

*A God's Eye View of You, Pt. 7*  
***Repairer of the Breach***  
*Lamentations 3; Isaiah 58: 6-12*

**First Presbyterian Church  
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What beautiful spring weather we had! I remember sitting in the living room, thinking, “I love this house! I’m so glad we did the renovations. It’s a delight to work from home every day.” Bicycles streamed past the windows. Kids and moms and dads were out playing. It seemed so good. Of course I knew businesses and practices were nose-diving. And I wondered, “What’s it like where people’s homes aren’t so spacious? Where too many people are crammed into a tiny living area? What’s it like for people who don’t get along? What’s happening for people who have no meaningful work to do at home?” Even as I basked in the peaceful luxury of my life, I knew that elsewhere pressure had to be building. It was going to boil over like pasta cooked on high with the lid on the pot. Messy. But I did not anticipate the explosion of hundreds of thousands in the streets: the anger, the sorrow, the chaos, the destruction, the strain against the rule of law.

I have sought comfort and meaning in the Scriptures. I heard the call for the church to *lament*. To approach the situation with the plaintive prayer, “Father, this is not right! Father, this should not be!” So I read through the book of Lamentations, a book composed during the exile of God’s people, just the period we have been studying in this series. It struck me anew what it means to be part of God’s chosen people. Singled out to be the apple of his eye. Favored in order to be a light and a blessing to the world. But also sent through four hundred years of slavery to the Egyptians. Sent through centuries where good leaders alternated with horrible ones. Sent into exile to be exploited and taunted for 70 years by blood-thirsty pagans. God sent his people through these experiences so that we might be no strangers to the suffering of a world under the lash of sin.

Hold the images of the last weeks in your mind and let these images from Lamentations 3 wash through you:

[God] bent his bow and set me as a target for his arrow.  
He drove into my kidneys the arrows of his quiver.

I have become the laughing stock of all peoples,  
The object of their taunts all the day.

He has made my teeth grind on gravel,  
And made me cower in ashes.  
My soul is bereft of peace.

To crush underfoot  
All the prisoners of the earth  
To deny a man justice...  
The Lord does not approve.

[Yet] I have been hunted like a bird  
By those who were my enemies...

They flung me alive into the pit  
And cast stones on me;

Water closed over my head,  
I said, "I am lost."

A panic and a pitfall have come upon us,  
Devastation and destruction;  
My eyes flow with rivers of tears  
Because of the destruction of my people.

Are these words that could have expressed those last 8 minutes of George Floyd's life? Are these words for a Vietnamese couple standing in the looted rubble of their optometry business that was just about to re-open? Are these words for the family of a 71-year-old sheriff slain while protecting others from rioters? Are these words for those who wonder what happened to the America in which they grew up? Are these words for those who feel that this is the reality they have been living every day?

The answer, of course, is Yes to all of those questions. For these are words of lament. This should not be! This hurts. This breaks my heart. This is not right. Lord! Lord! How can you let this be?

Before the pointing of the finger. Before the politicizing and the polarizing. Before the exploitation, yet again, of a people's suffering for the power advantage of others. Before we must all parrot obediently and without question the one acceptable response decreed for us. Before companies make money off riding the right wave. Before the shouts of "Those people...." Before any of that, we join the

history of God's people in letting the painful, necessary cries of lament rise through our souls and in our voices.

And here's the kicker. God sent his chosen people through the centuries of slavery, political upheaval, exile and return in order that we might know most acutely of all the pain of a world lashed by the whip of human sin. Further, God sent his own Son to be born into the people with this history. And all of Israel's history came together in Jesus. God sent Jesus through such a life and death that he could uniquely pray all of these laments. Jesus could cry out these prayers as his own experience. And yet do so on behalf of the world he came to save. His Father sent him through the exile of our common humanity so that we might know, in all our dismay, that there is no suffering to which Christ is a stranger. He has taken it all into himself. He has taken the arrows, tasted the gravel, felt the spit, heard the mocking. He has been seized, unjustly tried, battered and slain. He has been betrayed by the Law, deserted by friends, denounced by God's ministers and socially shamed. No human injustice falls outside the range of his experience. He is no stranger to these days we are experiencing.

And. And neither are the people of God. We exist in order to offer the cries of a broken world to our Father and simultaneously offer the love of the Father to his broken world. Through our words and our actions. Where is it written that I am promised endless days in the bubble of my fine home while the world burns?

This is a different way to think than our news outlets suggest. This is neither white-bashing nor black-blame. This is not the guilt/shame rhetoric wielded to extract penance in the form of power seized or payments made. This is not the "why don't you stop committing crimes and pull yourselves together" lecture that comes so quickly to my lips. This is not the absurdity of thinking we can enjoy the rule of law without law enforcement. This is not the callousness of saying, "Just overwhelm them with force and put them back in their places."

