

Genesis 32:22-31
Psalm 121
2 Timothy 3:14 – 4:5
Luke 18:1-8

Sermon October 16th, 2022

Christ Encourages us to Lament

There is a lot happening in the world today that has us feeling discouraged. From the war in Ukraine. To the increase in the intensity and frequency of natural disasters. From the polarization that has led to an increase in conflict and violence. To our eyes being opened to the injustices the indigenous people of this land experienced at the hands of churches, governments, and other institutions. From the mental health crisis (**Image**). To the climate crisis.

I don't know about you, but I find myself spending a lot more time these days praying for God to help us. Struggling to stay patient as I await God's answer to these issues.

In our gospel this morning, Jesus shares a parable with the disciples to encourage them to be persistent in prayer as they face persecution. As they face injustice. As they face suffering. Or in other words, Jesus is encouraging them, and us, to lament. To cry out to God for help when we feel helpless.

Jesus encourages us to lament.

Unfortunately, our society, and even our churches have created few opportunities and/or safe spaces for us to lament. In fact, the messaging we often hear is the opposite of what Jesus is saying to us this morning.

These societal messages we hear and experience discourage us from lamenting when we are suffering. We are taught through this messaging to do whatever we can to ignore suffering or avoid it or run away from it. How often have you heard someone you love say to you when you are suffering "just take some pain killers already?" Or "suck it up?" Or their response is one that leaves you feeling ignored (**Image**). Like, they have better things to do than listen to you whine. "Uh. That sucks. Anyways the other day I was out and..." How often have you felt ignored when you try to express your feelings around your suffering? How often have you hid your pain, because you are done dealing with the rejection you experience when sharing your feelings about your pain?

A lot of church messages we hear and experience discourage us from lamenting when we are suffering. We are to be joyful all the time, because we are God's children. We are to be thankful for all God has done. If we cry out to God then we are seen as ungrateful. We are to come and worship God. Meaning we need to fill our service with songs of praise. We are to trust in God. If we cry out to God where is our faith? These are messages people hear all the time in churches.

I remember attending worship once at this church in Saskatoon. I was going through a difficult time, and needed a safe space where I could let out a little frustration. Where I could lament.

Unfortunately, both the verbal and non-verbal messaging I heard at this service discouraged me from lamenting. For one, everyone who attended this worship, including the leaders, seemed joyfully happy. All the men carried brief cases, and wore fancy suits (**Image**). All the women and children were smiling and dancing throughout the service. All the songs and Bible readings were about how great God is, and how God is going to give us an abundance of possessions. When they collected the offering, people came forward and raised the offering above their head with great joy.

I thought to myself as I worshiped that day. What if I am not the only person here who is sad? What if I am not the only person here who is suffering? Like me, would they feel ignored through this worship experience? Like me, would they feel a lack of connection with God through this worship experience? Like me, would they walk away feeling shame for not feeling happy. For being upset at their circumstances? For not supposedly having enough faith?

Our church and social messaging about lament can be very discouraging for people who are suffering.

And yet, as I stated earlier, Jesus encourages us to lament. Jesus encourages us to be persistent in our lament. “Even the unjust judge will be just to the widow who doesn’t leave them alone. How much more will our just God listen to our lament?” Jesus passionately proclaims.

Jesus isn’t alone in this encouragement. In our Genesis story, Jacob is in this lament wrestling match with this unknown person that has been interpreted as God. Jacob’s lament to God lasts through the night, as they wrestle with each other. And then at the end of this lament, God blesses Jacob. God affirms Jacob’s lament.

In our Psalm, we hear the Psalmist lament. In fact, many of the Psalms are someone or a community lamenting to God in the midst of their suffering.

In our reading of second Timothy, Paul encourages the early believers to endure their suffering, which does not mean to suck it up. It means to be persistent in prayer in the midst of their suffering. To continue to cry out to God, believing that God is listening to their lament, and that God will deliver them from suffering. Eventually.

We as the church need to do a better job of creating that balance between praising/thanking God like we did last week, and leaving time for lament. To acknowledge that it is okay to lament. To cry out to God. To ask the why? To acknowledge that praise, thanksgiving, and lament are all part of the biblical story, all part of our story with our creator.

Our lament doesn't mean we have little to no faith. To the contrary, Jesus argues that one who laments persistently has shown a lot of faith. They believe so profoundly in God's promise of healing and renewal that they will keep crying out until they feel heard.

We as the church need to do a better job of creating opportunities for lament. To encourage lament when our world is in disarray. To reiterate to people that lament doesn't mean your faith is weak.

We as a society need to do a better job of creating safe spaces and opportunities for people to lament. For people to cry out. To share their frustrations and pain.

We are in the midst of a mental health crises that has been exacerbated by the pandemic. More than ever before we need to start acknowledging that people who are suffering in our world need to be heard. Need to feel listened to. Need to feel supported. Need to feel loved.

If we continue to make it difficult for people to share their feelings of lament then I fear the mental health crisis will continue to get worse.

In our gospel this morning, Jesus encourages us to lament. Jesus encourages us to be honest with our creator God. Jesus affirms our sadness, our anger, our anxiousness, our fears, our frustrations, our discouragements with the fate of the world. Jesus affirms us. And offers us a safe opportunity where we can lament. Through Prayer.

Through prayer (**Image**) we are given the opportunity to shut out the voices in the world that discount our suffering, and hear God's affirming voice. God's affirming voice that says, "I am listening to you. I hear your cries. I feel your pain. I will act justly. Please be patient. Healing and renewal are on the way." Prayer is our opportunity where we can go and feel listened to.

Jesus encourages us to lament. To pray. To believe that God is one who listens to our lament. To be this caring and compassionate presence to one another. So, that everyone has an opportunity to lament. To feel listened to. To feel supported.

Let us pray, Oh God, our world is in trouble. There is so much suffering. We weep. We cry out to you for help. Breathe your healing and justice into our world. Help us as your called and enlightened people to create safe spaces for people to lament. Give us the patience and compassion we need to listen. To walk with people in their lament. And through your grace, through your people, help us feel listened to in our lament. In Jesus name we pray, **Amen.**