

October 6, 2019                      Lamentations 1:1-6  
Coming to Our Senses: Seeing the World as it is vs. as it Should Be  
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Lamentations 1:1-6                      Common English Bible

Oh, no! She sits alone, the city that was once full of people. Once great among nations, she has become like a widow. Once a queen over provinces, she has become a slave. She weeps bitterly in the night, her tears on her cheek. None of her lovers comfort her. All her friends lied to her; they have become her enemies. Judah was exiled after suffering and hard service. She lives among the nations; she finds no rest. All who were chasing her caught her— right in the middle of her distress. Zion’s roads are in mourning; no one comes to the festivals. All her gates are deserted. Her priests are groaning, her young women grieving. She is bitter. Her adversaries have become rulers; her enemies relax. Certainly the Lord caused her grief because of her many wrong acts. Her children have gone away, captive before the enemy. Daughter Zion lost all her glory. Her officials are like deer that can’t find pasture. They have gone away, frail, before the hunter.

We are living in an interesting time. There are families being separated at the border, gun violence is a daily occurrence, there are impeachment proceedings for our President, and every day it feels like there is another crisis. My brother-in-law watches CNN and every time I go to his house it says “Breaking News”. One day this week, my sister tried to turn off the TV and my brother-in-law said, “Wait, it really is breaking news.” And it was!

We see our world as it is and we think about the world as it should be, and there is a big gap. October is Domestic Violence month. Every 9 seconds in the U.S. a woman is beaten or assaulted by a current or ex-significant other. One in four men are victims of some form of physical violence by an intimate partner<sup>1</sup>.

The way the world is versus the way the world should be. We see it with someone sitting in a chemo ward or the bare finger that used to display a wedding ring or the never-worn maternity shirt hanging in the back of the closet or the confused look a parent who no longer remembers who you are<sup>2</sup>. “She sits alone, the city that was once full of people... She weeps bitterly in the night, her tears on her cheek” The lonely city is Jerusalem and its distress was its violent destruction at the hands of the Babylonians.

Lamentations is the story of a survivor living in the midst of that crumbled world. It is the way the world shouldn’t be. A world in which the Babylonians blockaded Jerusalem for eighteen months and cut it off from all food. A world in which Jerusalem’s leaders attempted to escape, only to be murdered. A world in which the Babylonians broke through the last defenses, pillaged, raped and burned, and razed the city to the ground. A world in which most who were not killed were carried away into slavery. The tears and rage of that experience in the world produced the book of Lamentations.<sup>3</sup>

It is important for us name our present reality with all its pain, all its hurt, all its sadness and anger and loss and grief and loneliness, without trying to make it better. However, it is exhausting to be a person of compassion. The volume and relentlessness of the threats to humanity and goodness can wear you out. I was sharing with a friend how I was feeling so hopeless and she said, “Welcome to how it feels to be black.” The realities of white privilege, gender disparity, and stories of people we love who are under distress are overwhelming. Compassion fuels us but grief and fatigue can catch up to us. We may want to turn our head away or turn off the news of the brokenness in our world.

<sup>1</sup> <https://nationaldaycalendar.com/national-domestic-violence-awareness-month-october/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://fourthchurch.org/sermons/2016/100216.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://fourthchurch.org/sermons/2016/100216.html>

This is a holy place. This is a place where we can bring our grief and our anguish. This is where we can give voice to those unspeakable feelings that we have, and where those feelings will be acknowledged and held tenderly. This is a place where we can be who we are, we don't need to hide, we don't need to cover up. We come as we are, not as who we hope others think we are. We come to God with our brokenness, with our hurt and our pain.

Lamentations teaches us to be honest. Daughter Zion is the voice we hear in chapter 1, and she refuses to deny anything. She sits in her pain and speaks of how awful the world is. She isn't sure if it will ever get better. She speaks of captivity and lost children, of being abandoned and ruined. She speaks of humiliation, exposure, and rejection. Daughter Zion wants to be seen in her pain, by God and by all of us. In the next chapter Daughter Zion tells God to look and pay attention. Don't forget us God. Don't turn your face from us. Daughter Zion never hears God's voice, but it doesn't stop her from speaking her grief over living life in a world that is not as it should be.

It should not be that the holy city Jerusalem was violently destroyed and its people taken into captivity and enslaved. It should not be that seven children have died in immigration custody since last year, after almost a decade in which no child reportedly died while in the custody of U.S. Customs and Border Protection.<sup>4</sup> It should not be that children coming to the United States desperate for shelter and safety find inhumanity and suffering under our government's care instead. It should not be that there have been more mass shootings than days this year.<sup>5</sup> It should not be that war between those in power kept food and aid from those who needed it back then in Jerusalem. It should not be that war between those in power keeps food and aid from those who need it today in Yemen and Syria.

