

Singing the Blues

Call to worship

We come to worship God,
in the busyness of our lives
and in the stillness of this place,

We come to worship God
bringing all that we are
the joys and sorrows of our lives

We come to worship God,
in the reality of our lives and our world
our grief and anger
our longings for change and healing
bringing the things that burden and overwhelm us

We come to worship God,
with our hopes that things can be different,
and our knowledge of the love of God
present even when silent and unnoticed

**In all that we are,
because of all that God is
let us worship.**

499 Great God, your love has called us here

Introduction

Lament is one of the central movements of the Spirit. It connects the realities of this world and our lives with the life of God within them and beyond them. It grieves those things which separate us, others and the world from abundant and full life in God.

In these services we will be following the rhythm and pattern of lament by starting our services with an opportunity to name those situations we are grieving and praying about, the things that need healing and change. The service will move through our hearing and meditating on God's Word. Then, as many of the Psalms of Lament, we move from lament and petition to confession, thanksgiving, praise and commitment.

As having a familiar structure and rhythm gives us a sense of security which enables lament, the liturgy in the services is the same, hopefully enabling our engagement to deepen over the weeks.

Prayer of Lament

So we remember this week.

Take a moment to think of
those things that have grieved or angered you this week
the items on the news that have led you to long for a better world

Write one grief on each post it note and hold them as we pray. There will be a chance later in the service to add to them and to place them on the 'Wailing Wall'

a time of quiet for all to write

So let us pray,

We acknowledge and recall the griefs we bear, their weight and the times when they have seemed to heavy to carry

God, who in Jesus wept for Lazarus and grieved over Jerusalem,
give us the courage and strength to sit in our grief
and the assurance that you weep with us.

We acknowledge and recall the times when we have been hurt, our resentments and our need for healing

God, who in Jesus stood with the woman caught in adultery,
give us the honesty to acknowledge our hurt and resentment and the hurt and resentment we have caused in others
and the strength and grace to accept your healing

We acknowledge and recall the anger we have felt at a world that is not as it should be, our rage over injustice

God, who in Jesus raged at the state of the Temple and turned over the tables,
give us the wisdom to know when our anger is just
and the vision to allow it to move us to transform the world to your kingdom.

We remember too those times when we have been aware of your presence in a story on the news or the action of a neighbour, in a word of scripture or a moment of stillness.

God who in Jesus called us to life in all its fullness
give us a knowledge of your presence
in our griefs and our joys,
our struggles and our times of peace
our worship in this place and throughout our daily lives

Amen

482 There is no moment in my life

Psalm 139 The Inescapable God
To the leader. Of David. A Psalm.

1

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

2

You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.

3

You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.

4

Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.

5

You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

6

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

7

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?

8

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

9

If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

10

even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

11

If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night',

12

even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

13

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

14

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.

15

My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

16

Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.

17

How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!

18

I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
I come to the end—I am still with you.

19

O that you would kill the wicked, O God,
and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—

20

those who speak of you maliciously,

and lift themselves up against you for evil!

21

Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?

And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?

22

I hate them with perfect hatred;

I count them my enemies.

23

Search me, O God, and know my heart;

test me and know my thoughts.

24

See if there is any wicked way in me,

and lead me in the way everlasting.

Sermon/Meditation:

Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;

if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning

and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

even there your hand shall lead me,

and your right hand shall hold me fast.

In the middle of a thunder storm in The Sound of Music Maria sings

“Whenever I feel afraid,

I hold my head erect

and whistle a happy tune

so no-one will suspect

I’m afraid.”

Faced with reality, at times when grief is raw, oppression feels overpowering and all feels lost, people have a tendency to wish to escape from the reality. We tell stories of golden ages of the past that never really existed. We run directly to the false praise that seeks to hide ourselves from God. We dive into self-pity or seek a scapegoat so that we don’t have to face the reality of who we are. We run, like Adam and Eve in Eden’s garden, to hide ourselves in the bushes of self deception and false cheerfulness, whistling happy tunes to stave off the fear and grief.

Like the Psalmist we wish to take the wings of the morning or dive to the depths to escape the feelings that overwhelm us. Maybe, also, we want to hide these feelings from ourselves, others and God because we feel they are unacceptable. Do we think that, somehow, our grief and anger is unacceptable to God? That God will be upset or unable to cope with it? That somehow it will anger God? Do we hide these feelings because, like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, we are ashamed of them?

