

Lament and Hope



Recently in Australia, we have been experiencing extreme weather events with drought, fires, floods and storms. At the same time, the world was and is watching with apprehension the coronavirus gradually spreading from China to other countries. To add to these disasters we have been confronted by a horrific act of domestic violence in Queensland. I believe that these occurrences make studying “*Lament and Hope*” this Lent very relevant for us.

A lament is a sung expression of people’s grief and loss. Nearly a third of the 150 psalms are classed as laments. Sometimes they include thanksgivings or petitions to God asking for help. There are community laments and individual laments.

Community laments are responses to disasters shared by a group of people. They could be extreme climate events, wars and conflicts, the forced movement of refugees, pandemics, domestic violence, and so on. We lament today because people have been killed, homes destroyed, pastures and stock burned, businesses ruined and wild life decimated in droughts and fires, and for the many acts of domestic violence in our country. The Church also is suffering from the guilt of its leaders who have abused children. We grieve on behalf of our nation and Church for the hurt and damage caused by these actions. (For Israel, the temple was destroyed, people were exiled and leaders sinned.)

Individual laments express the grief of individual people. We all know what it is to lose loved ones, family members and friends, and perhaps the loss of good health, our home and independence. If we can be open and honest with ourselves we may also feel guilty because of the hurt we have caused to a group or another person, or our failure to love and care about someone we ignored or did not like. All these situations encourage us to be sad and lament.

Moving from Lament to Hope.

For most people, the first response to sad and upsetting events is grief. It can help to share or confess to another what we have done. This may be difficult because in some situations we do not know what else we could have done. One thing we can always do is to tell God how we feel and say sorry for whatever wrong we may have done. In doing this, we are linking ourselves to the laments in the psalms. This is a good thing to do as the psalms remind us that we are not alone in our trouble. There may be other people around to comfort or guide us as to our next step, and God is always with us in it all.

Jesus grieved on the cross when he faced failure, desertion by his friends and the pain of being unable to feel the closeness of God. When we know God is sharing our loss and grief, it gives us hope. God will never leave us, especially in distressing situations. Just as new shoots appear on trees that look dead and completely destroyed after fires, so too, God's life will appear as new green life within us giving us hope. This Bible Study may be an opportunity for us to be refreshed by feeding and encouraging one another.

In the **Bible Study** we shall work from lament *to* hope, by contemplating the psalms used on Sundays in Lent 2020.

1) **Psalm 32.** (Sin *to* forgiveness). A believer has at last acknowledged to God what he has done wrong. He has received God's forgiveness, given thanks and placed his trust in God. In v.v. 9-12 he is directed how to proceed.

Sin affects ourselves and our community. By owning our sin and saying sorry we activate God's forgiveness and healing for ourselves and others.

2) **Psalm 121.** (Dislocation *to* God's presence with us). In v.1 a man is leaving a familiar place and setting out on a journey. He cries out in his anxiety and fear of the unknown. Another person assures him that God will be with him 24/7 and for ever, keeping him safe.

Stepping out alone to a new 'place' can be frightening, whether it be an unknown physical place, a sickness, work, or relationship. But, wherever we go God is with us.

3) **Psalm 95.** (Being alone *to* belonging.) The people are strengthened and encouraged by coming together to worship their Creator and Lord. They give God thanks that they belong to God and God's family.

To belong to a family, group or place is important. We need God and others to support and encourage us. We, in turn, also need to support and encourage others.

4) **Psalm 23.** (Returning from darkness *to* God's care). God is imaged as a shepherd who cares for the flock and each individual sheep with a special relationship. The writer has experienced God present through good times and bad times. Now he has confidence in being with God for ever.

For Christians, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who loves us and cares for each one of us through our whole life. Even when we have moved away from God we are always longed for and welcomed by God to return to our place, our true home.

5) **Psalm 130.**(Waiting in distress *to* trusting God). The writer in his anguish reaches out to God, asking for help and mercy. As he waits in prayerful hope he grows into the certainty of God's forgiveness and love. *To wait in hope wondering if God will answer our prayer or if God is even there, can be painful and difficult. Yet God is holding us as we slowly open ourselves to receive God's love.*

6) **Psalm 31.** (Suffering *to* God's love for all). This psalm is a mixture of the terrible sufferings of a man and his thanksgivings for the many times God has answered his prayers and helped him. Others gathered for worship are comforted and strengthened by hearing his words.

When in our sufferings we trust ourselves again and again to God's love and care, we may, unknowingly, be strengthening the faith of others.

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