

# PRACTICE LAMENT



*A Prayer in Times of Isolation 2020 by Meena Matocha*



"By the Rivers of Babylon" 1910 by Ephraim Moses Lilien

## Invitation

This year our theme for Lent at Apostles is Practice Lament. This is crucial for our parish for three reasons. One, practicing lament connects us to the suffering we and those around us are experiencing. Two, practicing lament brings deep healing, profound hope, and joyous celebration that are found in Jesus. Three, to practice lament is to prepare for missions. As we recognize the suffering of others and experience God's healing and hope then we are whole enough to offer the God's grace to our friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, and classmates.

Learn to lament. Teach one another how to take seriously these cadences of pain, some coming from hate, some coming from love, so that we're not diminished but deepened by them—find God in them, and beauty....

What I do with my grief affects the way you handle your grief; together we form a community that deals with death and other loss in the context of God's sovereignty, which is expressed finally in resurrection.”

-Eugene Peterson

1. Lament is a form of praise.
2. Lament is a proof of the relationship
3. Lament is a pathway to intimacy with God.
4. Lament is a prayer for God to act.
5. Lament is a participation in the pain of others.

-N.T. Wright

Lament in the Bible is a liturgical response to the reality of suffering and engages God in the context of pain and trouble. The hope of lament is that God would respond to human suffering that is wholeheartedly communicated through lament.

- Soong Chan Rah



*The Beloved* 2020 by Trygve Skogrand

## Reflection

“How is faith to endure, O God, when you allow all this scraping and tearing on us? You have allowed rivers of blood to flow, mountains of suffering to pile up, sobs to become humanity's song -- all without lifting a finger that we could see. You have allowed bonds of love beyond number to be painfully snapped. If you have not abandoned us, explain yourself.

We strain to hear. But instead of hearing an answer we catch sight of God himself scraped and torn. Through our tears we see the tears of God.”

- from *Lament for a Son* by Nicholas Wolterstorff

# Articulation

heaviness  
weariness  
terror  
groaning  
wasted away  
quaking  
dishonored  
misery  
needy  
helpless  
oppressed  
forgotten  
lonely  
perplexed  
fallen  
trembling  
confounded  
afflicted  
forsaken  
scorned  
rejected  
laid low  
afraid  
desperate  
dismayed  
useless  
withered  
attacked  
sick  
torn up  
mocked  
unbearable  
turmoil  
unseeing  
broken  
disquieted  
betrayed  
left out  
wounded  
turned away



*Tomorrow will be the same but not as this is* 1958-1959 Colin McCahon

The writers of the Psalms described their grief and pain with tremendous specificity. What words capture the emotions you're carrying as you lament?

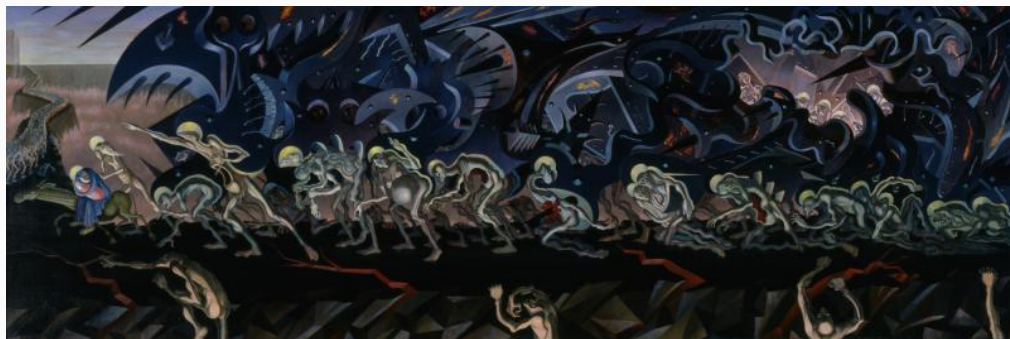
worn away  
humiliated  
disappointed  
trapped  
hated  
closed in  
foolish  
contrite  
shattered  
anxious  
hounded  
sinking  
failing  
distressed  
brokenhearted  
imprisoned  
tired  
alone  
mute  
terrified  
devoured  
sorrowful  
unprotected  
confused  
withdrawn  
lost  
overwhelmed  
swept away  
cast off  
faint  
languishing  
ensnared  
striving  
restless  
condemned  
homeless  
thrown away  
weeping  
abandoned  
crushed

# Lamenting over this World

As you reflect on the global events that have happened this past year, what has particularly filled your heart with sadness?

What would you want to tell God about any of it?

What specific acts would you ask God to do to make it right/bring Shalom?



*War Refugees* Irving Norman

# The Church



*Christ Crowned With Thorns 1450-1479 Antonello da Messina*

What moments of loss, brokenness, or strife have you been witness to in the church? How did you feel in those moments? What feelings do they stir now?

How do you imagine Jesus feels about these moments, knowing all things? If it were up to you, how *should* Jesus feel differently?

# My Own Life



*Mary Magdalene* Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo

As you recall the last year, what have you and your loved ones lost?

Considering the past year, when have you felt comforted? Describe those experiences of comfort.

When have you felt discomforted? What 2-3 words from page 4 best describe your discomfort?

What do you feel now?

