

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 24

A Relationship Lament about Divorce and Broken Relationships

Read the hymn "When Love is Found," No. 643 in the *United Methodist Hymnal*

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Why do we keep score of who is right or wrong in our most intimate relationships?
- 2) Why can't we work through the pain of betrayal or change to once again find love?
- 3) Why can't we see our partner through God's eyes?
- 4) What can I do today to resolve the emptiness and pain in my life?

Prayer:

Lord, you bless us with love to share. Along the way we have lost sight of the joy and fullness of our relationships, and they have become broken just as we are broken. Heal the brokenness of our lives and those connected to us so that when you have healed us, we may never break again. Amen.

Tuesday, March 25

A Lament about Burdensome Church Structure as a Barrier to Revival

Read Psalm 22

Reflection Questions:

- 1) We understand that we are part of the catholic (or universal) church, which unites Christians from all denominations. At the same time, we find ourselves frustrated at the larger church. What would you say is the most frequent frustration with the church universal?
- 2) What is the most frequent frustration with the United Methodist Church nationally?
- 3) What is the most frequent frustration with the Arkansas UMC?
- 4) With the new work in the Arkansas Annual Conference, where do you think we are missing the mark?

Prayer:

Loving God, the church is the incarnate body of Jesus in the world today. You have lifted up the people called Methodist to advance your Kingdom on earth as part of the larger Church. Forgive me when I attribute all that is wrong with my local congregation to the hierarchy. And forgive us when we care more about rules and order than people.

Lord, I ask for you to come in the power of your Holy Spirit to bring real revival to all our people, starting with me; and with all congregations, starting with my congregation. May we be a vital congregation that is focused on making disciples who make disciples, to the glory of God and in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Wednesday, March 26

A Personal Lament Concerning Spiritual Stagnation

Read Psalms 42-43

Reflection Questions:

- 1) What ignites your passion in your walk with God? When do you feel God nearest to your heart?
- 2) What happens that causes you to drift in your relationship with God? Why is it so hard to get back on track?
- 3) What are some practices that might help you renew your passion for the things of God?
- 4) When God restores your soul, what can you do to show your gratitude?

Prayer:

O God of living water, I thirst for your presence. I remember times when you seemed so close. But instead of drinking the living water, I feel drowned by the floods of despair. Sometimes I don't even know why I am so cast down, but sometimes I know exactly what has led me away from you. Save me again, God! Restore the joy of my heart, the passion of my spirit. Let me drink again from your fountain, and I will be made new. I will put my hope in you, and I will praise you, for you are my help and my God. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Thursday, March 27

A Lament for Pride

Read Psalm 36

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Read verses 1-4 again, replacing "them" and "their" with "me" and "my." Does the Psalmist speak for the condition of your soul?
- 2) How do you define pride? What is the opposite of pride?
- 3) Imagine yourself safe in the arms of God, where you do not have to do anything or know the answers. Instead, just rest there as a child of God.

Prayer:

Sheltering God, so much of my life is spent trying to prove to myself and others that I am worthy of your love. I do not trust you to be who you say you are, because I do not trust myself. I am puffed up and full of myself instead of seeking to be filled by you, and so often, I feel empty. Forgive me, so I can live as your child again, amazed by your faithful presence and content to be overshadowed by your grace and glory. Amen.

Friday, March 28

A Lament about Decline in our Local Churches

Read 2 Corinthians 4

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How have you found yourself thinking about the decline of the Church?
- 2) What would you say to God about it?
- 3) How have you used your faith to be a channel of God's light to share the gospel with others?
- 4) What could be different for the Church after this Easter?

Prayer:

Almighty God, ruler of our hearts, it is by your mercy that we are able to engage in ministry in the world and in our churches. You make it possible and you inspire us to serve. Yet we watch as the world pulls others, and sometimes ourselves, away. We hold our breath, believing that what we experience as obvious—your love, mercy, and grace—will override the temptations and alternatives that keep people away from the church and from obedience to you. Our fears compel us to take risks, and sometimes to make compromises. Encourage us to speak as Paul and reveal the gospel, and commit to proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ to the world. May we stop seeing scarcity, decline, and darkness, and embrace a desire for the abundance of revival and renewal in an outpouring of your Spirit. Send us your light and cast out the darkness. Amen.

Saturday, March 29

A Global Lament for Poverty and Economic Disparity

Read Psalm 140

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How do you understand "I know that the Lord maintains the cause of the needy"? (verse 12)
- 2) How have you seen that "(the Lord) executes justice for the poor"? (verse 12)
- 3) As a disciple, in what ways has God called you to ministry FOR and WITH the poor?
- 4) As a disciple, how can we live faithfully in a world with a growing gap between the haves and the have-nots?

Prayer:

Holy God, today we pray for the needy and the very poor. We pray for the homeless and hurting. We pray for the confused and the lost. Lord, we pray for the millions who live on the edge of hunger, even in a land of plenty.

Give to us open hearts, minds, and doors, especially to those in great need, and regardless of whom they are. Move our world into a place where the gap between those with plenty and those with great needs is reduced. Finally, bless us so that we might be a blessing to you and to others. Amen.