

The appointive cabinet has written a daily Lenten devotional for the Arkansas Conference called 40 Days of Lament for Lent. You may share in this journey toward Easter by reading the daily post via an email blast from the Center for Technology, checking the Network for Discipleship and Mission for daily posting, or downloading a weekly set of the 40 Days of Lament for Lent document to use or reproduce and distribute in your church. The daily postings will begin Wednesday, March 5, and the weekly downloadable document will be available that same day on arumc.org.



The graphic features a large maroon number '40' on the left. The zero is a circle containing a white wreath, a palm frond, a chalice, and a cross. To the right of the '40' is the text 'Days of Lament for Lent' in a maroon serif font.

40 Days of Lament for Lent

Welcome to the Season of Lent. For most of us this is an unsettling season of personal sacrifice and self-examination. Few of us approach Lent with joy; however, for many of us Lent offers precious days for honesty and truth telling within the Body of Christ. Walter Brueggeman writes that the life of faith is a life of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. If this is true, then Lent is our season to admit our disorientation and claim a new reorientation by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The process for this movement of the Spirit in our lives requires lament. Lament for our own sin. Lament for the suffering we endure. Lament for the world. Lament for all that is not right, oriented, and true, in spite of the grace of God. Without lament, our losses, shortcomings, and disappointments feel like punishment. However, through honest lament, we can discover a new way as we admit our disorientation and experience God's reorienting grace.

Such honesty is not for the faint of heart. It takes courage to admit when we are lost, afraid, ashamed, angry, and vengeful. Yet the scriptures, especially the Psalms, attest to the power of such honesty before God. When the faithful lament, we are always led to affirmation that God is with us and God alone can lead us to new life. Ultimately it is this new life, this reorientation that we seek when we enter Lent, knowing that it is through the cross that resurrection is possible.

Thank you for joining us in this Lenten journey of Lament. May God show us the way forward.

Wednesday, March 5

A Lament Concerning Seeing Revival as a Moment Rather than a Movement

Read Acts 2

Reflection Questions:

- 1) You are a part of God's ongoing story. Recount from the moment of your baptism, from when you received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, some of the most critical moments of your ongoing spiritual journey.
- 2) What would have been lost if those who had received the gift of the Spirit on Pentecost had not devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and living as a community of faith?
- 3) How have our communities of faith fallen short—trading our revival moment for comfort and familiarity?
- 4) What can we do differently to be revived by the Spirit and live in ways closer to the Acts 2 church?

Prayer:

Lord, you remind us that we are always growing in your justifying and sanctifying grace. Remind us of our faithfulness and openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit, encouraging us to serve others in profound and transformative ways. May our search for the good community come after deep reflection and correction of our ways. May our lives reflect our belief that they are a living sacrifice for you. Remind us that you will always provide and care for our needs. Forgive us for falling short, but move us by your Spirit—revive us again, O Lord—to be your hands and feet, your servants of Christ in this world. Amen.

Thursday, March 6

A Global Lament Concerning Oppressive Regimes / Need for Military Defense / Lack of Peace

Read Isaiah 2:4

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How does God intend for us to live together?
- 2) I am just one person; how can I bring change to the world?
- 3) Why do we humans find it necessary to treat one another with disrespect?
- 4) Where does "Peace" really begin?

Prayer:

Gracious God, You created the world and called it "good." We now live in a world torn apart by hatred, pain, and death. We each feel so helpless, for we are only one and the problem is global. What can we do? What do you wish us to do? Speak into our hearts and direct our steps so that we may be "peacemakers" and bring Hope to a divided and fragile world. Direct us today to fulfill your holy desire. Amen.

Friday, March 7

A Lament Concerning Idolatry in our Local Church

Read Psalm 119:25-48

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How has idolatry left its effects upon the church today? What are the things that we are "holding onto" rather than following the Spirit? Do we see our churches as institutions or mission stations?
- 2) How do we deal with times when we sense the Living Spirit, but can hardly let it work its way before we try to capture and control it? How are we, the Church, any different from the culture?
- 3) What pain does this cause when we go after the comfortable, safe, and flashy world, rather than things of Spirit? What are the idols that you and I put before commitment to God? What are the things we want to happen before we follow Jesus?
- 4) How do we respond to this issue as a disciple of Christ and as the body of Christ, the Church?

Prayer:

All-loving God, in many ways, we are no different from our unbeliever brothers and sisters. We're fascinated with anything with an engine on it or the latest electronic wonder. Owning that kind of stuff gives us power. It makes us feel cool. We were raised to be competitive, so anything that gives us an edge over the other person seems irresistible. The bigger the item, the bigger we feel. You, O God, have to wonder where it's going to stop. We are the same way with our churches: the flashier the better, the bigger and more things we place inside it, even better. In our church, we confess that we have the tendency to gather with others who look just like us, rather than letting the church look like the diversity of the community around us. Teach us, O Lord, to be careful to keep "things" in perspective. They can steal too much of our time and attention. We move from one thing to the next, hoping "the next big thing" will do the trick. In all our activities we forget the first thing, "I am the Lord your God, you will have no other gods before me."

All-loving God, set us free this Lenten season. Enable your people, the Church, to set aside all the sins of the flesh and material world, and grant that we may be your agent to bring change to this world. May this day, we place all things in the proper place within our life. Amen.

Saturday, March 8

A Lament Concerning Cynicism and Hopelessness about the Future Blocking Revival

Read Psalm 90

Reflection Questions:

1. What has happened to discourage the Methodist revival in our time?
2. What most needs to be revived for us to be the people and the church God calls us to be?
3. What does God want for your life, for your church, for the United Methodist Church? What is your Godly vision for the future?
4. What can restore your hope? What are you willing to do to make that happen?

Prayer:

Eternal God, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. But we're not sure we see another generation coming. Our church and society are falling apart. Corruption and immorality are rampant. Our government is in gridlock. Our church is in conflict. Expressions of hope seem like lip service to forsaken ideals. We don't see how we can get a revival going. But you can. You have created outbursts of the Spirit in the worst of circumstances. Do it again, Lord! Blow your Spirit into our gatherings! Give us the anointed tongues of witness! Prosper the work of our hands! Do it again, O God, for the sake of your Son. Amen.