



Wales Window of Alabama (J. Petts, stained glass, 16th Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama, 1964)

Gathered

Leader1: Welcome. Today we are going to be doing lament together. Lament is honestly expressing the pain of a situation. The opposite is hiding our emotions or distracting ourselves or pretending pain does not exist. As a church, we don't want to be or pretend to be happy all the time. It's not real, not honest. No, we need to lament. Constantly. And it is important we do lament as a community, because lament isn't just a private activity; it's a public, communal one in the Bible. Lament as Christians isn't just lamenting our own pain but, like Christ, taking on other people's pain as our own.

Today, we're lamenting specifically with the Black community in the US. Our lament today is to express the pain of the realities Black people face every day in our city and country. We have George Floyd in our minds, a Black man killed by police in Minneapolis two weeks ago. And we also have so many Black people, so many painful experiences, so many ongoing painful experiences, over so many years, in mind.

Lament is not about liberal or conservative, not about whether specific people are racist or not. It's not a policy proposal. It's not a time to feel self-righteous.

Leader2: Lament IS facing these realities in the light of Jesus' story, remembering that God created all people in his image. In doing that he gave all people deep dignity and deep value.

We're remembering that Christ came to us, showing us exactly who God is and what he's like; and he healed people, he preached good news to the have-nots, he identified with us in our pain, and he even died for us.

Leader3: We're remembering he rose from death and began a new in-between period of history, between the old world of constant death and the new world of Christ's return and resurrected life. We're living and now praying in this in-between, the already-not-yet.

We'll start with our theme verse for the season, remembering we're in God's presence by God's action and call to us. In Acts 1:8, Jesus says, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Leader1: The Holy Spirit has come on us, just like Jesus promised, amen? Let's acknowledge, boldly, God's call to us. I'll speak the parts in regular font, and you all can speak the parts in italics.

We're here, *empowered by your Spirit to testify to Christ*, that he is shepherd to all his people.

We're here, *empowered by your Spirit to testify to Christ*, and the sadness and anger he feels over evil.

We're here, *empowered by your Spirit to testify to Christ*, and the value he places on every Black life.

We're here, *empowered by your Spirit to testify to Christ*, and his power to break and remake systems, to humble the arrogant and make them repent, to lift up those bowed down.

Song "Total Praise" (B. Smallwood)

Lord, I will lift my eyes to the hills
Knowing my help is coming from you
Your peace you give me in time of the storm

You are the source of my strength
You are the strength of my life
I lift my hands in total praise to you

Leader3: As we pray now, please join by speaking "Lord, we come and humble ourselves," after I say a prayer ending with "We come for your mercy." Let us humble ourselves.

God, we acknowledge together that none of us stand on morally superior ground. We are just as capable of evil as anyone else. We are often blind to our own flaws. We are quick to speak and slow to listen. The righteous stands we take often are full of flaws and hypocrisy. **We come for your mercy.**

All: Lord, we come and humble ourselves.

Leader2: God, we grieve our society's failure, over centuries, to value the lives of people created in your image. We know that our grief is but a fraction of what you feel. We acknowledge the hatred and dismissiveness that we as a society have fostered towards the Black community. We grieve how we have undermined your image in them. **We come for your mercy.**

All: Lord, we come and humble ourselves.

Leader4: Creator of all, those of us who are not Black confess our failure to perceive or respond to the evil, injustice and oppression that the Black community has faced. Many of us, who are other people of color, including Asian Americans, have reaped costly benefits of civil rights movements led by courageous Blacks. Yet we confess moments

when we in turn have abandoned them, selfishly building our own houses and failing to stand with them. Those of us who are white have knowingly or unknowingly benefited from systemic injustices, and like Cain to his brother Abel, we have not been our brother's keeper. **We come for your mercy.**

All: *Lord, we come and humble ourselves.*

Leader1: Sustainer of all, you've called us to be neighbors to others and brothers' keepers. But we have not defended the weak and the fatherless, have not loosed the chains of injustice and set the oppressed free, have not acted justly and loved mercy. We see our passivity and our collective failure to protect the Black community in their need. **We come for your mercy.**

All: *Lord, we come and humble ourselves.*

Leader1: This is Psalm 55.

