

Lament

We have a strange relationship with grief and lament in the United States. I have always attributed it to our belief in rugged individualism, never let them see you sweat attitude. I remember that when my great grandmother died I already knew this. Even though this woman was so centrally important to my life, I knew to not show any emotions in public. It was only when I was alone that I was able to cry. I was never taught that, but I learned it. Even if we do grieve a loss it seems like society around us has given us an expiration date on our sadness. It is like being told to get over it, when there is really no such thing.

We are often better at memorializing than we are at openly showing our own lament. I am deeply touched by the trees to Ron and Neil, the angel to Vicki. They show how important those people were to people's lives. There is something special about the memorials we find in every corner of a church. People we may have forgotten, but whose death left others bereft.

It seems just as difficult to sorrow for losses, we are also becoming increasingly unable to admit our faults. With prominent politicians obfuscating and never admitting the weakness of being wrong it is impossible that this will not seep into our cultural norm. We have all heard the non-apology, apology too many times now. "If anyone one was offended, I am sincerely sorry."

Unfortunately, neither of these reactions are biblical. The Bible calls for us to lament. There is actually an entire book of the Bible called Lamentations. Jesus openly wept on multiple occasions, for others and for himself. Even crying a Psalm of lament from the cross asking why he has been forsaken?

There are at least two ways that we can lament this morning. One is through the sadness of loss. The second is because of the realization that our sins.

Today I would like to take the opportunity to take two, but do not ask you to limit yourself.

First, I would like us to lament the losses that have happened because of the Covid pandemic.

Second, I would like us to lament our participation in systems of racism.

Covid has touched us, especially in this region. As I name some of the ways it has affected us, let us know that God is with us in our sadness.

- For those who have died like Rev. Clarence Sickles.
- For those who grieve their loss.
- For those who had the sickness and it has damaged their bodies.
- For those who were asymptomatic and spread it.
- For health care workers we have lost.
- For the elder care facilities that have been so ravaged. We have lost so much history.
- Those who have lost their employment in the shut-down.
- The inequalities that this pandemic has exposed.
- For the businesses that have shuttered because they couldn't survive.
- The opportunists that would exploit other people's death for gain or misinformation.
- Those deaths that happened in this time where we were unable to be with those dying. Or it has heightened the loss of those we miss. Cathy, Mark, Jeff, and Kim are some of those names.

I will give you some time to reflect on these and maybe some other things I have not mentioned.

Now for this country's sin of racism we lament. We lament for:

- That our brothers and sisters who are African American are incarcerated at much higher rates than whites.
- That our major companies have very little diversity in their leadership and Board of Directors.
- That profiling is done quite often to people of color in many ways in our society.
- That even with the overwhelming evidence of racism in our society there are some who still contend it does not exist.
- That unemployment is always statistically higher among African Americans historically.
- There is clear inequality of pay between clergy of color and white ministers. Their opportunities for calls are also much more limited.
- Public educational institutions in African American communities have been historically underfunded while those in more affluent white neighborhoods benefit from much more.
- Public investment toward public safety far outstrips public welfare in most of our communities. We have made social problems about laws and law enforcement and not about reconciliation.
- The fear that many of us have for our friends, children, and grandchildren who are People of Color in a society where they might encounter violence and prejudice.

Here are a list of violent African American deaths given to me by Centenary graduate Benn Sibblies:

Ramarley Graham
Trayvon Martin
Michael Brown Jr.
Akai Gurley
Tamir Rice

Walter Scott
Freddie Gray
Sandra Bland
Samuel Dubose
Alton Sterling
Philando Castile
Terence Crutcher
Ahmaud Arbery
Breonna Taylor
Maurice Gordon
George Floyd

-I will give you a moment to reflect on the lament that racism has touch us.

The good thing about lament is that it is a pure emotion. It allows us to know, we are not alone, because lament is a public liturgical act. We must lament for those lost, and we must lament our own participation in sin have hurt others. Let us love deeply. Even in the depth of death God is there.