

Prayer sheet 7

24 April 2020

At this challenging time, we have asked the Revd Dr Stephen Torr to write a piece on Lament:

'My God, my God why have you forsaken me?': Learning to Lament

Lament is a Biblical prayer practice – undertaken by an individual or a community – in which raw emotions and questions are expressed to God in the midst of experiences of pain and suffering. This can include but is not limited to, descriptions about the situation and the emotions being experienced, questions to God, and suggestions as to what the one lamenting thinks God should do. These are often intermingled with vows of trust and praise.

In more recent times, for various reasons, this practice has been largely overlooked in many parts of the church but, with the outbreak of the current pandemic, there is no better time to (re)introduce ourselves to it. But why?

There are a number of reasons for this but perhaps the most important is that it enables honest relationship with God amidst the most difficult moments of life, which in turn can open us up, as individuals or communities, to the healing work of God.

Reconciliation, healing and wholeness can only come through honest relationship with God, but honest relationship requires expression of the things that wound us to the God who loves us. Rather than a sign of a lack of faith, lamenting is, in fact the very opposite. Biblical lament pours forth from the lips of those who believe in a God who loves them and can change the situation, and it is this faith exemplified in the psalms of lament and in Job, amongst other places, which we see fuel the honest, raw expressive prayers so prominent in those texts.

We have recounted in recent weeks the use of Psalm 22 by Jesus, at the cross, as he cries out to his Father. The fact that Jesus engages in lament offers us further permission and direction to pray in this way when the situation arises. In Romans 8.22-27, Paul seems to suggest that the Holy Spirit even aids us when we lament but are not sure what to say!

God desires honest communion with us and invites us into that, so, in the midst of all that we are experiencing at the moment, there is no better time to think

about how we can engage in a more honest, deep and rich relationship with God and guide others in doing the same.

Some helpful resources:

New Patterns of Worship has a helpful outline of a service of lament.
Liturgies of Lament, (Chicago: Archdiocese of Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994)

Steven has suggested we read Psalm 13 in preparation to pray.

We continue to uphold and pray for the situations both in our diocese and the wider world:

For the world

Melanesia

- Give thanks that COVID-19 still appears not to have reached the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu;
- Give thanks for the response to MMUK's Emergency Appeal to support the Anglican Church of Melanesia's work with communities;
- But continue to pray for those whose livelihoods are being affected by the virus;
- Pray for the Melanesian Brothers who fund their missions through the income generated by Chester Rest House which is experiencing lower occupancy levels;
- Pray for those still without shelter, food and safe water supplies in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands following Cyclone Harold;
- For schools beginning to reopen in the Solomon Islands from 27 April.

For the Democratic Republic of Congo

- There is cautious optimism that the Ebola epidemic is over. The infrastructure and experience from fighting the Ebola epidemic will aid the country to fight Covid-19;
- Health infrastructures are poor and there is widespread poverty with no government safety-nets or bail-outs. As of 8 April, twenty Covid-19 deaths had been recorded and there are cases in Kinshasa, North and South Kivu, Ituri and Kwilu;

- Please pray for protection, especially for those living in densely populated towns and cities and for displaced people in camps with poor access to water and sanitation;
- For provision of food and safe water. The borders are closed and much less food is being brought into towns and cities causing food prices to escalate;
- For church leaders as they make radio broadcasts and offer pastoral care and support;
- Pray particularly that the Easter radio messages address people's fears and counter false information which abounds on social media;
- Pray for peace and for an end to the devastating militia attacks which are forcing people to leave their homes.

For the Diocese

Our Schools

- This week we pray for children of key workers who continue to attend school during the lockdown and for the children who are learning at home and missing being with their friends in school;
- We pray for all school staff, at what would have been the start of the summer term;
- We give thanks for the family support workers who continue to support vulnerable children and their families during the lockdown.

A Hospice Chaplain writes

I would appreciate you including in the prayers all those who have lost family and friends during this difficult time and particularly those unable to attend the funerals. This has been a cause of great distress.

From the Church House Outreach Team

- Please pray for youth groups, on-line at the moment – for safety, creativity and continued building of community;
- For those facing who have lost their jobs or are in financial difficulty;
- People in 'hidden' jobs who have no choice but to be in contact with others – those who work in utilities, refuse disposal, in warehouses and delivering goods. Pray for pastoral support for them;
- Please pray for people with physical, sensory and learning difficulties who are especially vulnerable and potentially isolated as many of the support mechanisms are limited at this time.

Transforming Lives Together have asked to share

St Paul with St Luke's, Tranmere are now sewing scrubs, hats and bags for the NHS. Collections are being made from and materials delivered to the doorsteps of those able to help.

On Tuesdays and Fridays St Hildeburgh's, Hoylake deliver a flask of soup and a sandwich to 23 vulnerable parishioners who would have otherwise attended their luncheon club and Bacon Butty Mornings. The service has been much appreciated by the recipients who are self- isolating.

Also, TLT have submitted three bids for emergency funding to provide food to communities via the churches we already work with. Please pray that these bids will be successful. Thanks!

West Cheshire Foodbank

The foodbank has an emerging partnership with the local authority with some local councillors involved in issuing vouchers and setting up delivery/collection hubs.

- Please pray for closer liaison with officers to map and plan food provision down to neighbourhood level;
- a county-wide coordinated approach to receiving surplus food and getting it to projects that can use it;
- Please pray also for all those facing financial uncertainty and worrying about how they will manage in the coming weeks and months.

Our friends in DRC have shared this prayer with us

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy.
Sustain and support the anxious,
be with those who care for the sick,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may find comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.

Thank you for joining us in prayer,
Jonathon and the Foxhill Team