

## A Service of Lament Reflection

The Rev. Sarah Carver

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Tonight we embrace the spiritual practice of lamentation: The sitting in grief holding the ashes of what once was---sitting in sorrow for what is happening around us---sitting in anguish for people, nations that have lost their way, wondering where God is in all of it, wondering where we are supposed to be in all of it. This is an ancient practice seen throughout scripture in persons such as Job who lost everything, Rachel who lost her children, Jeremiah who lost his nation, David who grieved Saul and Jonathan, Hannah who could not conceive, and Jesus as he faced his own death. To lament is not to despair, it is not to turn our backs on God, nor is it an act of faithlessness. Instead, it is to enter the passion and grief that Godself holds and endures for the wayward world that suffers but cannot see how it suffers, that wanders lost, without knowing it is lost, that dwells in darkness without seeing that the light still shines. To lament is to allow ourselves into a space where all is laid bare before our eyes and our hearts, where there is no hiding from the ongoing suffering and injustice, and loss, where we cannot help but feel those things, and feel them in our souls bringing us to a place where change is the only answer, where we understand ourselves as being overwhelmed by the enormity of it all, and that we cannot move forward, cannot move through all this without God's intervention. To lament is not an act of hopelessness, it is to recognize our finiteness and our need for our infinite Creator.

Lamentation brings us deeper into relationship with God as we bare our souls and cry for relief, allowing our hearts to break open through love for all that is lost. It is also, as the late theologian Walter Brueggemann would argue, a way to call the injustice and wrongness of the world to account.

There is much to lament in our nation and in our world right now. We are losing our sense of a common good, a common assumption about who is deserving of human dignity. Violence is seen more and more as an acceptable tool to settle disagreements. We have watched as families have been torn apart, children traumatized, and certain groups of people warehoused in detention centers. We have watched people being beaten, shot at, and killed essentially by their own. We are divided, lonely, anxious, angry, and our actions betray our despair. And the reality is that this is not actually new for our nation, this wrongness has been here all along visible to many but not

all, lurking there in the shadows, while most of us saw things as mostly ok, mostly. But this wrongness has now emerged more fully, crawled out from the rock under which it was mostly contained (mostly) where it was still wrong, but where most of us could ignore it (most of us) to standing in the sun and daring us to name it, to challenge it, to demand it be exorcised from our communities as it continues to spread further and further into our reality threatening to become normal and acceptable.

And as people of faith, we are called to face the wrongness in the world, to name it so it cannot hide, cannot be denied, so it has to be reckoned with so it cannot become “normal”. We are to be an example of love in hate-filled places, bearers of each person’s human dignity, seekers of justice who like God can see through the things that separate us and instead see the things that connect us. It is ours to help others to see the same so that the dark powers of the world cannot turn us against one another, cannot tell us who we are and what we are to believe. To do this we are to be rooted in God, sustained through our prayers, our grief, our cries for justice, our service to others, and our willingness to speak out as the prophets did. Tonight is just a part of this. A pause for us to name our feelings, to ground ourselves in prayer, to remember how loved we and all of creation are, to remember those around us so that we can move forward and navigate the world as God would have us. Because that is the kingdom in which we dwell first and forever: the kingdom of heaven whose coming we are called to herald and help bear. Amen.