

A Service of Lament

The Service may begin with alternative opening acclamations or collects, and selected readings. Music may be implemented throughout. A homily is intended, followed by the Service of Lament.

The People stand for the opening acclamation and collect.

Opening Acclamation

Officiant: Children of God, hear the word of the Lord from the Prophet Isaiah:
If we remove the yoke from among us, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if we offer food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted;

People: *Then the glory of the Lord will shine upon us; the Lord will say to us, "Here I am."*

Officiant: The Lord be with you.

People: *And also with you.*

Officiant: Let us pray.

God, our Heavenly Father, we draw near to you with thankful hearts because of your great love for us. We thank you most of all for the gift of your dear Son, in whom alone we may be one. We are different one from another in ethnicity and language, in material things, in gifts, in opportunities, but each of us has a human heart, knowing joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain. We are one in our need of your forgiveness, your strength, your love; make us one in our common response to you, that bound by a common love and freed from selfish aims we may work for the good of all and the advancement of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. *(Prayer by Queen Salote Tonga)*

People: Amen.

The people sit.

A Reading from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, *Letter from Birmingham Jail, abridged*

My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without legal and nonviolent pressure. History is the long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and give up their unjust posture; but groups are more immoral than individuals.

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly I have never yet engaged in a direct-action movement that was "well timed," according to the timetable of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. This "wait" has almost always meant "never." It has been a tranquilizing Thalidomide, relieving the emotional stress for a moment, only to give birth to an ill-formed infant of frustration. We must come to see with the distinguished jurist of yesterday that "justice too long delayed is justice denied." We have waited for more than 340

years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward the goal of political independence, and we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward the gaining of a cup of coffee at a lunch counter.

Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say wait. But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, brutalize, and even kill your black brothers and sisters with impunity; when you see the vast majority of your 20 million

Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see the tears welling up in her little eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in her little mental sky, and see her begin to distort her little personality by unconsciously developing a bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking in agonizing pathos: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?" when you take a cross country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" men and "colored" when your first name becomes "nigger" and your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and when your wife and mother are never given the respected title of "Mrs." when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tip-toe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into an abyss of injustice where they experience the bleakness of corroding despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience....

Here ends the reading.

Psalm 6 *read antiophonally*

1. Lord, do not chastise me in Your wrath,
do not punish me in Your fury.
2. **Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am wretched.**
Heal me, for my limbs are stricken.
3. And my life is hard stricken.
—and You, O Lord, how long?
4. **Come back, Lord, deliver my life,**
rescue me for the sake of Your kindness.

5. For death holds no mention of You.
In sheol who can acclaim You?
6. **I weary in my sighin.**
I make my bed swim every night,
with my tears I water my couch.
7. From vexation my eye becomes dim,
is worn out, because of all my foes.
8. **Turn from me, all you wrongdoers,**
for the Lord hears the sound of my weeping.
9. The Lord hears my plea,
the Lord will take my prayer.
10. **Let all my enemies be shamed and hard stricken,**
let them turn back, be shamed in an instant.

1 Corinthians 13

If I speak in the tongues of human beings and of the angels, but do not have love, I have become resounding brass and a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophecy and know all the mysteries and all the knowledge, and if I have all faith, of such a sort as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I distribute all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may be burned, and do not have love, I am profited nothing. Love is magnanimous, love is kind, is not envious, love does not boast, does not bluster, Does not act in an unseemly fashion, does not seek for things of its own, is not irascible, does not take account of the evil deed, Does not rejoice in injustice, but rejoices with the truth; It tolerates all things, has faith in all things, hopes in all things, endures all things. Love never fails; but if there are prophecies, they will be made ineffectual; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be made ineffectual. For we know partially and we prophesy partially; But, when that which is complete comes, what is partial will be rendered futile. When I was an infant, I reckoned like an infant; having become a man, I did away with infantile things. For as yet we see by way of a mirror, in an enigma, but then face to face; as yet I know partially, but then I shall know fully, just as I am fully known. But now abide faith, hope, love—these three—and the greatest of these is love.

