the Quiet Center
Additional verse by Rev. John Thornburg

TFWS 2128

When the ache of constant sorrow
dulls our senses and our hope,
and the threat to our tomorrow
makes it difficult to cope,
God, the One who hears our weeping,
knows our longing, sees our pain,
brings assurance to our sleeping,
is the sunshine after rain.

In the Spirit let us travel,
open to each other's pain,
let our loves and fears unravel,
celebrate the space we gain:
there's a place for deepest dreaming,
here's a time for heart to care,
in the Spirit's lively scheming
there is always room to spare!

Reading**Psalm 77:4-9**

You keep my eyelids from closing;
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.
I consider the days of old
and remember the years of long ago.
I commune[a] with my heart in the night;
I meditate and search my spirit:[b]
“Will the Lord spurn forever
and never again be favorable?
Has his steadfast love ceased forever?
Are his promises at an end for all time?
Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has he in anger shut up his compassion?” *Selah*

Litany for Naming Our Lament

As we hold space for our lament, you are invited to hold a rock or a bead or other small object in your hand. For each petition, I will drop a rock in the waters of the baptismal font. At the end of this time of holding space for lament, I invite you to drop your rock into your water or place it in front of you. If you do not have a rock, hold your hands in front of you, and as we say “Amen,” imagine you are handing your laments over to God. Let us pray.

Merciful and loving God, you know the pain of division and the longings for peace that trouble us in this season of disaffiliation. As we cry aloud to you, receive our lament and hold us in your loving embrace.

God, we survey the divisions among us and our hearts break at communities, families, colleagues, and friends once united and now divided.

Merciful God, we cry to you.

God, the ground seems to be ever-shifting, and we mourn that the church, once a place of stability, now feels full of uncertainty and confusion.

Merciful God, we cry to you.

God, we look to the church as the community that teaches us who you are and shows us how to love as you love. Yet the discord and division among us leads us to despair that we can never become who you have made us to be.

Merciful God, we cry to you.

God, with all that is hard in the world, we waffle between numbness and anger as we encounter the mistrust and secrecy that have been sown in our churches and across our connection through misinformation and mischaracterization.

Merciful God, we cry to you.

God, we have known the beauty and strength of our connection, and we lament the ways that our arguments, divisions, and disaffiliations threaten to weaken our witness and mission.

Merciful God, we cry to you.

God, some of us are grieving not for ourselves but for our fellow United Methodists who feel lost as they are left searching for a new local church community to call home.

Merciful God, we cry to you.

God, we weep for clergy who faithfully led congregations that have chosen to leave the denomination and now grapple with feelings of loss and betrayal while preparing to serve a new ministry context.

Merciful God, we cry to you.

God, many of us were taught to build up the Body of Christ through love, integrity, transparency, and truth-telling, yet are now left confused, wounded, and even skeptical as we watch the churches who raised us tear down and harm other members of the Body.

Merciful God, we cry to you.

Merciful God, we bring these and so many more laments to you today, crying to you to pay attention to us in our pain and to hold our grief in the palms of your hands. And so, as we share these laments with one another, we give over these burdens to you to hold and to bless, in the name of the Triune God who created us, redeems us, and sustains us.

Amen.

Reflection

Rev. Chebon Kernell

Reading

Psalms 77:10-15

And I say, "It is my grief
that the right hand of the Most High has changed."
I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord;
I will remember your wonders of old.
I will meditate on all your work
and muse on your mighty deeds.
Your way, O God, is holy.
What god is so great as our God?
You are the God who works wonders;
you have displayed your might among the peoples.
With your strong arm you redeemed your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah*

Instrumental Lament

David Henry

Reflection

Maggie Taylor

Reading

Psalms 77:16-20

When the waters saw you, O God,
when the waters saw you, they were afraid;
the very deep trembled.
The clouds poured out water;
the skies thundered;
your arrows flashed on every side.
The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind;
your lightnings lit up the world;
the earth trembled and shook.
Your way was through the sea,
your path through the mighty waters,
yet your footprints were unseen.