Attend to me, and answer me;
I am restless in my complaint and I moan,
because of the noise of the enemy,
because of the oppression of the wicked.
For they drop trouble upon me,
and in anger they bear a grudge against me.

Leader2: My heart is in anguish within me;
the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
Fear and trembling come upon me,
and horror overwhelms me.

Leader4: And I say, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest; yes, I would wander far away.

Leader3: The Psalmist tells God he is in trouble, tells God he's sad and afraid, that he wants to run away, that he's angry. Like this, can we, as best we can, SEE AND BELIEVE and express the feelings—whether we identify as Black or not—of the larger Black community?

As we feel those feelings, just like Christ does as he takes on our feelings and pain, I invite you to use your own words, maybe use the Psalm's words. Speak your feelings to God out loud: numb, sad, angry, enraged.

You can pray out loud where you are, or you can take turns if you're with someone. Let's pour out our hearts to God.

[congregation praying]

Psalm 55 also says:

For it is not an enemy who taunts me—then I could bear it;
it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—then I could hide from him.
But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend.

Leader2: My companion stretched out his hand against his friends;
he violated his covenant.

His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart;
his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.

Leader1: Jesus calls us to love and pray for our enemies, for people we are tempted to hate and even do hate. It's hard in the case when the enemies are supposed to be our friends, like how the Psalmist was betrayed by the person who was supposed to be a friend. We could be praying for racial groups like this, but we're going to respond to Christ differently. We'll pray for two specific groups. First, can we pray for the larger church. Not just GCCC, but the larger church, specifically in the US. The larger church that disappoints us; we feel like it betrays us and Christ. Please join us by saying, "Forgive them, and lead them in your way," when we say, "Have mercy."

Leader4: God, we see parts of the church, today and in the past, who seem so full of arrogance. They seem blind to their own hypocrisy and their posture is not like Christ's. Have mercy.

All: Forgive them, and lead them in your way.

Leader2: We see nationalism in parts of the church, where commitment to America or to a race or to an ideology seems more important than commitment to you. Have mercy.

All: Forgive them, and lead them in your way.

Leader3: We see greed for money and greed for power. We see parts of the church where mercy is seen as weakness and justice is a political word rather than a word about you. Have mercy.

All: Forgive them, and lead them in your way.

Leader1: We see parts of the church that seems to ignore and even perpetuate mistreatment of the Black community. Have mercy.

All: Forgive them, and lead them in your way.

[pause]

Leader1: A second way we're going to pray for our enemies, including ones that are supposed to be on our side, is to pray for those in government. It's easy to despise leaders of our country or state or city. Christ calls us to pray for them.

God, we feel like our leaders in government are often a part of the problem rather than part of the solution. We see folly, selfishness, and fear of people. **Have mercy.**

All: **Forgive them, and lead them in your way.**

Leader2: God, we see leaders who have failed and inflicted harm on the Black community they should serve. **Have mercy.**

All: **Forgive them, and lead them in your way.**

Leader3: God, many in the Black community reasonably feel that the government is against them rather than for them. And more evidence seems to pile up every year. **Have mercy.**

All: **Forgive them, and lead them in your way.**

[pause in silence]

Leader1: Psalm 55 continues.

Leader2: I see violence and strife in the city.
Day and night they go around it on its walls,
and iniquity and trouble are within it;
ruin is in its midst;
oppression and fraud do not depart from its marketplace.

Leader4: But you, O God, will cast them down into the pit of destruction;
men of blood and treachery shall not live out half their days.
But I will trust in you.

Leader1: Let's continue praying like the Psalm. When we say "have mercy," you can pray, "Lord, show your power."

Leader3: We pray against systems that oppress Black people in this country. We pray your gospel would free their oppressors from an illusion of superiority. We pray your gospel would free the oppressed from an illusion of inferiority. **Have mercy.**

All: **Lord, show your power.**

Leader2: We pray against patterns of oppression since legal slavery, against harmful laws and policies at work today in education, health care, law enforcement, banking, and employment, systems that callously take away life and heart and home. **Have mercy.**

All: **Lord, show your power.**

Leader1: God, rebuke people and systems of violence and fraud. We know your heart, we know your life, Jesus. Bring down arrogant oppressors. Let the first be last. Lord, when we see a land full of violence and oppression, who else should we turn to, besides you, a God of justice who acts on behalf of downtrodden peoples, who even died for them, whom we make known to all the world? **Have mercy.**

All: Lord, show your power.