Lector: The Word of the Lord

People: *Thanks be to God.*

Hymn, Precious Lord, Take My Hand

During COVID, the lyrics may be read quietly as the music is played on the piano, organ or other instruments.

A Homily is intended to be offered here.

The Lament

Dear Friends in Christ,

Naming our sin and complicity in the injustices of the world is the first step toward healing. It is only when we admit that we have done wrong—that we are sinners—that we can stop condemning others for the wrongs that they have done. This does not keep us from naming injustice; rather, it keeps us from passing judgment, lest we condemn ourselves.

We gather, therefore, to lament. We are broken. And in our proclivity to throw stones, in our propensity to scapegoat the other, we turn from the forgiveness of God. We are afraid. In our fear, we make no room for empathy, neither for the afflicted nor for those who afflict. Yet they are us. We are them. We are responsible to and for each other.

Let us, therefore, lament the hurt that we have caused, either by our action or inaction. Let us lament the hurt caused to us, by the actions and inaction of others. Let us lament the hurt caused to our neighbor, for which we are all complicit, knowingly or unknowingly, to greater and lesser degrees.

“When you lament in good faith, opening yourself to God honestly and fully—no matter what you have to say—then you are beginning to clear the way for praise. You are straining toward the time when God will turn your tears into laughter.”

~Ellen Davis, *Getting Involved with God*

Lament

*How she sits alone,
the city once great with people.
She has become like a widow.*

*Great among nations,
mistress among provinces,
reduced to forced labor.*

*She weeps on through the night,
and her tears are on her cheek.*

*She has no consoler
from all her lovers.*

*All her friends have betrayed her,
have become enemies to her.*

*Judah is exiled in affliction
and in hard labor.*

*She dwells among the nations,
she finds no rest.*

*All her pursuers overtake her
in straits. (Lamentations 1:1-3)*

We join, O Lord, the Lament of Your people.
We have lost what is most common to us:
our humanity.

We have betrayed Your trust.
We have squandered the fruits
of Your labor.

*People: We have abandoned peace,
we have forgotten what is good. (Lamentations 3:17)*

We have become cheapened
by systems of injustice.
Our silence is deafening.

We have failed to be responsible
to the plight of our neighbors,
unaccountable for our ignorance.

*People: We have abandoned peace,
we have forgotten what is good. (Lamentations 3:17)*

Our eyes are flooded
with tears that we
have caused.

Our hearts churn within us.
We have sorely rebelled.
Forgive us, Lord.

*People: Bring us back to You, Lord,
that we come back.... (Lamentations 5:21)*

Amidst the suffering we inflict,
multitudes are afflicted,
pandemic rages on.

Thousands upon thousands have died,
we grieve their loss.

In our weakness, give us strength.

*People: The Lord will not abandon forever.
Though sorrow strikes,
Mercy and Compassion endure.*

You have seen the suffering of Your people.
The fires of earth rage,
devastation is in their wake.

You have seen the vindictiveness of the violent.
Their hearts burn with hate,
death is in their hands.

*People: You have seen the wrong done to Your people.
Grant justice, O Lord! (Lamentations 3:59)*

Restore what we have broken, O God.
Revitalize the soil, purify the waters,
renew our hearts and minds.

Dispel the myth of race.
Give voice to the voiceless.
Let Love reign supreme.

*People: The Lord's kindness has not ended;
God's mercies are not exhausted.
They are renewed every morning.
Great is Your faithfulness, O God. (Lamentations 3:22-23)*

Officiant: I invite the congregation to name their laments, to name the sins of one's own doing, to name the injustices of this world, to give voice to the voiceless who have suffered affliction, to cry out to God with a broken and contrite heart.

A period of silence is observed as the people name silently or aloud the hurt of this world. The service continues with the kyrie.

Officiant: Lord, have mercy upon us.

People: *Christ, have mercy upon us.*

Officiant: Lord, have mercy upon us.

Officiant: Let us pray as Christ has taught us.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,

thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

The candles are lighted from the paschal candle, if available, passing the light of Christ from person to person.

The people are invited to kneel, as able. A brief period of silence is observed. The service continues with the versical and responses. All remain kneeling, as able.

