

## 8/16/20 || Grief & Lament

God breathed the breath of life, the Spirit, into our bones and skin and we became living souls. The Spirit fills out our beings - giving us shape and form and speaks to us through our bodies. She partners with all of what our bodies feel - whether that's joy, fear, anger and grief.

Today's spiritual exercise will be one of grief and lament.

The Spirit partners with grief to continue to speak to us.

To let us know that grief has something to tell us.

And that the practice of Lament allows us to speak of that grief.

We have been collectively learning a lot about how the practice of grief and lament nurtures our resilience during these times. 4 years ago we held our first lament service, but we've started to honor grief in our community more regularly, once a month during these virtual services.

Grief is a force of its own. It doesn't wait for us to be ready to receive its weight. It doesn't follow a linear path. It ambushes, it takes over, it bullies its way into our thoughts, our bodies, our hearts.

And grief is unwieldy, it's not picky... It hovers over the space where we've lost what's precious to us or where what is good and right in us has been trespassed..... And it burrows right into that most tender spot. And it displaces, disorients, disrupts our way of being. Sometimes it enrages us - others it stuns us, stills us and silences us.

The practice of lament though - is what pulls grief out of our bones, our flesh and our soul - where it threatens to take up residence - where it threatens to paralyze us - and lament allows our grief to speak. Lament allows grief to have a more productive placement, where suffering and loss and pain - see the light of community, to see a humanity that also individually and collectively grieves - and this pulls us out of isolation and into community where resilience can be birthed.

The Bible is full of lament.

I want to help us walk through the practice of Lament today - with the only one book of the Bible named after an emotion: Jeremiah's book of "Lamentation". The prophet Jeremiah himself is called the "weeping prophet" as he grieves for himself, the people around him and for the city of Jerusalem.

**So today as I read a sampling of verses from the book of Lamentations - I invite you to consider your personal grief, the grief that you bear witness to the tragedies around you - and for our greater society.**

**I've said that lament, allows our grief to speak... and today I'd like to do that in a non-verbal way, through gestures.**

**So as I'm reading the verses, listen and let the grief of Jeremiah speak to your own grief - let the Spirit of the Old Testament - speak to your very testament of life today.... and respond with an embodied gesture as you are so moved:**

**1. Clutching chest.**

"Ow!" You feel the pain and it hurts you, your heart broken.

**2. Arms crossed over yourself.**

I'd rather keep my feelings and my grief close... it's too much, too risky to let them out right now...

**3. Raised fist.**

Anger, rage - in disbelief - can't believe this is happening!

**4. Hands out and open.**

I don't feel anything, I'm numb - but you want to hold yourself open to the Spirit...

*\*(repeat these again)\*If you don't get it perfect it's totally fine!*

...or any gesture of your own...

**I'll read through 3 chunks of Lamentations and ask us to take a breath between each one.**

**The first is grief for the city and its people:**

How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! 1:1

Like a widow broken with grief, she sits alone in her mourning.

The roads to Jerusalem are no longer filled with crowds on their way to celebrate the temple festivals. The city gates are silent, her priests groan, her young women are crying - how bitterly the city of Jerusalem weeps. 1:4

**Things are not as they should be.**

**And now grief for yourself and God**

God has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship, anguish and distress 3:5

God has made me grind my teeth on gravel. God has rolled me in the dust. Peace has been stripped away, and I have forgotten what prosperity is. I cry out, "My splendor is gone!

Everything I had hoped for from the Lord is lost. 16-18

**Where is God in your suffering, in your grief?**

The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget these awful times, as I grieve over my losses. Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The unfailing love of the Lord never ends! By his mercies we have been kept from complete destruction. Great is God's faithfulness; God's mercies begin afresh each day.

**How daring is hope for you in your grief?**

To hope is daring and brave because real hope demands we look at our grief, our losses, our suffering - square on and feel it - And there we are invited to listen to what the Spirit has to tell us.

And our lament is daring and brave because in it we "honor the hard truths we have learned during these times of pandemics: How our suffering has been unequal, elders have been vulnerable and alone, black and brown neighbors have borne disproportionately the brunt of sickness and death. Native communities, our land's original caretakers, have been particularly hard hit—as they have been so many times in the past. Asian Americans have been targeted by hateful words and actions." (sojo.net). So let our prayers and gestures of lament - as daring as they might be - be expressed for the health of our hearts - but also for the healing of neighborhoods, cities and this nation!

*We name today and grieve the losses of* friends and family and those in our church community who have passed away:

**-We remember and name Rajni Amin, a relative of Chris Mihelich and Laura Openshaw who died on July 19th.**

**-We remember and name Art Nesse, Erika Nesse's grandfather, who died at the age of 98 on July 18th.**

**-We remember and name Choi Nam Soon, Jake Lew's grandmother who died on July 27th.**

**-We remember and name, Marsha Bildeau - Jen Morris' cousin who died on July 11th.**

**-And we remember and name, Mike Cataruzolo who died August 5th and Katriana Wilk who died July 6th, friends of Reese Himmer.**

*And we grieve today - the nameless. The ones whose names we don't know. Those who are bed-ridden, who are sick, suffering, dying alone. The ones whose names have long been forgotten by family and friends and our country. But Lord God we trust now*

*that you will whisper and breathe their names you know so well in their ears... that you will call them by name, "child of God", "saint", "Prophetess", "beloved".*

***Let us Pray:***

*God of all power and love,*

*The one who grieves and weeps and holds us close,*

*we give thanks for your unfailing presence*

*and the hope you provide in times of uncertainty and loss.*

*Thank you for your Spirit who continues to breathe on us, calling those of us here who are still here on this Earth, to life (!) - and to the fullness of LIFE,*

*Revive us to live as Christ's body in the world:*

*a people who pray, worship, learn,*

*break bread, share life, heal neighbors,*

*bear good news, seek justice, rest and grow in the Spirit.*

*Wherever and however we gather,*

*unite us in common prayer and send us in common mission,*

*that we and the whole creation might be restored and renewed,*

*through Jesus.*

*And his Holy Spirit who continues to speak to us today, in our grief.*

*Amen.*