Leader4: And bring healing of the hearts of those oppressed, as part of your justice. Bring healing. Heal hearts from bitterness, frustration, and disillusionment. Let there be freedom from doubt and anger, through your incomprehensibly powerful salvation. **Have mercy.**

All: Lord, show your power.

Song "Bless His Holy Name" (A. Crouch; add'l lyrics, C. Park)

Bless the Lord oh my soul and all that is within me
Bless his holy name, bless the Lord oh my soul

One with those bowed down
He with thorns was crowned
His blood spilled on the ground
Bless his holy name

To break the unjust chain
Turn darkness into day
Mourning into praise
Bless his holy name

Those who rule on earth
Are warned of his wrath
He can shatter them like glass
Bless his holy name

Shelter the poor
Open your door
Feel the Spirit of the Lord
Bless his holy name

Leader1: Psalm 55:22 says, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved."

Leader2: Can we pray together, again with many voices but one heart, with love for the Black community. Can we tell God we know the value he puts on every Black life? Can we tell God that we—whether we're Black or not—are carrying their burdens with them

in prayer. Can we say, “God sustain them. Carry their burdens”? Again, praying in our own words, all together. You can pray out loud where you are or take turns if you’re with someone.

[praying]

Leader1: Can we also pray together with James 2 in mind? “If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?” Can we cast on the Lord *this* burden: to actively be and become peacemakers and rebuilders? To not just say the right things on a Sunday? Please take a moment to pray that, in your own words.

[praying]

Song, reprise of “Bless His Holy Name” (A. Crouch)

Bless the Lord oh my soul and all that is within me
Bless his holy name, bless the Lord oh my soul

Acclamation

Leader2: Please join me in saying “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.”

Passing Peace

Leader2: Peace to you in the Holy Spirit. Please speak peace to someone.

Community Sharing

- Leader3: If you’re new to our church, we’re so glad you’re joining us online. We usually have welcome cards for you to fill out. If you’re new to us, we’d love to be able to introduce ourselves further. Could you email us at welcome.arlington or welcome.tyson? We encourage you to invite others too.
- Tuesday Prayer
- Panel discussion “Race & Justice from an Asian American Perspective”
- Summer Bible study
- Member Meeting
- Offering and prayer

Sermon Acts 8:4-25

Response

Prayer led by preacher

Communion

Leader1: Communion is a picture of our communal guilt and our communal cleansing which is both now and not-yet. Taking this bread and cup is an amazingly simple and robust act that says, “We are rotten,” and, at the same time, “we are genuinely changed,”

and, at the same time, “we know full change and full justice and full beauty will come when Christ returns.”

Before we take the bread and cup, let’s say this summary of Christ’s story, called a creed:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Leader1: On the night he was betrayed, Jesus broke bread and said, “This is my body, broken for you.” He took the cup and said, “This is my blood, shed for you.” Whenever we take this, we proclaim Christ’s death for our sake, one with the condemned, until he comes. Please take it now.

[taking communion]

Song “Kingdom Come (Lift Up Your Heads)” (R. di Castiglione)

Earth is groaning and we are longing
For your kingdom to come
All creation and all of Heaven
Join their voices as one

God let your kingdom come
May your will be done
God let your kingdom come

Hope is stirring joy arising
As we look to the day
When all injustice will bow and every voice will cry out
Holy is your name

Lift up your heads all the weak and the poor
The Lord is at hand and his Kingdom is yours
Lift up your hearts all who suffer and mourn

The Lord is at hand and his Kingdom is yours
Lift up your eyes all who hunger for more
The Lord is at hand and his Kingdom is yours
Lift up a shout let the Earth hear your voice
The Lord is at hand and his Kingdom is yours

Sent

Leader 4: Benediction