

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, April 7

A Lament that Self-Centeredness and Blindness to Needs of Others Blocks Revival

Read Psalm 10:1-4a

Reflection Questions:

- 1) We are often self-centered because of past pain. What are some past pains that have made you more focused on your needs than the needs of others?
- 2) Name a time that you have thought or said something hurtful about a person or a group of people.
- 3) When has your personal pride gotten in the way of a valued relationship?
- 4) How has humility been a blessing to your life and ministry?

Prayer:

Almighty God, your holy Word clearly states, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Help us to be less prideful in all of our relationships. Allow us by your grace to see how to value others more than ourselves. We need your Spirit so that we can be a church that is driven by unity, not by pride. Help us to know that your love is stronger than pride. Amen.

Tuesday, April 8

A Lament for Bureaucratic Church Structures

Read Psalm 42

Reflection Questions:

- 1) What is the longing of your heart? Where do you experience dryness in your soul?
- 2) In what ways is the church vital to your spiritual growth?
- 3) Has there been a time when the church has made your journey more complicated than it needed to be? Can you name someone who has been disillusioned by the church?
- 4) What structures or practices make those outside the church ask, "Where is your God?"

Prayer:

God of the deep, from whom all healing waters flow, forgive us for the structures and practices that have dammed up your grace and changed the course of your love at work in the world. We admit that we love our organization—the committees, boards, and agencies which we have designed to help us fulfill our mission of making disciples. And we confess that sometimes this very organization can become an idol which demands more time and energy than we have for you or our mission. Help us to love you more than the institution, and lead us from mere maintenance to mission and ministry in your name. Amen.

Wednesday, April 9
A Personal Lament Concerning Hoarding
Read Psalm 13

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Hoarders: Have you watched them on TV or in your own neighborhood? What first comes to mind when you see all that junk? How is that a metaphor for your own spiritual life?
- 2) How does hoarding reflect a lack of trust in God to provide for us?
- 3) Could it be said that your congregation is hoarding the Good News? Keeping it to yourselves? Not sharing?

Prayer:

Lord God, I confess before you that my desires morph into needs that must be collected against a time of need. I confess that I prefer my silos full. I recognize that this is a spiritual condition, it is a lack of trust that you are faithful and that you will provide.

Like the Hebrews in the wilderness, I have tried to store up my manna only to find it ruined. Forgive my greed. The answer seems so simple: just throw out my extra stuff or give it to the thrift shop for others. But Lord, it is not so simple when it is so much a part of who I am.

So, Lord, remake me so that my trust is in you and you alone. And I will give you praise. Amen.

Thursday, April 10
A Neighborhood and Mission Field Lament about Crime and Violence
Read Psalm 54

Reflection Questions:

- 1) When have you experienced crime or violence toward yourself or someone you know? How did you feel or respond?
- 2) What do you think are the root causes of crime and violence?
- 3) Where does our faith say God is when a crime or violent act is committed?
- 4) As a disciple of Jesus, how can you respond if you become a victim? How can you respond toward other victims? How can you respond toward perpetrators of crime and violence?

Prayer:

God of all people, nothing makes us feel as vulnerable as the desecration of our bodies or property by violence or crime. It saddens our hearts when we hear of anyone killed or hurt by senseless acts. Help us seek justice and protection for those who are vulnerable. Help us find a way to forgive and love those who have hurt us or others. We know you are a God of both justice and mercy. Help us to follow you as we live in a dangerous world. In the name of Christ, who bore the wounds of violent men, Amen.

Friday, April 11
A Lament for Those Who Are Abused
Read Psalm 22

Reflection Questions:

- 1) What forms of abuse have you encountered? How has abuse damaged your life or the lives of others you have known?
- 2) How do you know God is present in such places of suffering?
- 3) Jesus quoted this psalm on the cross. Can you pray this psalm with hope?
- 4) What can you and your church do to heal the wounds inflicted by abuse in any form?

Prayer:

Self-giving God, you refused to play it safe and remain above the suffering of this world. You came to live among us and to suffer the wounds that we inflict upon each other in our sinfulness and pain. So we cry out to you, naming those who suffer and daring to pray also for their abusers. Redeem them all. Provide healing and hope. Pour out grace that allows forgiveness. Allow the church to be the voice for those who have been silenced. Give us courage to get involved, so we might be instruments of your saving power to free all who are oppressed by the misuse of power. Amen.

Saturday, April 12
A Personal Lament Concerning Speaking Ill of Others
Read Psalm 109

Reflection Questions:

- 1) **"In return for my love they accuse me, even while I make prayer for them"** (verse 4). Shades of Joseph, **"you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good..."** (Genesis 50:20). When did it happen in your life? In spite of others and all odds, God graced your life with good.
- 2) **"So they reward me evil for good, and hatred for my love"** (verse 5). Surely, you have had this happen to you. Think of the time you meant nothing but good and your words or actions were perceived as spiteful.
- 3) In a world of 24-hour news commentary, it is hard to believe anything anyone says. That attitude has bled over into the church. It is so easy to believe the worst about one another. When was the last time you discovered that your preconceived notions about another follower were wrong?
- 4) Reflect on why we as a society are so quick to believe the worst about others. Does this honor and please God, or is God's way one of forgiveness, repentance, and understanding?

Prayer:

Blessed Savior, you know above all the pain that comes when lies and half-truths are spread. You experienced it even on the cross. Forgive me, O Lord, when I speak before I know. Forgive me when my words are intended to tear down and not to lift up. Change my heart so that I look for the best in others. May I extend to them what I expect from them: the benefit of the doubt and the assumption that together we are sisters and brothers in Christ. Amen.