

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2024 Lent 2 "Hear My Cry"

Psalm 46, Isaiah 64: 1-8 Psalm 61:1-8

Lent is a time when it is important to undertake self-reflection by holding up a mirror to one's ideas, thoughts and emotions in this moment right now. It is not easy to do because our emotions are deemed personal and of course everything is 'fine'. Everyone is ok and no one goes through things because we can handle it all ourselves right? Yet in this Lenten season it is important to stop and think and pray for who you are from God's perspective and as you look into the mirror as a Christian person of faith.

Last week we reflected on the words of the Lord's Prayer and how all encompassing these words have come to us from Jesus and what each phrase means when we offer it to God as a prayer to call us into action. As we continue in our series on "Prayers from the heart", our focus today may be necessary for some people and at the same time difficult. Because, when we say the words, "Hear my cry" there is deep emotion, concern, heartache and hurt behind them. There is an admission to God that we want someone to listen to the words of our prayers. These words and prayers are prayers of lament.

Everyone goes through periods of grief or sadness, not only when we experience death of loved ones, but we all experience loss, change in status, or even wonder what is to come. Whether these changes result because of our choices and decisions, or the decisions of others we need to express our feelings and thoughts. Lament prayers call us to express what we are feeling and to do so knowing that God hears and comforts us with the Spirit's embrace.

One person whose life was filled with grief, loss and lack of hope was Job whose story of prosperity to deep loss and grief is at the hand of God and Satan. His story is filled with words of lament as in Job 3:11, when he asks God "Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?" In Job 7:20, he asks "Why have you made me your target?" And it is these prayers and words that call us to question our relationship with God and God's relationship with us. We may not feel as 'down' as Job did, but sometimes we do. So how does sharing in these "Hear my cry" prayers help us.

Whenever we feel this sense of giving up or even the 'poor me' attitude, the sense of 'loss' or uncertainty of what is to occur next, it is then that individuals or groups need to approach God and share what is happening and maintain their relationship with God even in times of suffering.

Individual laments are expressions of personal grief and sorrow while communal laments are collective expressions of mourning for a community or a city. Communal lament is when as a whole a community approaches God for deliverance from a shared predicament or common situation of loss.

But what are laments and what do these mean? Laments have four distinct parts and in Isaiah 64 each part is distinct. The first part is a communal lament that begins with a praise-filled account of God's mighty acts of deliverance throughout Israel's history. God's actions are expressions of God's steadfast love, mercy and compassion. But the people rebel and God is not looked upon favourably. The people actually ask God "turn back for the sake of your servants, for the sake of the tribes that are your heritage". The us is a community crying out for help and lament how God should respond to human guilt.

This passage Isaiah 64:1-9 begins and ends with a request. The first request is that God would come down and make his name known to the adversaries of the people. This would enable those who are offenders to experience God's divine power, end their hostilities and lament it all. The pondering lament continues as they praise God for His involvement in human wellbeing. The community then complains that if God was with them, they would not have fallen away from him and in need of his help. The second confession to God "There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity" (verse 7). The failure to seek God is attributed to God's hiding; seeking is futile because God has left the guilty to the consequences of their own trespasses.

Then the cry is shared as they call upon God's name and appeal to our Father/ Potter. They complain they are all filthy and faded (verse 6) and they claim that they are all offspring and product of God's creative activity (verse 8). And then they ask that God's anger and memory of their guilt not last forever (verse 9).

Laments or 'hear my cry' prayers are not formal arguments. They may have faulty reasoning or are one-sided. But they are poetic protests against pain and they appeal for intervention. And they are helpful, necessary and enable all those who share them to vent, to cry to express emotions that are often bottled up inside until a breaking point!

In Isaiah 64:1-9 the communal pain experienced is brought on by the consequences of the people's iniquities, experienced most deeply as anger and alienation from God. Their appeal

is for God's intervention to heal the alienation and to halt the damage of their sins. The people's pain is clear. How God will respond is not.

When have you had those moments where you just were either filled with anger, or so sad you questioned everything about your life and wondered where God was for you? Psalm 61 is an example of a Lament with its four elements.

1) Turning to God in prayer... "Hear my cry .. listen to my prayer' – from the ends of the earth I cry to you" By going to God with our grief, we are doing something distinctly Christian. It says that, no matter the sheer weight of emotion we feel, we are going to approach God with our fear or anxiety, not run to something else. –not turning to something to take the pain away—but God.

2) bringing complaints 'you've heard my vows, given me heritage of those who fear you"

We then complain to God. But a complaint is not simply whining about our situation. It is about sharing with God what is causing great distress in our lives. It is saying that we are feeling the effects of sin and brokenness. What might our complaints be? The loss of a job, or a recent medical diagnosis, death within the family member, or rejection of Jesus by someone we love. The common thread of lament is that we need his help.

3) ask – prolong the life of the king, be he enthroned forever, appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch

IN this step, we ask for God to bring healing and wholeness. God wants those who are bold enough to complain to ask for help. When we request God that he heal our pain or cure our sickness, we lay bare the fact that we cannot fix our situation on our own. And the situation is in His hands.

4) choosing to trust I will always sing praises to your name, pay my vows day after day.

We then trust that God will fulfill his promise. If you never get to the trust part then you need to look at where you are in relationship with God. IN 2024 we have the advantage over the writers of the Old Testament—David and Solomon wrote their prayers of lament, they trusted that God would deliver them in some form and they waited for the Messiah who would redeem Israel. But over 2,000 years later, as Christians we know how and in whom God's promise was fulfilled. Through Jesus, we have hope for all people. Therefore if we trust in God's promises including the promise of the messiah, Jesus, we know that God will hear our cry and answer.

But where might we find prayers of “Hear my cry”--lament? The Psalms have many examples of prayers and because these are often best remembered as hymns- we can turn to our memories of special songs. ‘Unto the Hills around do I lift up my wandering eyes’ Psalm 121; Psalm 10, Psalm 102. Lamentations 2 -3 also offers prayers seeking God’s help.

But we also need to remember that Jesus himself prayed to the Father God—“Abba Father, take this cup from me.” March 14. My God My God why have you forsaken me from Psalm 22.. There is also the simple prayer which a man asked Jesus in Mark 10 “Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me.”

Hear my cry O God. This is what is happening, I need your help and because you are God who fulfills promises I trust you!

As we consider the prayers of our hearts let us be reminded that we are called into relationship with God through Jesus and to build this relationship we need to share our emotions, thoughts, complains with God. God is strong enough to receive it all- and is there to help us through it with love. God is with us if we truly share our concerns.. Hear me, help me.. I trust you, God.

While we continue in this Lenten journey let us each take time to lament- to focus on our thoughts as to what we need God to hear us in the moment. Then we can tell him our needs and our desires. But we must also remember to praise him and thank him for his blessings and comfort and guidance always. This is our response as we seek to grow in relationship and pray from the heart.

LET US PRAY:

Hear our cry o God. Hear us when we are sad, upset, worried and concerned. Hear our complaints when we don’t know what to say or do. Hear us O God as we praise you and offer our love to you. WE pray in silence. Amen.