



Daily Meditations

March 29 - April 3, 2021

The Biblical readings are taken from the Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer for Year 2 and written by the St. Stephen's Meditation Writing Team: Dave Boyd, Jon Campbell, Becky Denton, Pat Gillory, Jay Nickel, Bob Reed, and Carroll Wilson.

Click on the scripture reading for each day to go directly to link. Current and past copies of the "Daily Meditations" may be found at: ststeve.org/daily-meditations

COLLECT: Holy Week 2021

Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Collect for Monday of Holy Week

Monday, March 29, 2021

Lamentations 1:1-2, 6-12

Almighty God, whose dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we may, walking in the way of the cross, find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Lamentations

*How lonely sits the city
that once was full of people!
How like a widow she has become,
she that was great among the nations!
She that was a princess among the provinces
has become a vassal. (NRSV, Lam 1:1)*

The book of Lamentations collects poems into a "Lament Liturgy" of the Hebrew Scriptures. They express grief for the destruction of Jerusalem by the Neo-Babylonians in 586 BCE (Harrelson, p. 1141)

To get a sense of the grief the people of Judah might have felt, let me try and create a (thankfully fictional) account of a modern crises.

Imagine on January 6, 2021:

- an armed insurrectionist shot Nancy Pelosi through the brain;
- the insurrectionists hanged Vice President Pence from their gallows;
- the confirmation of the Electoral College results never got ratified as Senators hid for their safety;
- martial law got established in Washington D.C.;
- people across the country, in support of the insurrection, took to the streets with their guns;
- Armed coup resistors took to the streets to shutdown business and the coup-led governments;
- riots broke out and martial law got established across the country;
- COVID-19 infection rates soared as hospitals shut down;
- financial and stock markets collapsed. People with any savings or investments lost it all.

Perhaps the people of Judah felt a similar sense of disorientation, loss, anger, fear, and helplessness.

The compilers of the Hebrew Scriptures wrote/collected these Laments to serve a valuable liturgical, psychological, and spiritual purpose: to concretely name our pain and fears. The compilers of our Lectionary set these Laments for us to read during Holy Week as we remember the trial, conviction, and death of Jesus. Nothing very happy happens in these readings. We need to wait for Easter, next week, for happier news.

In this week's meditations, I plan to share my own personal laments, trusting the wisdom of Hebrew liturgists, that we find value and healing in naming our laments.

I invite you to spend this Holy Week reflecting on your own laments. I found visiting the Stations of the Cross a valuable exercise, and I commend it to you as well.

Harrelson, W (2003), New Interpreter's Study Bible. Abington Press

Collect for Tuesday of Holy Week

Tuesday, March 30, 2021

Lamentations 1:17-22

O God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Lament: Death of Loved Ones

My daughter died in 2018. My father died in 2019. My stepmother died in 2020. Death has threatened close friends and taken loved ones of people I care about.

Through their declines, I remember the helplessness of watching nature take its inexorable course. I remember the unreality of taking care of business: funerals, burials, wills. I know the doubts about whether I could have done more or better. I know the loneliness of remembering and living without them.

I know the choked-up tears of trying to talk about my daughter at her

funeral.

I recognize the dread of knowing my own death lies in the future.

For all this I lament.

Collect for Wednesday of Holy Week

Wednesday, March 31, 2021

Lamentations 2:1-9

Lord God, whose blessed Son our Savior gave his body to be whipped and his face to be spit upon: Give us grace to accept joyfully the sufferings of the present time, confident of the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Lament: My Failing Body

I have lived on this Earth 67 years. The effects of those years show themselves as: aching and weaker muscles; skin that bruises, tears, dries out and cracks painfully open; eyes that have trouble seeing in dark drawers; eyes that have "floaters" often obstructing my vision for seconds at a time; a brain that seems to work slower than I remember (but maybe I don't remember that well).

How long, Lord? How much deterioration should I expect? What shall I do?

I've lived in denial and taken my body for granted, neglecting it, bargaining with exercise and diet to put off the decay. I resent people telling me what I should do for my body. Sometimes I play with the idea of giving up. But acceptance does not feel like an option yet. I recognize these as stages of grief. I recognize the denial of my mortality. I recognize the fantasy that my true self belongs to a 35-year-old body.

Lord, I lament the loss of my illusions.

Collect for Maundy Thursday

Thursday, April 1, 2021

Lamentations 2:10-18

Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who no lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Lament: My Failure of Friends

A few years ago, the parents of a friend, whom I called my "best friend," died. I did not make myself available to my friend, I did not visit, I did not write, I did not call, I did not attend the funeral. I completely abandoned and failed my friend and destroyed my illusion of myself as a good and caring person.

I have a wheelchair-bound friend whom I failed to stay in touch with after he moved away. I did not call, I did not write, I only briefly responded to text messages with an emoji of some sort. Again, I let down a friend and I

betrayed my illusion of myself as a wholly good and caring person.

I recognize my habit to, as Stephen Stilles says, "love the one you're with" and fail to bring to mind absent friends. I recognize it as a sin of sloth in my relationships.

Lord, I lament my sloth. Help me to love better.

Collect for Good Friday

Friday, April 2, 2021

Lamentations 3:1-9

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Lament: Loss of Hugs

At my daughter's, Colleen's, memorial service, Nancy, a friend who sat with us at the hospital through Colleen's last day, opened her arms to give me a hug. When I held the hug for what seemed the appropriate amount of time, I gave her "the shoulder pat" and started to let go. Nancy squeezed tighter and held me closer for a few more seconds. My eyes started watering, and they mist up to this day as I remember it. Hugs are powerful.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, I haven't hugged anyone except my wife. I haven't hugged my daughter. I haven't hugged my grand-kids. I haven't hugged my close friends. I haven't passed the peace at church (I know some people, especially women, may experience the passing the peace hug as unwelcome). I have laid-on hands in prayer only once (and it was moving).

I lament the loss of physical contact and long for the day of its return.

Collect for Holy Saturday

Saturday, April 3, 2021

Lamentations 3:37-58

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so we may await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Lament: Loss of Faith

After the losses I have documented this week, death of loved ones, loss of youthfulness, loss of my idealized self-image, loss of affectionate contact, (and I could name others), I find less certainty and less comfort in prayer, or in the religious beliefs and dogma I used to turn to. Perhaps my faith and my experience have led me to a place of not expecting happy endings.

As I often reiterate in these meditations, Jesus had the mission to make visible and present the Kingdom of God, here, now.

I find I experience God's love and presence most frequently in sharing a meal

with people I love. My table grace almost always starts with the words, "We recognize your presence in the food on, and the fellowship and love around this table." I'm anticipating the Easter resurrection experience here when I quote the disciples around the dinner table in Emmaus when "they recognized him in the breaking of the bread." (Luke 24:35)

I lament the loss of the time at the communion table and the time at the community dinner table. I look forward to its resurrection.

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