Lamentations teaches us to be honest about our grief over living life in a world that is not as it should be. It is painful and it must be said aloud and shared. If you are grieving right now about the world as it is, that means you are human.

I want to read Lamentations 3:22-26. "Certainly the faithful love of the Lord hasn't ended; certainly God's compassion isn't through! They are renewed every morning. Great is your faithfulness. I think: The Lord is my portion! Therefore, I'll wait for him. The Lord is good to those who hope in him, to the person who seeks him. It's good to wait in silence for the Lord's deliverance."

How is the writer able to move from grief to hope? Was it the gift of catharsis, getting it all out, refusing to deny any of it, allowing the tears to flow for as long as necessary until they were all cried out? How did the poet decide to have hope? We remember the old days when life was better, but if God had been good in the past, surely a loving and kind God would be loving and kind again.<sup>6</sup>

When all we can think of is the world as it should not be, remembering is all that we have of faith. Remembering is our intentional action to bring to our mind all the ways we have experienced God's love, God's presence, God's goodness in our past so that we might absorb enough courage to lift our heads in anticipation of experiencing God's love, God's presence, God's goodness in our future. "God's mercies are new every morning," the Lamentations poet proclaimed. "Great is God's faithfulness."

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/why-are-migrant-children-dying-u-s-custody-n1010316?fbclid=IwAR38n79Vu1jBLEjqEPL8NCeCJ7qaGinN2TJOuTfEkVI1BKJDyISX3Jee7Rs>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/mass-shootings-2019-more-mass-shootings-than-days-so-far-this-year/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://fourthchurch.org/sermons/2016/100216.html>

Remembering when we have experienced or known God's presence and faithfulness is what helps us move from despair to hope. It is what opens our eyes so we can see what God is up to now and gives us the ability to imagine how God will be present and faithful in our future.

I have been training with my son for a 50 mile bike ride with his Boy Scout troop. I have noticed in these training rides that I do not like going downhill. I get nervous. I think that I am going to fall. My heart starts to race and I have visions of my death. So, whenever I am going downhill, I brake. I make myself slow down. I try to control the descent. I have noticed that if I can breathe, and face my fear, I sort of enjoy going downhill. The feel of the wind in my face with the sun shining is pretty amazing. Terrifying but amazing. I love it for about 2 seconds and then the fear comes in again. I don't like that I am afraid, so I have been slowly trying to stop being afraid. I have been braking less. I have been trying to breathe more. And I am happy to share with you that yesterday I went down one entire hill without braking. Not even once.

There is a Disney movie about the ride at Disneyworld, Tomorrowland. In the movie the young girl is told by her father a story about two different types of wolves, one that is dark and full of despair and the other that is light and full of hope and heart. The two wolves will always fight, but the one that wins is the one that you feed. Which one are you feeding?

In the midst of fear and brokenness and despair, God's vision for the world as it should be calls us forward. As we share in Communion together today, we celebrate with people around the world with different cultures joining at the table that God sets before us. At this table we are linked with people of all times and all places. At this table we build community reaching out across barriers. This table is the place where we as a people celebrate how God created us, loved us, liberated us, called us, forgave us, and saved us in our past. This is where we remember God loves us so much that God decided to become one of us in Jesus of Nazareth, so we would know that nothing separates us from God.

Today is a day for us to say that we want to work day by day, step by step, to break down walls and make the world as it should be. We have to speak truth that people might need to hear one more time. There are really good people who have been told really bad stories about immigrants, and black people, and transgender people, and gay people. Watching Botham Jean's brother share his personal forgiveness this week was powerful. Forgiving her, praying for her releases him from a lifetime of anger, bitterness, and resentment. But, it does not release her, or the rest of us white folk from responsibility and the hard work of repentance, justice and reconciliation.<sup>7</sup>

I woke up today looking for hope and here you are. You are the answer to prayer. You care and then you do something. This is the joyful feast of the people of God. A feast we choose to celebrate in a world too full of weeping and too full of experiences of how the world should not be. In this place we receive a taste of what God promises that our world, the new Jerusalem, will become. The world as it should be. A world in which we all see that God's mercies are new every morning and God's faithfulness will endure for all generations. On this day of Worldwide Communion may we remember and be grateful. Amen.

<sup>7</sup> <https://twitter.com/rachcornwell/status/1179767301102592004>