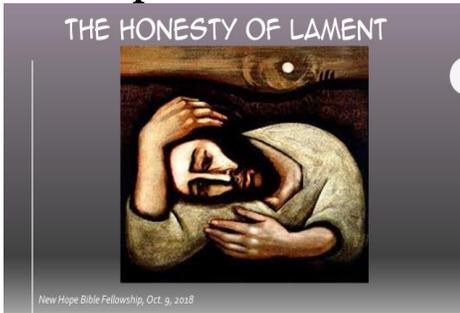


New Hope Sermon- The Honesty of Lament



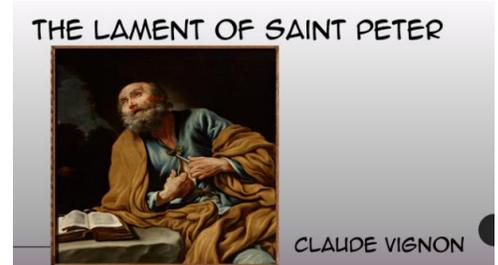
Introduction

In our preaching series we are seeing how the disciples' expectations and experiences following Jesus created obstacles for them, often upending their lives. Today I'd like to approach this issue of being upended from a Biblical and psychological perspective. The title of the sermon is "The Honesty of Lament." Interestingly, God gave this focus for today before we heard of Evan's R-1 visa acceptance, so the service today really embraces the

whole of life – its celebrations and its laments. It should always be a balance between the two because life has great joy and great pain. In our experience and study from the Biblical texts lament is based in reality and suffering. In the NIV Application Commentary Commentator Gerald Wilson says:

“The lament Psalms direct their appeal to God himself seeking deliverance from trouble and distress, the world of the lamenting Psalmist is fully aware of the possibilities and realities of suffering, disorder, sin and oppression that are apart of living in the world, Indeed, the laments but their focus and recounting how life has run amok despite the power and grace of Yahweh. Experience of pain often drives the Psalmists to question the sure foundation represented by God's creative power and sustaining authority. They experience God as distant (or even hostile as in Psalm 88) and like Job muster arguments to motivate God to act in their behalf.” (NIV Application Commentary Psalm Vol 1. Gerald Wilson Zondervan. 2002, p. 65)

We will be using the Psalms and the experience of David as our texts but lament has been known in the lives of New Testament followers of Jesus and all the rest of us down through the centuries. I love this artist's rendering of the Apostle Peter's lament before God – probably when he was in jail right before he was killed. Notice how he is pointing to his heart and pouring out to God what is on his heart.



David said, in Psalm 38:9 “All my longings lie open before you, Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you. Laments include the sighing and the longings we have that are unfulfilled. Fortunately, God keep track of all those – as well as our tears. As Psalm 56:8 says, “You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.” Clearly, our tears don't fall without His heart being affected.

So lament with its attendant sighing, loneliness, and tears touches the heart of God: To lament is to taste the tears of God.”

“The Psalms of Lament can be subdivided as either laments of the people or laments of the individual. These Psalms carry no specific requests but petition for supplication in time of need. And there is always a distinctive cry for salvation that takes its character from the lament. The Psalms of petition are the largest group in the Psalter” (The Preacher's Commentary. Donald Williams. Nelson Publishing. Psalms 1-72 p. 21).

Yet all commentators, and all of us who study the scriptures will realize that despair is not the bottom line in these psalms. The African Bible Commentary says: So lament with its attendant sighing, loneliness, and tears touches the heart of God: The songs reflect many of the circumstances we face in life: difficulty and danger, sickness and the fear of death, failure and sin and defeat. But they also sing of joy, deliverance, victory and triumph, always with an awareness of God's attributes of Love, goodness and power. These psalms inspire us to trust him as much as they draw us to him in surrender and worship.” (African Bible Commentary: Psalms. Cyril Okorochoa. P. 605)

I believe an authentic, safe church family needs to be space for lament. So let me start with two things that have happened in my own life last week that triggered this deeper reflection on lament. We'll look at those first, then do a Biblical exposition of lament in the Psalms.

Current causes

In an interview for her communication class last week, Meg asked what effect she thought American TV was having on our international students living here. That's a good question. What do you think? I think TV and social media are producing distorted understandings of this country. And I realized I needed to step to create more dialog about political realities and aberrations in this country.

As you know, the hot button issue politically last week was the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh and a chief justice in the Supreme Court. But, as with everything these days, that was overshadowed by the bellicose statements of President Donald Trump. Both those factors have seriously upended me. I thought the Kavanaugh confirmation was a fiasco, an actual political farce. It violated the impartial foundation of the American judicial system and revealed the poison of a tribal mentality in America where people believe a party line and attack those outside their camp with impunity. For Trump and others to attack Dr. Ford's witness and mock her and others' integrity was a disgrace. The #MeToo movement has awakened the global problems of men's abuse of women and cracked the door open to reveal that abuse, shame, imbalance of power that has given men permission to dominate women over the centuries. For men like Trump, who have an appalling history of sexually intimidating women, to mock Dr. Ford was both dishonest and blatantly hypocritical. I recall the statement by Senator Jeff Flake that even "though Kavanaugh will get confirmed, these hearings and the questions they raised will always cast a shadow on the court."