Quite often when we do this we end up feeling self-pity instead of grief and we whinge instead of lamenting. So what’s the difference between whinge and Lament?

Imagine you’re in a hole. When we whinge it’s as if we’re in a hole, deep and dark. We can’t stand being in there and long to get out to the sunshine and friends but instead we

keep digging making the hole darker and darker. Whinging is addressed to ourselves and increases our isolation. Even if we whinge to a friend we expect them to join us in the whinge and not to help us out of it. It makes us certain that we're alone and even when we find a friend it tries hard to separate us from them and increase our isolation. In fact, while we may whinge to friends, it's as if we want them to dig their own holes or shout to us from outside the hole rather than joining us in it. So whinging increases our isolation.

When we lament we're still in the hole. It's still dark and impenetrable. But now we've invited others into the hole with us and together we may think of a way out. And we've discovered that God is already in the depths waiting for us longing to be with us. Lament calls out to God and invites God in. It calls out to others and invites them to join us. Like the blues songs of America, like the protest songs of Soweto, like the songs of oppressed peoples everywhere, lament may start with a single voice but expects or longs to be joined by a choir both on earth and in heaven. So lament expects company, ends isolation and gathers a choir.

Whinging also blinds us to the reality of the situation. Our hole seems a warm, comforting, safe and secure palace. The world seems entirely at fault. All is wrong and must be escaped. Our isolation seems like martyrdom. And we are the hero of our story. As we whinge we can gaze into our mirror, like the wicked queen in Snow White, and see perfection. We blind ourselves to things that need to change in ourselves and the possibilities that surround us. Again we dig the hole deeper or merely sitting enjoying it, blind to the harm it is doing, ignoring its reality.

When we sit in the hole lamenting, we can be honest about what the hole means to us. We can be honest about our wish for comfort, our longing for safety. But we also see the false safety of the hole: the walls that could fall upon us, the lack of food, our vulnerability to attack. We also can see ourselves honestly: we may still be the hero of the story but we are a hero with faults whose actions may have helped create the hole. Our mirror shows us, not false perfection or an airbrushed picture, but that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. It causes us not to hide from God and others but to ask God to search us and know us and know if there is any wickedness in us. As we lament we look at the reality with honesty. We are not held fast by our own need to be the martyr or the hero but allow ourselves to be fully ourselves.

Whinging also makes us stay put. It stops us changing the situation. It gives us an image in our heads of ourselves as great martyrs who must endure this. Think about the last time you had a good whinge. Did anyone try to offer a solution or help? If so, how did you feel? My guess is that you felt irritated or angry, that you looked for reasons why their suggestions wouldn't possibly work. You may even have felt the need to whinge about their suggestion!

When we're sat in our hole whinging, actually we quite enjoy the hole! Although, if you dare to suggest such a thing from outside we'll get extremely angry and indignant about it and tell you that you don't understand! It's dark and surrounds us and holds us safe. It doesn't ask for action or require us to change. While we're alone in the hole, we can believe whatever we like and no one and nothing will challenge us. Because we quite like the hole, we don't try to find ways to escape it. So we don't notice the torch by our hand, let alone shine it along the walls and find the footholds or ladder that might be a way out. And if we saw the ladder, we'd probably assume it was a trap or broken - too dangerous to use!

As we sit in our hole lamenting with others, seeing the hole for what it is and acknowledging our fears and shortcomings, we begin to notice possibilities. Someone finds a torch and then the ladder. Others outside the hole hear the singing and are drawn to help. When we lament we do so recognising our needs and all that we are but also recognising the need for change. Lament is like the grit in the oyster. Lament gets our feet moving to its rhythm. Opens our eyes to what's wrong. It prompts change in ourselves and action in our world. It empowers rather than handicapping.

Whinging is seductive. It seems to offer an absence of painful feelings like fear, anger, and pain. It seems to show us an image of ourselves as self-sufficient hero and martyr battling on when no one understands. It leaves us sat in our hole with our dreams, that cannot be destroyed, of a golden age that never was and never will be.