# Writing Your Own Psalm of Lament

an exercise from W. David O. Taylor

*“A poem requires re-reading. Unlike prose which fills the page with print, poems leave a lot of white space.... We sit before the poem like we sit before a flower and attend to form, relationship, color. We let it begin to work on us. This attending, this waiting, this reverential posture is at the core of the life of faith, the life of prayer, the life of worship, the life of witness.” – Eugene Peterson*

## TASK

1. Taking the basic shape of a lament psalm as your pattern, write your own lament psalm.
2. Choose whether you wish to write an individual lament or a communal lament.
3. Keep your phrases/lines succinct; no long sentences, no wordy phrasings.
4. Be specific and concrete in your statements, rather than abstract and idiosyncratic.
5. Choose evocative imagery or metaphors that will help you see what you're praying.
6. Take advantage of the unique devices of Hebrew poetry and of the language of the Psalter.
7. Title your psalm.
8. Share your psalms with others.

## THE SINGULAR POWERS OF HEBREW POETRY

1. Shorter sentences than in prose. One line = 6 Hebrew words divided in two halves/cola, or 9 words in a tri-cola. EX: Ps. 2:1 + 2:2. 2.
2. Default rhythmic arrangement is 3 Hebrew words or 3 stresses per half line. EX: Ps. 2:2, 7 and 8. The second most common is the 3-2: Pss. 14 and 27.
3. Its language is terse. Things are said in the most economical way possible. It is not a flowery style of poetry.
4. It relies on the following devices:
  - Strophe and Stanza: Ps. 13 and 19.
  - Rhyme: 5:1-2; 18:46; 26:11; 35:23; 44:5
  - Paronomasia (play on words): 6:10; 28:5; 37:2.
  - Alliteration and Assonance: Ps. 127:1 and Ps. 102:6.
  - Alphabetical psalms: Pss. 9-10; 25; 35; 37; 111; 112; 145; 119.
  - Chiasms (abba): Ps. 29.
  - Refrains: 42:43; 67; 80.
  - Parallelism (“stereophonic complementariness”). Three of the most common types of parallelism include:
    - a) Synonymous (Ps. 77:11)
    - b) Antithetic (Ps. 30:5)
    - c) Synthetic (a heightening or specifying of first line: Ps. 33:8; 6:5).
5. Its language is suggestive rather than discursive.
6. Its powers reside in its rich use of metaphor and imagery



## THE BASIC SHAPE OF LAMENT PSALMS

With individual and communal psalms of lament, there is a recognizable pattern. Psalm 13 is typical.

### A Complaint (vv. 1-2)

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I bear pain in my soul,  
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?  
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

### A Petition (vv. 3-4)

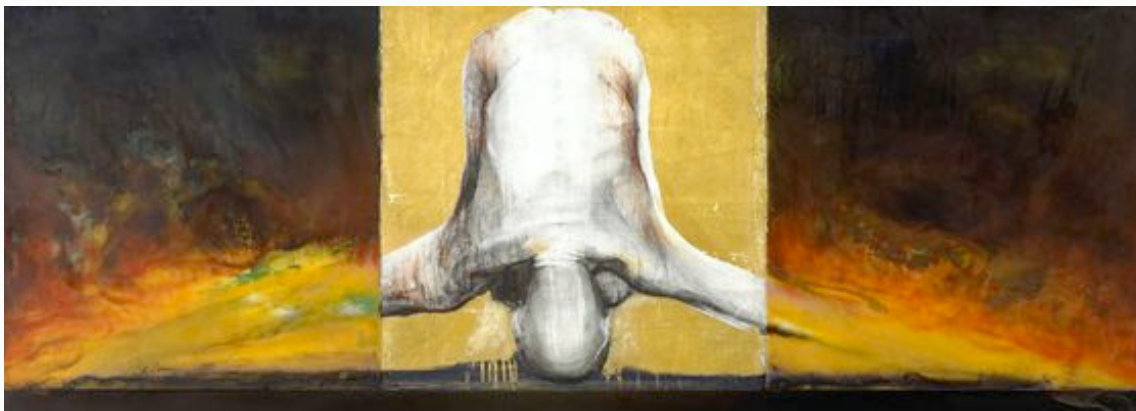
Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!  
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,  
and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";  
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

### A Resolution (vv. 5-6)

But I trusted in your steadfast love;  
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.  
I will sing to the Lord,  
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

While there are plenty of variations on this pattern, the complaints are directed chiefly to God. Psalm 3:1, "Oh Lord, how many are my foes!" Psalm 10:2, "Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up Your hand. Do not forget the afflicted." What are the complaints about? They may be about God, or about one's life, or about a presumed enemy. Psalm 22:1, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Psalm 38:3, "There is no health in my bones because of my sin." Psalm 72:4, "Save the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor." The kinds of petitions that the psalmists make of God range widely. They include requests for healing, deliverance, vindication, provision and protection, and, in the cases of confession of sin, forgiveness. The final resolution of a psalm of lament may involve a confession of trust; it may involve a resolve to praise or a promise to obey; or it may involve a confident affirmation of God's own faithfulness, even if there is no empirical data to prove it.

*Tenebrae* by Erica Grimm Vance



# Additional Resources

## **Books**

Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer by Eugene Peterson

Prophetic Lament by Soong-Chan Rah

Prayer in the Night by Tish Harrison Warren

A Sacred Sorrow by Michael Card

## **Articles**

"Five Things to Know About Lament" by N.T. Wright:

<https://www.ntwrightonline.org/five-things-to-know-about-lament/>

## **Podcasts**

"How Grieving the Pandemic can Unlock Revelation of God and Ourselves." 02/01/21  
& 02/09/21: Emotionally Healthy Leaders Podcast by Pete Scazzero

Renovare Podcast

The Healing Power of Grief - Fil Anderson 05/10/20

Open and Unafraid: The Psalms as a Guide to Life - David Taylor 05/25/20

Prayer in the Night - Tish Harrison Warren 01/26/21

## **Music**

*Lamentations* - Bifrost Arts

*Lament Songs* - The Porter's Gate

*Stormy Landscape* by Errol Stephen Boyley