On a personal level, my hearing loss is another cause for lament. It has upended some of my freedoms in ministry. As long as a person I'm talking to is on my left side – where I still have some hearing- I can engage in meaningful conversation. But I can't hear many people in a group who speak quietly or with high-pitched voices. That's why I put out the prayer request for restoration of my hearing. As a result, many people both from here and overseas have sent me strong words of faith and commitment to pray for my healing. I am so very grateful and I believe with them. But, the first week the new hearing aid was installed, I had two strong reactions like the ones I've had in the past. When my body reacts strongly, it takes a few days for it to calm down and get the offending allergens out of my system. Friday night, my body was still reacting and it affected me physically, and emotionally. Gratefully, this was also the normal time Carol Dobson calls me so we can pray together. She called and we talked and prayed about this issue. In fact her first question was "How are you doing ML? And I said, "I'm in lament." Talking it out with her and sharing my thinking and feelings restored peace and emphasized the words God had given me already from Psalm 42 – an expression of lament and a focus of faith to restore hope. So that's where I want us to start now in looking as we look at **the Songs of lament in the Psalms.**

A Psalm of Lament: Psalm 42:

*"5 Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.⁶ My soul is downcast within me; ⁷ Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.⁸ By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life.⁹ I say to God my Rock "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"
¹¹ Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. (NIV)*

"The image throughout the Psalm is of water, threatening pounding ocean waves, tumbling waterfalls which depict an overwhelming sense of oppression. These powerful waters have swept over the Psalmist and threatened to carry him away, but in the midst of the drowning flood,...he discovers

[that] God is the rock who provides firm footing and protection. His thrashing hand grips the line of God's love, God's faithful, committed, covenant love that endures forever. The living God of 42:2, becomes the God of my life 42:8 and a song wells up within the Psalmist even in the midst of darkness. (Wilson, *Ibid.*, 672-673). It was Psalm 42:11 that the Spirit brought to my mind last week on Friday when my soul was disturbed. God knew all about that but I needed to speak to those negative feelings and say: *Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, the light of my countenance, my Savior and my God.*" Or, to put it in the contemporary vernacular: *I say to my soul: Don't be discouraged, don't be disturbed for I know my God will break through for me.*" Amen!

In my own life as I have pioneered several of the jobs I've had – the first woman to be what is now called a Missions Pastor but back then was called a Missions coordinator. Writing a curriculum to help churches put missions in the center of church life. We called it *A Disciples' Bifocals*, teaching people how to see life from God's perspective. I was able to travel around the country teaching from the curriculum. Then I was hired by World Evangelical Fellowship to be the secretary for the new Commission of Church Renewal. That position is how I got to teach in South Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, and Taiwan. These were wonderful opportunities for ministry and so many evidences of God leading the way, but there was also struggle and tears. We are all in a spiritual battle, beloved, and Satan fights against everyone who is on God's side, doing His work. I faced recurring physical problems and all the problems of travel from country to country. Keith went with me, but our marriage had many serious ups and downs and so God has a number of bottles of my tears from those decades. Each time I turned to the Bible, mostly to these songs of lament to strengthen my soul in the Lord. And that's what I want us to do today.

Lament in Other Psalms

There are many lament psalms - 3, 10, 13, 6, 56, 55, 44, 60, 74, 42, 54, 57, 58, 61, 69, 71, and psalms that deal specifically with sickness: 38, 41, 88, 102 . I want to highlight just 4 other psalms besides the ones I've mentioned already.

Psalm 55: 16-17, 22 "But I call to God and the Lord will save me. Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan and he hears my voice." This is so crucial to our faith, beloved. God does hear us and carries our moaning in His own heart. So *we can cast our cares on the Lord and He will sustain us*. A word study just on God's sustaining role in our lives is a great source of comfort.

Psalm 57:1-2 *Be merciful to me, O God. Be merciful to me for in You my soul takes refuge. In the shadow of your wings I will take refuge till the storms of destruction pass by.*" That's verse 1. Then verse 2 says *"I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me....God sends His love and faithfulness."* What is the cause of your lament, beloved? What is the area where you are anxious about God's leading in your life or forgiveness, or strength or wisdom or even hope? In those very emotions of doubt and distress, we can rely on God's mercy and trust Him to fulfill his purpose for us. This becomes an anchor of our soul that quiets the churning emotions and centers us in faith in Him.

Psalm 61:1-3 Those conflicting emotions or sense of oppression or failure or fear can be very overwhelming. So Psalm 61:1-3 = *When my heart is overwhelmed within me, lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.*" Crying out to God to be our fortress, our Rock of safety, our defense against the onslaughts in our mind and emotions from the evil one.

And finally, **Psalm 59:16-17**: in the midst of feeling attacked by spiritual forces or physical enemies who slander or distort or jockey for political position and power over you is the word: *"But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. O my Strength, I sing praise to you; You, O God, are my fortress, my loving God."* A few years ago when my body seemed to be particularly attacked by Satan, I wrote these verses down and

pasted the paper with the verses on the dashboard of my car, so as I was going to my job at church, I would sing aloud and claim these truths and watch to see God fulfill His Word.

God is not put off by your laments, beloved. He knows our inner thoughts and struggles and places of distress. We can honestly share these with Him. And when we honestly share them with the church, we can receive His support through prayer and love and the mercy of others. The honesty of lament. Just don't keep it to yourself so your negative thoughts spiral down. Give to the Lord your fears – cast all your cares on Him and then share them in a safe fellowship so others can carry you and carry them with you and for you. As a church we celebrate our joys together. And we carry each others' laments. This is the practical outworking of loving one another in Jesus's name.

Amen.

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 10/14/18