

15th October '22
Social Service – CAP Sunday
Lament

A rough transcript of the talk is included at the end of this document.

The Reading

Lamentations 3:19-23

Lam. 3:19 The thought of my affliction and my homelessness
is wormwood and gall!

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

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

Lam. 3:22 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.

Connect Group Questions

1. Are there things that you struggle to talk to God about?
 - a. Why do you think this might be?
 - b. Do you find it easier to praise, thank, or lament to God?
2. What does the word “lament” mean to you?
3. Jeremiah’s heart was “poured out on the ground” because of what he, and his people, were experiencing.
 - a. What things cause your heart to be poured out?
4. Jeremiah brought the full depth of his pain to God in lament but in the midst of his pain he found hope in the love, mercy, and faithfulness of God
 - a. Why do you think this was a comfort to him?
5. Richard said, “God does not leave us alone in our despair because this is the God who saw the suffering and situation of the world and came down into it [...] and provided the way of transformation”
 - a. Does the fact that God experienced life as we experience it help us in our times of lament? How?
 - b. How does this fact help us in our times of lament?
6. God’s presence is not a place reserved only for praise and for thanksgiving but is also the safe, intimate, and genuine place to bring our despair, grief, hurt, bereavement, and pain.
 - a. If we struggle to be emotionally open to God, how might we help ourselves to practice it? Share some ideas in your group.

Talk – Lamentations 3:19-23

Opener

- Are there things that we shouldn't talk to God about?
- Are there things that God doesn't want to hear or perhaps can't cope with hearing?
- We often bring our praises to God in singing particularly in church, and we bring our thanksgiving to God in prayer and it is right that we do both of these.
 - But if we only praise and thank God are we missing out on a large part of communicating our reality to our loving father?
- God offers to all people a deepness of connection, an intimacy of knowing, a genuineness of relationship and that should give us the confidence to express the full range of human emotions before God
 - What kind of relationship would it be if we were only free to express the "good" things?
 - But God wants us to be able to express our doubt, sorrow, fear, trauma, despair, pain, hurt, grief – as well as our joy and gladness – such is the confidence we can have in our relationship with our loving God.

Biblical example

- Of the 150 psalms found in the Bible, 60 of them (40%) are psalms of lament – of crying out to God. There are, of course, psalms of praise and of thanksgiving but the biggest proportion are psalms of lament
 - Psalms of people expressing their deepest emotions and hurts
- And much of the prophet's writings are laments for the situation and circumstances and behaviours of their people

Jeremiah and us

- Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet

- His people, the nation of Israel had been captured by the Babylonians and had lost everything that identified them as a people – it broke Jeremiah's heart and he wrote the book of lamentations about what he saw, what he experienced, and what he felt.
 - Jeremiah didn't feel like he needed to hide his real feelings and emotions from God, quite the opposite.
 - He brought all of his hurt, pain, and grief to the throne of God
 - Lamentations 2:11
 - "My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within; my heart is poured out on the ground, because my people are destroyed"
 - Lamentations 3:19-23
 - "The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me."
- There will be things in our lives, seen, witnessed, or experienced that bring despair and heartache – that cause our hearts to be poured out on the ground
 - War, bereavement, disaster, injustice, poverty, illness, relationship breakdown
 - God does not ask us to stoically carry on, to only bring "the good" to him in songs of praise and thanksgiving.
 - God wants us to bring everything to him, as Jeremiah did, to bring our broken hearts and souls to him in lament
 - To address God, to make our complaint to God
 - And when we do, God does not leave us alone in our despair

Hope and presence

- God does not leave us alone in our despair because this is the God who saw the suffering and situation of the world and came down into it,

- who physically walked in the midst of it, experienced it, truly lamented it, and because of his infinite love provided the source of hope through his own suffering on the cross
- and provided the way of transformation, from despair to joy, from illness to health, from poverty to richness, from loneliness to community, from darkness to light through his resurrection to new life
- Lament doesn't and shouldn't leave us in a place of darkness because it is in the midst of lament that we can find hope.
 - As Jeremiah wept and lamented, he was confronted with the love, compassion and hope of God
 - Lamentations 3:19-23
 - "The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me."
 - But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope; The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."
 - God changes lives, God provides the outlet for our pain, God stands with us in our suffering and grief, God brings newness and transformation
- We should be moved by the reality of the pain, grief, and hurt in our world – we should not be immune or numb to it or stoically grind on without acknowledging its presence among us.
 - But, as our hearts are poured out on the ground, we are not left without a means of addressing it – we lament together for the circumstances and situations of our world, our nation, and our community.
 - We bring the full range of our emotions before the throne of God recognising that they all have their place in his presence
- And in doing so we are reminded of the never-ceasing compassion, love and mercy of God. The God who has made a way for all situations to be transformed, for hope to spring up from even the darkest places of despair.
- We should not forget that God's presence is not only the place for praise and for thanksgiving but is also the safe and intimate and genuine place to bring our despair, grief, hurt, bereavement, and pain.
 - For in God's presence, as Jeremiah did, we can truly express our authentic selves without fear.