

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 began Wednesday, March 5, and the weekly downloadable documents will be available on arumc.org.

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.

Monday, March 10
A Lament about Global Hunger and Poverty
Read Psalm 12

Reflection Questions:

- 1) What are the systems of injustice that perpetuate hunger and poverty?
- 2) What is it like for God to stand up for those who are oppressed, suffering, and groaning?
- 3) How is God faithful to those who are under-resourced?
- 4) How is the Church to be faithful to those who are under-resourced?
- 5) What is God calling you to do?

Prayer:

God who is Lord to all, whose pure promises contrast with the lies of those who oppress others, be merciful to us, and grant us a way to rise up and help others as you wish your faithful servants to do. Give us courage to move beyond acts of charity to transforming systems of injustice in order to permanently change lives, communities, and the world. May we hear, as we know you do, the groans and cries of those who hunger and thirst, and who eke out a daily living. Above all, Lord, continue to feed us all Living Bread and Living Water to quench our spiritual needs, that we may be sustained by your grace and fortified for the journey before us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Tuesday, March 11
A Lament on Behalf of our Neighborhood and Mission Field First Responders
Read Psalm 91

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Can you name the persons who have dedicated their lives to protect your life?
- 2) Do you recognize the danger they live with to provide for your safety?
- 3) How would you say "thank you" to those who guard you?
- 4) Will you say "thank you" to a first responder today?

Prayer:

Lord, there are those around us who have chosen to place themselves in harm's way to protect and defend us. Help us to honor their service. Help us to provide and encourage them, as they stand ready to aid, assist, and sacrifice for our safety. We pray that you protect them in their service. Amen.

Wednesday, March 12
A Personal Lament Concerning Resistance to Change
Read Psalm 80

Reflection Questions:

1. The metaphor of a vine that God carefully plants and God's people is often used in scripture. How have you experienced God's careful guiding hand in your life?
2. The Psalm repeats the phrase, "**Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we might be saved.**" This indicates a corruption of what God intended. Where have you strayed from God's intended path for your life?
3. What changes are needed in your life or your congregation to be faithful to God's intention of a growing, fruitful disciple?
4. We all hate changes, yet all healthy living things do change. What are the things that have not changed in your life or in your congregation's life that are limiting God?

5. If our prayer is to *Restore us, O Lord*, then what needs to be restored?

Prayer:

Loving God, you gave me life through your **Prevenient Grace**. You saved my life through your **Justifying Grace**. Now you lead my life through your **Sanctifying Grace**.

Lord, forgive me when I cling to those things that are comfortable and reject those new things where you are leading. Forgive me when I cry out "enough" when you have so much more in store for me, and through me, so much more for others.

Lord, I release all that holds me back from becoming all that you have created me to be. I repent of insisting that the future must look as I think it should be. Give me eyes to see you at work doing a "new thing" within me and within your Church. Amen.

Thursday, March 13
A Relationship Lament Concerning our Self-indulgence
Read Psalm 14

Reflection Questions:

1. Where do you have trouble practicing discipline in your life? What lies at the root of our lack of discipline?
2. What does God think it takes to make us happy?
3. How can the church help us renew our discipline together?
4. How can we make a witness to a culture of self-indulgence without being self-righteous?

Prayer:

Holy God, we have a strange idea of happiness. We think it's fun to do things that are ultimately self-destructive. We eat too much; we drink too much; we buy too much; we are unfaithful to our closest relationships. We have strayed from your goodness and righteousness, and we act like you don't exist. Turn my heart back to you. Fill me with your goodness and righteousness. Give me strength and courage to practice self-discipline, so I can truly be a disciple of my Lord Jesus. Restore all who come back to you, and we will rejoice. In the name of our Master, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Friday, March 14
A Neighborhood and Mission Field Lament Concerning Racism & Classism
Read Galatians 3:25-29, James 2

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How often do you speak about the reality of racism and classism (among other "isms") at home and at church?
- 2) What does it mean to be an heir to God's promises? Is anyone excluded from the promise?
- 3) Consider what James 2:1 means in relationship to racism.
- 4) What is the will of God, and what should be our obedient response?

Prayer:

Forgive us, O Lord, for the ongoing, obvious and subversive, divisive sin we have in our prejudices and preferences, in our racism and classism. May we repent! Receive our contrite hearts and grant that we will change our ways. Enable us to see our individual expressions of our sinfulness, as well as our corporate failings. We know that if we put our faith and trust in you, and if we watch the way Jesus

Christ led by example, exalting the lowly and lifting up the oppressed, then we shall be able to change our ways forever. All this to the end that the Kingdom of God may come upon the earth. Amen.

Saturday, March 15
A Personal Lament about Apathy and Cynicism
Read Psalm 74

Reflection Questions:

1. **"O God, why do you cast us off forever?"** (verse 1) When did you believe that God had cast you off? What changed to reverse that belief?
2. **"How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever?"** (verse 10) As our world becomes increasingly secular, God's name is increasingly reviled. Look inward and remember when, by your words, you brought dishonor to God. Consider how God's name has been attached to curses and abused. Pray for repentance and forgiveness.
3. **"Why do you (God) hold back your hand?"** (verse 11) When God seems distant to us, we often turn to apathy and hopelessness, a condition that is shared by many around the world. Reflect on how your growth as a disciple is weakened by cynicism and the expectation that nothing will change.
4. **"Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the earth."** (verse 12) The Psalmist claims God's working presence in our world, and in your life. When was this realization of God's active presence in your life most strongly felt?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, forgive me when I look at the world and see little or no hope. It seems that when problems arise, it is easier to just give up or criticize, instead of giving these problems to you. Lord, it is a false sense that the best times for our Christian faith are in the past and not in the future. When those thoughts arise, let me remember your faithfulness. Let me remember that you are victorious in all things, even to the end of the age. Amen.