

Facing the storms of life through Lament.

Gathering

Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle.

*This week, it would be appropriate to find a **green cloth** or scarf to signify that we are moving into "ordinary time".*

Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.

Greeting

Light Candle

Acknowledgement of Country

Call To Worship – Love Song for the Earth,
Jessica Roemischer <https://youtu.be/kLtF4xZ9chs>

Listening for God's Voice

Bible Reading: Luke 16: 1-13

Then Jesus said to the disciples, 'There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. So he summoned him and said to him, "What is this that I hear about you? Give me an account of your management, because you cannot be my manager any longer." Then the manager said to himself, "What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes." So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, "How much do you owe my master?" He answered, "A hundred jugs of olive oil." He said to him, "Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty." Then he asked another, "And how much do you owe?" He replied, "A hundred containers of wheat." He said to him, "Take your bill and make it eighty." And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

'Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.'

Jeremiah 8:19 – 9:1

Hark, the cry of my poor people
from far and wide in the land:
'Is the LORD not in Zion?
Is her King not in her?'
(‘Why have they provoked me to anger with their images,
with their foreign idols?’)
'The harvest is past, the summer is ended,
and we are not saved.'
For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt,
I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me.

Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?
Why then has the health of my poor people
not been restored?

O that my head were a spring of water,
and my eyes a fountain of tears,
so that I might weep day and night
for the slain of my poor people!

Reflection

We started the Season of Creation recognising that there is no planet B, last week we thought about how we might respond to that, looking for the tiny seeds, going after what is lost, being prepared to do what it takes to make a difference; acknowledging our role.

This week we think about storms, both the physical storms we experience in nature - something we're familiar with in Kiama, and those other storms- the storms of life, circumstances, illness, grief and tragedy; storms of conscience; storms in our relationships.

Our readings this week are very confronting - we hear Jesus telling the parable of the man who cheats his way out of trouble. Knowing that he has been caught he quickly tries to line his own pockets.

There's something uncomfortably familiar about this story. So often it seems that this is the way things are decided in our governments, large corporations and organisations. Doing something less than right, less than honest, trying to get best outcome by walking somewhere halfway between right and wrong and justifying it. Jesus ends the story with a challenge about being faithful, even in little things, even when no one sees your actions. Often we feel quite helpless, we can see things happening but have no power, no say, no way to make a change. Today I hope our time together might help us feel differently about that.

Then we hear Jeremiah, hard words; Jeremiah could be describing what we have seen on the news this year.

Reading - Jeremiah 8:18- 9:1

What can we do in the face of these challenging ideas? How do we respond? What can we do when helplessness looms large?

I want to suggest this morning that sometimes there is nothing to do other than lament. We live in an instant world- always able to contact someone, even when the world is locked down, zoom or face time. All our tv shows tell us that anything can be turned around in one hour, minus add times. We expect immediate answers, happy endings and positive outcomes. But that's not reality, the endings are often bitter and final, we watch as those we love have to walk difficult paths with no end in sight. We need to open up space where we can allow ourselves to acknowledge the struggles, to hear the pain and face the truth.

I think one of the places we fail as church is not providing space for people to be broken and acknowledge their lack of hope, we want to quickly skip over that and talk about Good News, but it's only Good when it finds us IN the storm, IN the pain, IN the darkness.

This morning I want to invite you to enter into a time of Prayer, a time of Lament in a different way. Jeremiah asked "Is there a balm in Gilead?" The answer is yes - it's not a way OUT, it's letting God work IN us.

"We live in a broken world where things do not always go right. There are times when we don't know what God is doing or which way to turn. Instead of backing away from God during a hard time or a dark night, we face the pain and worship Him with it... we offer it all to God and that can make all the difference in the world, because God actually changes US during these times when we pour out our hearts to Him." (Debbie Przybylski)

"Lamentation... places our love for God above even the worst of circumstances in our life... God does not ask us to deny the existence of our suffering. He does want us to collect it, stand in those things and make Him an offering." (Graham Cooke)

"It is more than just the expression of sorrow or the venting of emotion. Lament talks to God about pain. And it has a unique purpose: trust. It is a divinely-given invitation to pour out our fears, frustrations, and sorrows for the purpose of helping us to renew our confidence in God." (Mark Vrogrop)

Four Elements of Lament

Turn to God

Bring your complaint

Ask boldly for help

Choose to trust

Lament is the prayer language for God's people as they live in a world marred by sin. It is how we talk to God about our sorrows as we renew our hope in his sovereign care. To cry is human, but to lament is an act of faith that moves us to renew our commitment to trust in God as we navigate the brokenness of life.

Responding

Prayer for Others

Great God,
Who makes the sun to rise, and opens the heavens,
Hear the cry of the people
Who sow in hope for rain, but reap only despair,
Hear the cry of the people
Seeking shelter from the storm, their hopes and homes submerged
Hear the cry of the people.
When creation is hitting back, with rage and resistance
Give us hope, grant us salvation,
Give us a new relationship with creation
With reverence to tend this gift from You
And say once again of the earth and all you created
It is GOOD.

(Source: Rev. Bob Kikuyu, Christian Aid Global Theology Advisor, Nairobi, Kenya)

Offering

Loving God, You provide all we are and all we need,
Today we come bringing our gifts,
not because we must or because you need what we have,
But because You are our God and we are Your people
and we want you to know that we love and trust you
with all we are and all we have. Amen.

Sending

Sending and Blessing

Go simply, lightly, gently.
Go with obedience. Go with love.
And the blessing of God –
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you now and forever.
Amen.

Marion Haigh

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