

Sermon Notes for June 23rd

Patience is Hard

Last week we had a Psalm of praise. This week we have a Psalm of lament, sometimes referred to as “complaint” - but it is more accurately an “expression of grief.”

(This Davidic lament complains to God of enemies, false witnesses, insults, abandonment by friends and family, and even poisoning. Early Christians interpreted this psalm prophetically in order to understand Jesus’ experience in His suffering and death on the cross. - Voice) I also think that it’s important to understand this as part of our necessary grief-work. So many try to avoid the painful things, that they often get stuck as being perpetual victims. Our lamentations help us get through our grief.

G. Brooke Lester, professor at Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, our Methodist school in Evanston, Illinois, provides a five-part structure for a typical Psalm of lament. We will utilize and identify those parts as we go through our text:

{- WE DON’T SPEAK THIS PART. Psalm 44 illustrates well the typical features of the lament psalm. A lament usually contains some *direct address to God* (Ps 44:1, "O God"), a *complaint* describing the occasion for the lament (Ps 44:9-22), a *petition* for redress (Ps 44:23-26), some *statement of trust* concerning God's proclivity to save and vindicate (Ps 44:1-8), and a *vow* to offer public

thanksgiving after God has intervened favorably (Ps 44:8; this last element is often absent or only suggested in communal laments).}

Psalm 69:1-16 (Voice)

For the worship leader. A song of David to the tune “Lilies.” [Hebrew, *shoshannim*, white lily-like flowers]

1

Reach down for me, True God; deliver me. (That is the direct address to God - Part I what follows for some time is the occasion for the lament or the complaint - that is 2)

The waters have risen to my neck; *I am going down!*

2

My feet are swallowed in this murky bog;
I am sinking—there is no sturdy ground.
I am in the deep;
the floods are crashing in!

3

I am weary of howling;
my throat is scratched dry. (What follows now is a statement of trust - that is 4!)

I still look for my God
even though my eyes fail. (We go back to complaint - 2)

4

My enemies despise me without any cause;
they outnumber the hairs on my head.
They torment me with their power;
they have absolutely no reason to hate me.

Now I am set to pay for crimes
I have never committed!

5 (Another statement of trust - another #4!)

O True God, my foolish ways are plain before You;
my mistakes—no, nothing can be hidden from You.

6 (Now we get to #3 - the petition:)

Don't let Your hopeful followers face disgrace because of
me,

O Lord, Eternal One, Commander of *heaven's* armies;
Don't let Your seekers be shamed on account of me,

O True God of Israel.

7 (More complaining - #2)

I have been mocked when I stood up for You;
I cower, shamefaced.

8

You know my brothers and sisters?

They now reject me—*they act as if I never existed.*

I'm like a stranger to my own family.

9 (Another statement of trust - #4)

And here's why: I am consumed with You, completely
devoted to protecting Your house;

when they insult You, they insult me.

10 (Back to complaining)

When I mourn and discipline my soul by fasting,
they deride me.

11

And when I put on sackcloth,
they mock me.

12

Those who sit at the gate gossip about me;

I am *shamed by the slurred* songs of drunkards.

13 (Back to petition!)

But, Eternal One, I just pray the time is right
that You would hear me. And, True God,
because You are enduring love, that You would answer.
In Your faithfulness, please, save me.

14

Pluck me from this murky bog;
don't let it pull me down!
Pull me from this rising water;
take me away from my enemies *to dry land*.

15

Don't let the flood take me under
or let me, Your servant, be swallowed into the deep
or let the yawning pit seal me in!

16

O Eternal One, *hear me*. Answer me. For Your enduring
love is good *comfort*;
in Your great mercy, turn toward me.

**THIS IS THE WORD OF GOD FOR THE PEOPLE OF
GOD!**

THANKS BE TO GOD! Amen

Are you trying to trick us, Pastor? You said there were 5 parts, and we only counted to 4. I'm so glad there are some teachers and engineers among us...the fifth part is a (vow to offer public thanksgiving after the intervention is successful - and if we continued with the rest of the Psalm, we would find #5)!

I found a modern story that I think takes us through a lamentation Psalm.