Officiant: O Lord, let thy mercy rest upon us;

People: *As we put our trust in thee.*

Officiant: Good is the Lord for those who look to God,

People: *for the person who seeks the Lord. (Lamentations 3:25)*

Officiant: Our days are consumed in smoke, and our bones are scorched like a hearth. Our hearts are stricken and withers like grass.

People *Good is the Lord for those who look to God,
for the person who seeks the Lord.*

Officiant: Lord, hear our prayer, and let our cry come before You. Hide not your face from us; incline Your ear to us; answer us when we call.

People: *Good is the Lord for those who look to God,
for the person who seeks the Lord.*

Officiant: Let us pray.

Grant, O God, that Your holy and life-giving Spirit would anguish our hearts for Your Love and Mercy, especially the hearts of this land, our cities, communities, and our churches. We have divided what You have united; our ways have not been Your ways. Still our lips and open our minds. Silence our wills and give us hearts of flesh, so that, our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Isaiah 58 *Isaiah 58 is read by a lector or by a member of the clergy. The people remain kneeling, as able.*

Call out with full throat, do not stint,
raise your voice like a ram's horn,
and tell to My people its crime,
and to the house of Jacob their offense.

And Me day by day let them seek,
 let them desire the knowledge of My ways
like a nation that does what is right
 and its God's rule it does not forsake.
Let them ask Me rules of righteousness,
 God's closeness let them desire.
“Why did we fast and You did not see?
 We afflicted ourselves and You took no note?”
In your fast-day you found pleasure
 while all your affairs you pursued?
For quarrel and strife you fasted
 and to strike with a wicked fist?
Your fasting this day
 will not make your voice heard on high.
Will like this be the fast that I choose,
 the day a man afflicts himself,
to bow his head like a reed
 and bed down in sackcloth and ash?
Is it this that you call a fast,
 and a day pleasing to the Lord?
Is not this the fast that I choose—
 to unlock the shackles of wickedness,
 and loosen the bonds of the yoke,
to set the downtrodden free—
 and to break every yoke?
Yes, to offer your bread to the hungry,
 and bring the wretched poor into your house.
When you see someone naked, you should clothe him,
 and your own flesh do not ignore.
Then shall your light break forth like the dawn
 and your healing quickly spring up.
And your vindication shall march before you,
 the Lord's glory shall be your rearguard.
Then shall you call and the Lord shall answer,
 cry out, and He shall say, “Here I am.”
If you remove the yoke from your midst,
 the mocking finger and vicious speech.
And you proffer your bread to the hungry,
 and sate the appetite of the afflicted.
Then your light shall dawn in the dark,

and your gloom shall be like the noon.
And the Lord shall guide you always
and sate your appetite in arid land,
and your bones He shall strengthen,
and you shall be like a well-moistened garden
and like a water source
whose waters do not fail.
And from among you they shall rebuild the ancient ruins,
foundations laid in times past you shall raise.
And you shall be called repairer of the breach,
restorer of paths for dwellers.
If you refrain from journey on the sabbath,
from pursuing your affairs on My holy day,
and call the sabbath a delight,
the Lord's holy day, respected,
and honor it by not following your ways,
nor pursuing your affairs and speaking in vain.
Then shall you delight in the Lord,
and I will mount you on the heights of the earth,
and make you thrive with the estate of Jacob your father,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

A period of silence is observed.

The clergy and lay worship leader(s) then extinguish their candles, arise, extinguish any candles that have been lighted, and quietly leave the church. There is no dismissal. The people may remain for a time reflection and prayer. The people are asked to exit the church in silence.

For Reflection

It is fitting, following the service, for the people to leave reflecting on the following questions, ideally to become part of ongoing dialogue in the local congregation:

- What do you see as the breach?
 - What is the breach in your community?
- What is the action you need to take?
- What are the conversations that you need to have?
- What do you believe needs to happen regarding racism in our country?
- How you will be responsible for this good and challenging work?

**Old Testament Scripture passages translated by Robert Alter, New Testament by David Bentley Hart*