*This is the power of lament.* The fuel of entering into sorrow for how things are with no agenda but to stand in the rubble and feel the loss. To take hands with police and protestors, the powerless and power-wielding. To know that God's chosen people have been chosen to be a *vicarious* people: we, above all, are to feel and experience how it is with the suffering, the discarded, the looted, and the brutalized. To feel it deep in our bones until we are on the very knife edge of despair. To say with Lamentations, "My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD."

And then to do what God's own people uniquely are able to do. To pull hard on faith even when we don't feel a scrap of it. To voice the Word of God into a world where it seems absurd. The singer in Lamentations 3 has voiced the sorrow of a whole community. He has declared that his hope has died. Then, surprisingly, he also seizes hope on behalf of all. It is impossible to overstate the courage it takes to voice this faith amidst such ruin. He says, "But. But this I call to mind, and therefore. Therefore, I have hope:

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases.  
His mercies never come to an end;  
they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.  
The LORD is my portion,  
therefore I will hope in him.

I am not promised a life of ease. To be engaged with humanity with the redemptive message of Christ is to enter the difficult, messy struggle for what is right and true and good and redeeming. I may or may not know peace in my time. I may or may not have possession of a lovely home and a prosperous lifestyle. But underneath whatever befalls, what is given to me, what is guaranteed to me, is the LORD himself. *The steadfast love of the LORD is my eternal portion.*

And that means I have a portion, a share, in the very work he sends his people to do. A significant part of that work is vicarious suffering with those who suffer. We express their hearts even as we hold them carefully and tenderly. And a significant part of that work is vicarious faith. We rise in faith to say, even when it seems that all evidence is to the contrary, "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. Great is your faithfulness." We pray that for ourselves. But not only for ourselves. We pray that for George Floyd and Derek Chauvin, for Antifa and President Trump. For whites, blacks, Democrats, Republicans, atheists, and fellow Christians. I look upon these faces and speak words over them and for them: "the steadfast love of the LORD never ceases. His mercies never come to an end."

From this deep center of lament and worship, it will rise in us what we are to do next. We will be able to step more fully into the identity our passage from Isaiah gives us: "You shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In" (Is. 58: 12). This is how God looks at us! You, my dear ones, are the Repairers of the Breach. You are my Restorers of Streets in which people long to dwell. I see you as Sought Out, as My Delight, as my Bride. That's my

treasuring of you. I also see you as my minister. My partners in suffering for the world through serving it. You go to the gaps I show you and fill them with love. You go to the broken streets and bring restoration in my name.

There are a thousand, thousand ways to do that. It's both an individual and a group calling. We have Repairers and Restorers who are in the legislature or offering the physicians' touch, who are keeping a home together or caring for people in nursing homes. We have teachers, lawyers, and artists who pursue the true, the good and the beautiful. We have business people who create wealth to get this work done. We're all engaged in this personally. But we also come together to work as a united church to do things we couldn't do alone. Empowerment, justice, restoration, prosperity all flow from one source: *the valuing of people as beloved creations of God*. Love changes lives. Long, faithful, true-hearted consistent love. I'm so thankful for our church's heart for loving the people of our city. Building homes, mentoring children, teaching respect, helping former prisoners re-enter the workforce, housing the homeless, protecting the unborn and encouraging families. All of these are in place. They are far more effective than statements and rallies and grand declarations. These are quiet, enduring ministries. And a vicarious people know we are called to this kind of love. Look, we need fifty more mentors at Gardere through KidsHope. We need a couple dozen more reading buddies at Buchanan. We just do. And I know that this fall, First Presbyterians will rally like never before to do the work of love that arises from lament and faith.

I want to close with the image that has most touched my heart in the last weeks. It is a spontaneous exchange between a teenager and a policeman in Shreveport. The boy had gone to a peaceful protest. He was confused and dismayed at encountering Confederate supporters at the same rally. This officer consoled him with the words, "I feel your pain too. We're all here together."  
<https://twitter.com/i/status/12672784946166401>



This video was posted on the twitter feed of the news reporter. Later that day, Micah Denby tweets back to the reporter: That's my Dad! And then, the young protestor himself answers by tweeting back, "Tell your Father that I said thank you for what he told me!!"

That's it. We let tears be tears. Before blame and shame. We just agree. This isn't right. And then before our emotions are coopted by an angry agenda, we embrace. And we say, "I am in this with you. We're together." Because the steadfast love of the LORD never ceases. He calls a people to himself, and then sends us to suffer alongside the suffering. In a thousand, thousand ways, from that place of tearful love, we discover how to live out the name, "Repairer of the Breach. Restorer of Streets to Live In." Dear church, you're doing it! I'm so proud of you. I'm continually overcome with joy seeing how you live out this calling. Keep claiming the tears of Christ. Keep praying for your enemies and your friends. Keep calling up faith in the mercies of Christ. Keep repairing the breach in his name. It's how God see us. It's who we are.