

Welcome

Hello, I hope you are keeping well, and I thank you for joining us in worship this week from your home. We are all one body even when apart, and we will remember you in our church service.

Our theme for this week is 'lament'. I know there are many things to lament at the moment; as a nation, as a church family, and also for many individuals within our church, and within our circle of friends and family.

So we are going to consider what lamenting is and have some time in our prayers and whilst listening to a song to bring our prayers of lament before God.

We'll also think about how to support each other in difficult times, and how we can have hope in Jesus through our pain.

Call to worship and prayers

Psalm 89, vs 5-8

Lord God we thank you that you are sovereign over all and within all. We praise you for your faithfulness and love. Please be close to each one of us now as we worship you, and as we think about a difficult topic. We trust you Lord to guide our thoughts and prayers, to comfort us and to lift us up. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Song Here I am to Worship

Light of the world
You stepped down into darkness
Opened my eyes let me see
Beauty that made this heart adore You
Hope of a life spent with You

*And here I am to worship
Here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that you're my God
You're altogether lovely
Altogether worthy
Altogether wonderful to me*

King of all days
Oh so highly exalted
Glorious in heaven above
Humbly you came to the earth you created
All for love's sake became poor

*And here I am to worship
Here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that you're my God
You're altogether lovely
Altogether worthy
Altogether wonderful to me*

I'll never know
How much it cost
To see my sin
Upon that cross

*And here I am to worship
Here I am to bow down
Here I am to say that you're my God
You're altogether lovely
Altogether worthy
Altogether wonderful to me*

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Reading Psalm 13

Lament video

In church we will be watching a video by The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby. It has been slightly edited to make it a bit shorter. The full version can be found here, if you use YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UduqyYy2954>

Here is a precis of what he says:

- Prayer is respectful, but not polite.
- So much prayer in the Bible, especially in the Psalms, is lament, sorrow, rage, protest, because the world is very damaged. It's one of the most normal aspects of prayer in the Bible.

- Jesus protested about injustice and cruelty. He stands up to people and calls out to God for change. He weeps at the graveside of a friend. Weeping is one very powerful way of praying.
- We need to be honest with Jesus, and say to him “this is not right”, or “this event has been terrible.” “We grieve, we lament and we are sorry that this has happened, where is justice, and where are you?”
- There are times in life of great disappointment and sorrow. Nothing is beyond the hand of God. But it needs to be brought honestly, to God, through Jesus, in prayer.
- A relationship with God involves transparency and walking in the light, and prayer is the deepest core of our relationship with God. Our whole experience of life needs to be in prayer, our joys and sorrows, our protests.
- Lament and protest are essential parts of prayer.
- In Psalm 44 the Psalmist says “Wake up!” and “Are you asleep?” to God.
- When Jesus went to Mary and Martha after the death of Lazarus, the first thing they say to him is “if you’d been here he wouldn’t have died”, that was protest and lament.
- There are no techniques to lamenting, there is simply ‘being us’. Bring your feelings to God and be honest. Jesus already knows what we are feeling so we may as well be honest, we can’t hide anything from him. Be direct with him.
- We can lament together.
- Prayers that come deep from our gut are the ones that go straight to the heart of God, that Jesus collects in his arms and then absorbs, as he absorbed all sorrow on the cross. He embraces the person suffering and draws them to the next step towards healing and restoration.
- This session (on prayer) has gone to the very heart of who we are...powerful, painful. Just remember to pray with others, don’t try to bear your burdens by yourself.

He then went on to pray for persecuted Christians in the Middle East and around the world, the sorrows of those at the bedside of a critically ill loved one, the sorrows of those who has lost a job, whose relationships have gone wrong, of those who have been hurt by those they trusted. “Lord these things are wrong, hear the cry against injustice, wickedness, against those in high places who seem powerful and defiant of God. Hear the cry of those whose cry of lament is known only to them, come and bring your healing, your hope and your light; for you are our foundation of

love Jesus. Your resurrection breaks through the darkness of death. Let that be seen and known, for if you do not act we are without hope. Amen”

Prayers of intercession/lament

I am not going to use too many words in the prayers, and there will be space for you to bring your own prayers before God.

Father God we come now, humbly and respectfully with our prayers of lament for others, and for ourselves. Some of these prayers we have brought to you many times and we are still waiting for your answer, for you to act, for you to put things right. Hear the cry of our hearts, weep with us, bring comfort and healing swiftly, and sit with us and those we love in our suffering. Holy Spirit will you please guide us, so our prayers align with your will.

We bring to you our prayers for our world...

We bring to you our prayers for our country, and our local community...

We bring to you our prayers for those we know who are desperate for your love, comfort and healing in mind, body and spirit...

We bring to you our prayers for ourselves...

Oh God, hear our prayers, have mercy on us, and restore us, for your glory, and in Jesus' precious name, Amen

Song for reflection Weep with me

Weep with me
Lord, will You weep with me?
I don't need answers, all I need
Is to know that You care for me
Hear my plea
Are You even listening?
Lord, I will wrestle with Your heart
But I won't let You go

You know I believe
Help my unbelief

*Yet I will praise You
Yet I will sing of Your name*

*Here in the shadows
Here I will offer my praise
What's true in the light
Is still true in the dark
You're good and You're kind
And You care for this heart
Lord, I believe
You weep with me*

Part the seas
Lord make a way for me
Here in the midst of my lament
I have faith, yes I still believe
That You love me
Your plans are to prosper me
You're working everything for good
Even when I can't see

You know I believe
Help my unbelief

*Yet I will praise You
Yet I will sing of Your name
Here in the shadows
Here I will offer my praise
What's true in the light
Is still true in the dark
You're good and You're kind
And You care for this heart
Lord, I believe
You weep with me*

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Reading

John 11, vs 1-44 (in church we will read an abridged version of the story of Lazarus)

Song

I raise a Hallelujah

This song was written by Jonathan and Melissa Helsler when they received news that a friend's young son was gravely ill in hospital and not expected to live through the night. They made a quick recording and sent it to their friend who played it to his son. At a time when it seemed like there was no hope they called on Jesus, our only hope, in a song of lament and defiance against the enemy. Over several weeks the little boy got better and is alive and well.