But lament asks us to live in our feelings of pain and fear, to sing as Paul Robeson does in the song we're about to hear

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
A long way from home

It asks us to see ourselves as we are: wonderfully made but also capable of wrong. But most of all it asks us to join the choir or to begin a song and invite others to join in. Its rhythm sets our feet dancing, marching and stamping to change the world and end wrongs until we and all people can dance, march and stamp our way into God's kingdom where we need lament no more.

Introduction to the Song:

"Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" (or simply "Motherless Child") is a traditional African American spiritual. It dates back to the era of chattel slavery in the USA, when it was common practice to sell children of slaves away from their parents. The song is an expression of pain and despair as it conveys the hopelessness of a child who has been torn from parents. The 'motherless child' could also be a slave separated from and yearning for his or her African homeland, his or her spouse, parents, siblings or child(ren) (from all or any of which he or she may have been separated in the trafficking process) or a slave suffering 'a long ways from home'—home being heaven—or most likely all.

Slavery is still a part of global life, and present in the USA and the UK as people are trafficked for domestic, agricultural, sex or other work. Alienation and isolation, especially among migrants, is a part of our immediate community and our own experience. How do you identify with this lament?

Sometime I feel like a motherless child (Paul Robeson)

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
Sometime I feel like a motherless child
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
A long way from home
A long way from home
A long way from home
A long way from home

Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone
A long way from home
A long way from home
A long way from home
A long way from home

As you listen to the song, you may wish to look at the things you wrote at the beginning of the service, to think of the loads you carry, the injustices and griefs of the world that long for change and healing

When you're ready come and place your laments on the wailing wall trusting that God grieves with us

the song is played

Prayer:

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.

We bring these griefs and the griefs we have no words to express

Lord hear our prayers
And let our cry come to you

We bring our lives
the times when we have doubted or been unable to feel your presence,
our regrets for times when we have separated ourselves from you and each other,
our worries for what is to come
We pray for healing and forgiveness

Lord hear our prayers
And let our cry come to you

Lord you give us our lives
create us in your image
call us your children
give us times of joy when we have been surrounded by love in family and friends,
times of stillness when we have known you near us
We praise and thank you for your love which has followed us all the days of our lives

Lord make us aware of your presence
And may your cry come to us

We bring you the life of your church
the times when we have lost our way and longed for clear vision,
our regrets for times when our image of your love has been too narrow and the damage
that has done to ourselves and others
our worries for what is to come
We pray for healing and forgiveness

Lord hear our prayers
And let our cry come to you

Lord you give us your church
a people made for your praise and glory
to share your Word and work for your kingdom
give us times when we have celebrated your presence and shown your love to others,
We praise and thank you for your love which has followed us all the days of our lives

Lord make us aware of your presence
And may your cry come to us

We bring you the life of your world
the places where oppression and violence seem to hold the upper hand
homes destroyed by war, violence, abuse or poverty
our regrets for our misuse of the world and its resources
our worries for what is to come
We pray for healing and forgiveness

Lord hear our prayers
And let our cry come to you

Lord, you give us the life of your world,
created a place of wonder, beauty and diversity
inspire people to work for justice and peace
you empower us and our leaders to work for the good of all
We praise and thank you for your love which has followed us all the days of our lives

Lord make us aware of your presence
And may your cry come to us

Loving God,
Known and unknown
felt and unfelt
We bring you these prayers
in the name of Jesus
who knew you close and cried at your absence
Amen

We say together the Lord's Prayer in whichever language or form we know it best.

636 O love that wilt not let me go

Offering

465 Guide me o thou great Jehovah

Declaration of God's Presence, Blessing and Sending Out

God is with us
in this place and in every place
in this time and in every time

God is with us
when we feel God's presence
and when we feel God's absence

God will be with us
in all that we face
in our joys and our sorrows
our times of ease and our times of struggle
so let us praise God

Alleluia

Know that you go with the blessing of God, Eternal, Son and Spirit
Know that you are surrounded and filled by the love of God, Eternal, Son and Spirit
Know that you are called to live as people of God, Eternal, Son and Spirit

Go in peace and praise to live and work to God's praise and glory
to weep with those who are weeping
to dance with those who are dancing
to look for God's kingdom wherever you are
to create God's kingdom wherever you go
to show God's love to all you meet
to know God's love in all you meet

Thanks be to God. Amen