Some words on lament….A Sermon and Prayer Together
June 14, 2020
Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC
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Today my reflections and our prayer time are woven together - and I have drawn on the wisdom of many Christian pastors in these reflections on lament.

There is a saying:
Do not be afraid to cry. Tears and a sign that we have loved.

Rachel Hackenberg writes:

“Lament is an ancient practice, as old as humanity itself. We shake our fists at the heavens and wonder where God is. We cry and wail when death breaks our hearts. We take to the streets to grieve injustice. We pour tears into our pillows and ask for a sign of life’s (or God’s) purpose.

We do a disservice to ourselves when we refuse to admit the pain of our lives and spirits. Lament is a necessary expression of the soul.

And listening to lament—showing up in love to recognize lament’s heartache—is a necessary practice of community.

If one person’s lament is not heard and acknowledged by another, it festers. If a community’s lament is met only by silence from the wider community, the sorrow swells. If the raging of the heart never experiences God’s grace whispering, “I hear you,” the lament builds. In Psalm 22, the poet is desperate for recognition—for community—in order to not feel alone in grief. ‘God has left me. Others despise me. Those who hear me, mock me.’...

But to witness pain and to grieve for one another’s heartache: this is how community fosters grace and compassion.” (<https://www.ucc.org/commentary_making_room_for_lament_10182018>)

In these days there is much to lament.

We’ve prayed our prayer list, filled with names of the sick and names of those who have died, we have prayed in grief and solidarity in response to racism. But we have not paused to lament all that is hard in this time.

So today we do that.

“We lament. We cry out to the God who can deliver. We lament because suffering needs a voice and pain needs a place where it can argue its case before the courts of divine justice. We lament because it is an honest response to the contradictions of the human condition. We lament because it is a faithful word of resistance to the cultural noise and myths of empire determined to return to “business as usual.” We lament because we know that our God can and will deliver us. God, deliver us, even from ourselves. We lament. We wait. We trust our God.” (The Rev. Dr. Raphael G. Warnock, Pastor, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, author, social, political activist, and public theologian.)

In Psalm 147:3, we read, “God heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.” Our laments are a testimony to our relationship with a God who heals the brokenhearted.

Then, too, lament is a declaration that what we are experiencing is not normal. We are not getting used to this. We are not inured to the pain. We are getting through this time of disruption, and we are even building up strength and resilience and adaptability - we are getting through, but we do not call this normal.

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”—Romans 12:15

Give us the gift of weeping, O God, for tears of love are always holy. It is not only our loved ones who are lost, but our jobs, our neighborhoods, our familiarity with family, and graduations and classes. May our mourning, lamenting, remembering, and learning from these losses not disappear like water in sand, but push us to weep from time to time. Keep us tenderhearted, we pray. Hear our prayer. (<https://sojo.net/day-of-lament/prayers> )

Our laments:
The Laments of our kids

“Some of the things the kids miss are: doing craft projects in church school, doing "real” communion, going to school and being with friends... they’re also missing parents now that they are returning to work.”

The laments of our adults

We miss making music in person together. We miss coffee hour, even if Zoom coffee hour is lovely and fun.

We miss our colleagues.

It’s hard to live alone through this.

Be sure this one’s anonymous: We’re kind of tired of the folks we live with.

I miss trips to Maine, and visiting my Dad.

I have a friend who is struggling and needs support.
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We call out to you, O God, mourning for the milestones that have been altered this year. How we wish we’d had all of the regular celebrations just as they’d been planned: graduations, weddings, baptisms. How deeply we grieve that for those lost to CoVid19 we could not even gather together as mourners. How much we worry for the fall: what will life be like then?

We call out to you, Mother and Father God, worried for a generation of children experiencing trauma right now - learning disrupted, households disrupted, losing access to food and essential services.

We lament, God of families, that we cannot hug the family members we love so much, or even stand in the same room with them.

Eternal and all-knowing God, you know that we are tired of this pandemic.

As our conference minister Don Remick put it this week,

“[we] don’t want to do this anymore!?....It’s a statement. It’s a question. It’s a plea. It’s tinged with shame, inadequacy, and sadness, and weariness. Fatigue upon fatigue. Emotion upon emotion. Passion upon passion. Grief upon grief. It accumulates.” ( <https://www.sneucc.org/blogdetail/14021612> )

We call out to you, O God of all people, wishing that today we could be parading in Pride rather than driving in a rainbow car parade. And God beyond gender, how is it possible that in the midst of this Pride month, the health care rights of transgendr folks are being taken away?

Creator God we lament the destruction of your sacred earth after the hottest May on record.

We call out to you, O God of all people, how long will racism, systemic and interpersonal, dominate our criminal justice system? How long will it be until everyone is treated equitably and no one is in danger because of their skin color? We cry out with our Asian-American neighbors experiencing CoVid related discriminitation and we call out with our African American neighbors, Black Lives Matter. As Jesus wept over Jerusalem, we weep over all our cities and cry out for justice. We say their names:
Breonna
Tony
Ahmaud
George
Rayshard.

We call out to you, mourning for over four hundred thousand of your people all around the world lost to CoVid19 -
Remembering particularly Pedro, Myra, John S, Charlie W, Edith, Ellen, Jan, Bandita, Don
And we worry that this number might double or triple.

And when our lament, our grief, our sadness joins also with anger, God we call out to you in anger. How long, O Lord, How long?

Holy, interconnected God, we lament and call out how long and shout in anger at the injustices and tragedies of this time, not just to lament but because doing so keeps us connected to our neighbors who are suffering. Even though it is painful, sitting with the pain of the world keeps us working to heal the sick, to bind up the brokenhearted, stand for justice.

But when it feels impossible to look up from our own grief, that’s when we need your help most of all -

Your solidarity as the parent of one who died by violence -

Your healing as the Source of all compassion -

Your hopefulness as the one whom even death could not stop -

Your goodness as the vision that drives us forward.

Your voice when we need most to listen,

Your breath when we are most tired.

Your strength to carry us on.

Your love to catch, and hold, and heal our tears.

And so we pray:

“God of all power and love,
we give thanks for your unfailing presence
and the hope you provide in times of uncertainty and loss.
Send your Holy Spirit to enkindle in us your holy fire.
Revive us to live as Christ’s body in the world:
a people who pray, worship, learn,
break bread, share life, heal neighbors,
bear good news, seek justice, rest and grow in the Spirit.
Wherever and however we gather,
unite us in common prayer and send us in common mission,
that we and the whole creation might be restored and renewed,
through Jesus Christ….” (Episcopal Presiding Bishop Michael Curry)

Continuing with the Lord’s Prayer.