I raise a hallelujah, in the presence of my enemies
I raise a hallelujah, louder than the unbelief
I raise a hallelujah, my weapon is a melody
I raise a hallelujah, heaven comes to fight for me

I'm gonna sing, in the middle of the storm
Louder and louder, you're gonna hear my praises roar
Up from the ashes, hope will arise
Death is defeated, the King is alive!

I raise a hallelujah, with everything inside of me
I raise a hallelujah, I will watch the darkness flee
I raise a hallelujah, in the middle of the mystery
I raise a hallelujah, fear you lost your hold on me!

I'm gonna sing, in the middle of the storm
Louder and louder, you're gonna hear my praises roar
Up from the ashes, hope will arise
Death is defeated, the King is alive!

Sing a little louder (Sing a little louder) x 3
Let's sing a little louder (Let's sing a little louder)

Jake Stevens, Jonathan David Helsler, Melissa Helsler, Molly Skaggs © 2018 Bethel Music Publishing (Admin. by Song Solutions) CCLI:8026

Talk

I consider lamenting to be 'having words with God', questioning what's going on. Mary and Martha both had words to say to Jesus. When we only have their words written down we miss the intonation of how they were said. Mary, Martha and Lazarus were good friends of Jesus. They must have spent time together eating and laughing. The sisters were confident enough to send for Jesus, believing he would come and heal Lazarus. There would be no reason to doubt this.

So when he eventually showed up, 4 days too late, I can imagine there could have been an element of anger and blame in their statements, which may have been more along the lines of 'if you'd bothered to care and come straight away none of this would have happened. We trusted you, and we feel let down.'

Perhaps this was what was so troubling to Jesus when he wept. He appeared to allow Lazarus to die, so that he could come and resurrect him, to demonstrate who he was and build faith. But his close friends had been hurt by his lack of action. I'm sure that must have pained him deeply. I'm also sure that, even though he knew how the story would end, he was genuinely upset that his friend was dead. He took it seriously, he felt his own pain and the pain of those around him. He lamented too.

There was a positive outcome that time. But we must acknowledge that sometimes we don't have our prayers answered the way we would like. It feels like Jesus hasn't bothered to show up for us. And that is incredibly hard. I don't have any answers or reasons for those times. All I know is that God sees the big picture within eternity, and we don't.

It is so important that we are there for each other. With our church family, our community, our neighbours, our family and friends.

Here are some practical tips for lamenting with and supporting others:

- We should ask for support in times of lamenting, and when it is too difficult to even turn to God.
- We can lament with and for others. We can pray with people and let them know that we are praying for them. It's a great comfort to know you are being held in prayer.
- We can listen and just 'be with' people. Job's friends sat with him in silence for 7 days.
- Don't try to fix things, problem solve (unless asked to) or try to make things better. Those things help us feel better when we are uncomfortable but are not usually helpful to the other person. It can feel like we are belittling their pain or situation.
- Please don't try to find reasons for something bad happening. We like to try to make sense of it, it's within our nature, but it isn't helpful and can lead to guilt and blame, even if you didn't mean it that way, which is very hurtful. After giving Job the gift of their presence, his friends then spent much time doing just this. It did not help Job, and at the end of the book of Job God basically tells them off, saying

they needed to make sacrifices for their unkind words and apologise to Job.

- I will be the first person to put their hand up to say I have done all of those unhelpful things at different times. And I am truly sorry. We won't always get it right, but I hope that we will learn and grow together, and be gracious to each other, and say sorry if needed.
- We can be encouraging. We can hold hope for people and pray for them when they have lost hope and find it difficult or impossible to pray. We can carry them along the journey. It is a journey that we can go through and find light in the future. We do need to keep moving forward, one small step at a time.
- We can also bring some 'normality' – more difficult just at the moment, I know! We can bring light relief with some well placed humour, with talking about completely different things, maybe go out for a coffee or a walk, watch a good film. Do normal things, using wisdom and gentleness.

There is hope, always. Jesus lamented, he understands, and he went through the pain of the cross. He has given us his Spirit and promised that he will be with us forever. That is something to cling onto.

If you would like to speak to someone about lamenting, about difficult times, please do. You can talk to me, Peter, any of the prayer team, or anyone you feel comfortable with.

If you are in a good place, then thank God for that! Uphold others in your prayers and lament for them. And please do encourage them.

Let's pray.

Jesus, we thank you that you lament, and you understand all our emotions, even the painful ones. Thank you that you are with us, even when we don't feel you. Please make yourself known to, and comfort, those who are grieving a loss, who are in pain, who are waiting for your healing, who are confused, who are wondering where you are.

Please forgive us for the times we have not been good friends, when we have chosen to distance ourselves from someone else's pain when we were able to be alongside them.

Jesus please help us to notice the struggles others are going through and offer gentle support and encouragement. Give us wisdom to know when to be quiet and when to use words.

Walk with us and remain within us and remind us that you are our true and steadfast hope, our anchor in the storm and our Saviour. Amen

Song In Christ Alone

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand

In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

Offering and Blessing

Receive these gifts Father God, of our money, our time, our love and our service. May they be acceptable to you; and use what is imperfect to carry out your perfect will. Amen

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15, vs 13) Amen