You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Homily

Rev. Dr. Derek Weber

Litany for Surrendering Our Lament

We have spent this time of lament holding and being held by one another and by God, naming and acknowledging the pain and grief of this season in our life as United Methodists. Wherever you placed your rock as we held space for our lament, I now invite you to pick it back up. Or, if you do not have a rock, take your open hands and place them over your heart as we bless our lament as an offering to God.

Loving God, we have named our lament, knowing that you are good and faithful and compassionate to us in our suffering. Guide us now as we bless our lament, not so that we might forget our grief, but so that in giving it over to you, we would be a people whose hearts beat with yours, our God who is faithful in the midst of our pain.

God, we remember all you have done for us—your grace that saves us, your love that sustains us, your wisdom that guides us in all seasons, and we know that we can trust you with our pain.

Loving God, we surrender our lament to you.

God, we remember how you have inspired us to live as Gospel people, bringing good news and love and hope and compassion to our neighbors. Through our grief, breathe into us your breath life and stir us to continue as bearers of good news in our communities.

Loving God, we surrender our lament to you.

God, we remember how you brought us out of trouble, and we hold tight to your faithfulness, knowing that you are already at work in us to deliver us again.

Loving God, we surrender our lament to you.

God, we remember how Jesus modeled how to be present to our grief and lament, how to tell the truth when we are surrounded by misinformation, and how to work for unity marked by love and mutual care.

Loving God, we surrender our lament to you.

God, we remember that you are in the business of transformation. And so, we surrender our lament to you, and we seek your blessing in this season. Have mercy on us, your children.

Loving God, bless our lament.

God, we thank you that in our lament, you bless us not with the erasure of grief but with grief transformed. What once was heavy and lonely is now a little more manageable because we are blessed with not having to carry it alone. The pain that threatened to tell our story is now transformed into *part* of our story, one season that has and will change us, but only one season in the greater story of your love that never lets us go.

Loving God, in this season of disaffiliation, we raise our Ebenezer, our stone of help, that reminds us that you have been, you are, and you will be our help in time of trouble. Guide us now so that, in surrendering our lament to you and receiving a blessing from you, we might be a blessing and an outpouring of your love to the world. Amen.

Benediction

A Sermonic Sending Forth

Rev. Linda Furtado

We are more than what is in front of us. We are built up and built out of a past tense that informs our future.

Listen. Hear our future. It's outside, where the real work of the church happens. God is still doing good in us and in the world and has not given up on building up the kingdom on earth. So, let's not allow our past to hold us hostage. Let's join the revolution.

Even before God's vision is recognized by unbelievers, their expectations are growing. Listen to their expectations out there, flowing in freestyle music and poetic stories of injustice. Flowing from the lips of people who didn't grow up in our traditions and know nothing of the struggles and source of our convictions.

Maybe we missed something. Maybe we were living out our life cycles content dwelling on and in our self-focused, selfish intentions, blinded by the past so much so that we didn't see our own history and how it should inform our present tense experiences.

Let's not live in the past. Let's live. Let's build up our present with consideration of the past that is here right now. Here with us. Born to set us free.

It may not feel like it, but this is good news. Think back on the celebration of new life, of Jesus, born unto us a child, a Son given.

No secrets here. Everybody will get to see when God's vision meets human reality. It does not matter if the present condition of these walls reflects a different story.

Let's turn the ruins of our memories and the walls of the church and the past into steppingstones raising us up to see what those who are watching from outside expect with anticipation. That is before our ruins become tombstones for our souls.

Yes, let's sing songs and celebrate, even as we walk out of these doors, our churches, our long-time homes of faith, of the churches we hold up in our hearts. Let's put our God-given footwear on, and climb into the mountainous terrain far from our comfort zones and let the good news be open to us and to others as we share about that saving grace, that awesome gift of God, until our feet can walk no more.

We are more than what's in front of us. We are people of God. Praise be to God.

Hymn

Siyahamba

TFWS 2235

Siyahamb' ekukhanyen' kwenkhos'.

We are praying in the light of God

Tunaomba nuruni mwake.

Caminando en la luz de Dios.

We are marching in the light of God.

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Worship Planners

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