Kay Campbell, Religion News Service writes:

For John Mahony, a retired U.S. Army colonel who was managing projects for Blue Cross/Blue Shield, instinct came before analysis.

“The building jerked hard, throwing everyone off balance. Earthquake,” he thought, even as his military training diagnosed “bomb.”

Mahony directed his co-workers to a stairway, checked the area for anyone else, and headed down through what was quickly a haze of smoke and dust.

This was when his daily habit of saying the Lord’s Prayer bobbed to the surface of his mind, providing a grillwork of stability in the midst of the writhing building.

“As I stepped into that smoky stairway, the Lord’s Prayer ran through my mind; over and over and over: ‘Thy will be done.’ At first, I could only get through part of the prayer. But after a few floors, prayer relaxed me, and I was able to say it completely.”

On what will always be the worst day of his life, Mahony also saw great generosity and courage around him.

With hundreds of others, Mahony and his office mates trudged downstairs through the smoky air, grateful that the lights and ventilation remained on. When the fire sprinklers came on, they grabbed the handrails to keep from being swept off their feet from the waterfalls that ran down the steps.

Firefighters, breathing hard, passed them going up.

But out of the chaos, to the rhythm of the Lord's Prayer, Mahony sensed something that reminded him of when his mother would wrap him up as he'd climb out of a cold swimming pool, and he would be held, safe and warm, in loving arms.

“As I walked down that stair, somewhere between the 12th floor and the 10th, somewhere between 'Our Father' and 'Thy will be done,' that same feeling came over me. Suddenly, I was wrapped in warmth, and love, and comfort. In that smoky, wet stairway, in a burning building, surrounded by a thousand frightened people; I felt wonder. I felt God's peace, and I knew that regardless of the physical outcome, everything would be all right.”

The group came out into a smashed lobby, service elevator shafts open and filled with rubble.

A firefighter directed him to a side door, saying that he couldn't go out the front; people were jumping.

“I moved through the rubble of the lobby vaguely registering impressions of a woman receiving oxygen, a heavysset woman crying as she was carried over the back of a co-worker, another who was so badly burned that I could not tell the original color of her skin.”

Outside, he ran through a scene, he said, from a post-apocalyptic movie: cars on fire, chunks of metal and glass in the street, lots of shoes. He had just crossed the street to the far side when the sound of jet engines made him look up. The second jet collided with the second tower.

“At first it didn’t look real. The building seemed to absorb the jet as if it were some macabre magic trick. Then the glass wall rippled and glass and jet fuel exploded outward and spilled down the side of the building.”

Only after he had run a few blocks, getting away from the debris, did he turn to look again.

“The dawning realization that a pilot could abandon those in his care and intentionally fly into a building suddenly hit me. It made me sick.”

So did the hundreds of bodies falling through the air because people above the crash chose to jump.

“Each new descending body emphasized how terrible the conditions were on the upper floors.”

Then the first tower collapsed, sending a billow of ash out that seemed to embody evil.

“I try not to ascribe human emotion to inanimate things, but the debris cloud seemed malevolent. It roiled with greenish brown smoky shadows deep within the white dust. And it was fast. It was warm, not as hot as a sauna, but close. It itched. Thousands of cement particles whose edges had not yet worn smooth went into my nose, eyes, ears, and down my shirt.”

Mahony was trapped on the south side of the building, the tip of Manhattan at Battery Park. All he could do was watch and pray.

Despite the horror of that day, Mahony reached a deeper sense of the suffering, abiding compassion of Jesus, of the durability of the peace of God in the midst of death and destruction.

It was only later that Mahony learned that the smoke he inhaled in the six hours before he managed to leave the area would leave him with health issues that will shorten his own life. In the years since the attacks, he realized he was also left with insights that have enriched every day of his life since the attacks.

“When I walked from those ruined towers, I took two priceless gifts with me. First, I carry God’s peace with me every day. Even if I get distracted, Christ’s love is all

around us. It takes just a few lines from a simple prayer for it to wrap itself around me once again.

“Second, I know, with a certainty that my words cannot possibly convey, I know what will happen to me when I die. I will rise from this shell, like a child fresh and clean from a bath, and I will be wrapped in the warmth of His love and His forgiveness and His peace.”

AND THAT’S THE MESSAGE!