

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 14

A Relationship Lament for Isolation, Marginalization, and the Exclusion of Others

Read Psalm 142

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Who would find it difficult to be welcomed and accepted in your church?
- 2) What do you see as Jesus Christ's expectation when it comes to addressing the ways we perpetuate the exclusion of others?
- 3) Can you think of someone on "the outside"? Consider their position and what kind of relationship could be developed.

Prayer:

Precious Lord, Christ our Savior, and Holy Spirit our Comforter, remind us that not all your children are feeling the love and strength of your grace. May we open our ears, hearts, minds, and doors to listen to and receive those who find themselves shut out. Allow them to speak their truth, and enable us to hear. We place in your care these relationships, and trust that you shall enable us to build bridges in your name. Guide us into this work of restoration and transformation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Tuesday, April 15

A Local Church Lament for Blindness to the Neighborhood

Read Psalm 137

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Does your local church look like its neighborhood?
- 2) Who are the people in the neighborhood of your church who would not feel comfortable coming to your church?
- 3) How would the people in your church react if neighbors who are not like you—racially, economically, educationally—began to show up?
- 4) Does God care who comes to your church?
- 5) As a disciple of Jesus, what can you do to make your church more open to the people who live near you?

Prayer:

God of red, yellow, black, white, and brown, of rich and poor, of every language, sometimes we feel like we're in a foreign land. We don't know our neighbors; we don't trust them; they make us nervous. How can we sing your song when the neighborhood has changed? How can we witness to people who aren't like us? Remove the blindness from our eyes and hearts, so we can really see those around us. Give us strength and courage to reach out, beyond the safe walls of our church buildings, to be in relationships with the folks around us. For we acknowledge they are your children, just as we are. Forgive us when we have been cliquish or condescending. In the name of Jesus, who even loved the Samaritans, Amen.

Wednesday, April 16
A Neighborhood and Mission Field Lament for Public Education
Read Psalm 119:71-73

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Take a moment to reflect on the public schools that are in your town or area. What are some deficiencies?
- 2) Is the environment of many of our public schools conducive for effective learning?
- 3) What role does privilege play in the decline of many public schools?
- 4) Think about a town that has recently lost its school. Lift them up by name, because to lose a school is, for some places, the beginning of the loss of community.

Prayer:

There are many schools all over this nation, Almighty God, that need your special touch. There are many schools that are in an area where crime, poverty, and neglect run rampant. Help us, O Lord, to see that every child's education is important. Grant us your grace to bridge the education gap. Use us as instruments of your peace. Show us ways to support, engage, and enlighten the young people of our world. Amen.

Thursday, April 17
A Lament for Consumerism and Our Lack of Personal Discipline
Read Psalm 10

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Did you give something up for Lent? What impact is that having on your life?
- 2) What do you want? What do you need? Do you believe this is God's desire for you?
- 3) How does it make you feel to imagine giving up your most prized possession?
- 4) Do you own your things, or do they own you?
- 5) How does getting what we want affect others?

Prayer:

Lord of all creation, we know that all things belong to you. Yet we live as if we are the masters of the universe. We are infatuated with what we can get. We are never satisfied by what we have. Our lives are ruined by our greed; we oppress our brothers and sisters to get more things, and we are destroying the planet so we can get more faster. What are we doing? Free us from our addiction to "more." Help us to recognize that we have enough, and to provide for others with the same energy and resources we spent getting things for ourselves. Open our hearts that we might know the joy of giving and the comfort of discipline. Lead us to lives of true freedom and justice for all. Amen.

Friday, April 18
A Personal Lament about Anger
Read Jonah 3-4

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How has anger inserted a barrier between you and God? Between you and others?
- 2) Do you blame God, or harbor anger toward God, for something that has happened? How has that influenced your walk as a disciple of Christ?
- 3) How can anger be productive in the life of a Christ follower? In the church?
- 4) How do you see God at work, redirecting your concerns back to Christ and the movement of the Holy Spirit?

Prayer:

God of amazing grace, thank you for your unending, unyielding promise to love us, even when we set our hearts on anger and bitterness, thinking the world is unfair. You are merciful and wonderful. In our relationship with you and in our relationships with others, we ask that you relieve us of anger, that we may serve you with our whole hearts and hold nothing back. Forgive us, Lord. Rid us of the shame and guilt of our anger that we may be set free. Move us to be productive, helpful citizens of the Kingdom. Grant that we shall be restored in your mercy and grace. Thank you for hearing our prayer. What a relief it is. In your Son's name we pray, Amen.

Saturday, April 20
A Lament Confessing our Need for Revival
Read Psalm 80

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How has the need for revival become most apparent within our lives, our churches, and our Annual Conference? How is this revival the foundation for everything we do?
- 2) How do you know Jesus' unconditional love that it is so transforming that we are reconciled with God, and given a new way of living that is eternal?
- 3) What kind of pain do we experience when we turn away from spiritual revival?
- 4) How will we respond in bringing healing, hope, justice, and transformation in lives, communities, and the world?

Prayer:

We pray to you, Almighty God, to show us the way to a spiritual awakening and revival, in such a way that we may become anew in your Spirit. We pray for renewal and enthusiasm that leads us away from our disorientation of self that has so long impacted our lives. Our prayer for revival is to help us see what you are calling us to do and to be, right here and right now. We as your servants and your Church await your coming. Come Holy Spirit, and lighten our ways. We pray as the Psalmist prayed, "O God, restore us and cause Your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved." Amen.