

Lent 2, Year C  
March 16, 2025

*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it. How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, yet you were not willing!*

Whenever I hear this passage of Jesus' lamenting over the Holy City which will be the community that sentences him to death, I cannot help but be reminded of King David when he learns of his son's death: "Oh, my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom; would that I had died instead." The story behind David and Absalom is one man's desire for power over another and the tragic happenstance that they are father and son. As well I am reminded of the shortest verse in scripture from the Gospel of John: "Jesus wept."

We weep at loss, as David did upon hearing of Absalom's death, as Jesus did when he heard of the death of his friend Lazarus. This morning, I'd like to talk about "lamenting." There is an element in lamenting which distinguishes it from weeping or mourning and that is complicity: I caused this to happen; I too am culpable for this; I could have at least done something to help prevent this from happening. We sing in one of our Lenten hymns: "Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee? 'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee: I crucified thee." The Book of Lamentations which falls between the Books of the Prophet Jeremiah and Ezekiel in the Bible is five short but intense chapters of lament over the fall of the proud and holy city Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians and is read – complete or in part - on days of fasting and profound penitence in Judaism and Christianity. Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets. God sent us prophets; they lived among us, they spoke God's words to us and we heard their words but did not listen to them because they weren't telling us what we wanted to hear. We paid attention to the prophets who made us feel good and gave us comfort. Throughout the Book of Lamentations, we feel acutely the absence of God the Comforter, just as we can assume Jesus experiences when he asks why God has forsaken him, as he hangs on the cross, alone, betrayed by family, friends, followers. In the Book of Job, perhaps the best-known book of laments in Scripture, God listens to Job and his companions puzzle over the question "why do bad things happen to good people?" and what did I do to displease God? for 37 chapters and then sweeps in from out of the whirlwind to respond to Job's complaints. But no God in Lamentations, no God at the cross. Some have said the overall message of the Book of Lamentations is that God sees us through even the most terrible, hopeless of times. Maybe I'm missing something, but in all the 154 verses of its five chapters, I don't see God. I see a broken and abandoned people who

ultimately - in the book's final four verses - confess "you O Lord reign forever, you endure forever, restore us to you that we may be restored," a desperate plea rather than a spark of faith.

I dwell on this because Jesus' words expressing his desire to comfort Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets, in the tradition of lament, imply his own complicity in the sins of Jerusalem: I have tried through the ages to warn you and every time you failed to listen to the prophet, I sent you another. How is Jesus complicit in the world's damage and chaos if the words of God's prophets warn us over and over again that we must follow the commandments of God, to love our neighbor, to care for widows and orphans, captives and prisoners, immigrants, the homeless, to be faithful stewards of creation? How is it Jesus' fault that we're not listening? We sin when we turn from God, when we turn to our other more comforting gods who tell us what we want to hear. Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, but did not sin; Jesus does not turn away from God: we heard that loud and clear in Brother Bob's sermon last week. We, unlike Jesus, even though we are created in God's image, do sin. All the time. Rather than labeling it "guilt," perhaps our taking on to ourselves accountability for something we didn't do is a grace we have inherited as images of God. There is that seed of our possible compliance even when a loved one dies unexpectedly and we are overwhelmed by would've, should've, could've: I wish I'd known her cancer was that advanced; I should have taken his car keys and driven him home; she was so good at hiding her addiction; I didn't see the bruises.

Could it be that God is standing next to us as we lament: as we lose those dear to us, as we watch others suffer because of our actions, as we witness the changes in our environment? Could it be that God feels complicit in our failure to always turn to God? We as parents, guardians, teachers, cousins, caregivers, are endlessly haunted by "Could I have loved you more? Should I have taught you better? Should I have held you up after that first fall? Where did I go wrong that you have to suffer? How often have I desired to take you in my arms, but you did not let me?"

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all of us who have gone astray from your ways, and bring us again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*