

“The Cost of Following Jesus: Lament”

Series: *The Cost of Following Jesus*

Scripture: Psalm 77:1-6; Lamentations 3:17-24; Luke 13:31-35

Rev. Mary Bowman

March 16, 2025



First Presbyterian
Church of Charlotte

MEDITATION: “The Cost of Following Jesus: Lament” - Mary Henderson Bowman - 3-16–25 [Psalm 77:1-6; Lamentations 3:17-24 (The Message); Luke 13:31-35]

This morning we are talking about lament.
And if we are honest, lament is an alien word to our American ears.
Lament is the pure, unabridged expression of grief.
And as Americans, we do not express our feelings so forthrightly.
Watching someone wail and weep uncontrollably leaves us uncomfortable.

You see, our culture is largely a culture of emotional suppression.
Many of us have been told directly or indirectly that our feelings are not welcome.
We have been told the lie that there are good feelings and bad feelings.
We have often gotten messages like these . . .
Real men don't cry.
Keep a stiff upper lip.
Emotions aren't to be trusted.
Pull yourself together.

The reality is that people around us prefer us being happy rather than expressing any sadness.

My friends, one of the saddest parts about our culture's emotional suppression is that few of us understand that our emotions are one of the most remarkable gifts from God to human beings.
Our emotions are a gift for a number of reasons.
Our emotions tell us where we are. We think our minds know where we are, but it is really our emotions that serve as our compass because they reflect our heart and our soul as well as our mind.

In addition, our emotions give us a tool to process all that comes at us from the broken world we live in.
Our emotions give us a way to deal with the pain and sorrow of our human lives.

One of the things I love about the Bible is that it makes our emotions sacred.
In our readings this morning, we hear different people lamenting their lives, expressing their pain, and grieving over the conditions in the world.

And in none of these situations does God tell them to quit complaining and buck up.
God does not tell them to stop crying.
God does not punish them for lamenting.
Instead, God offers them a loving refuge, provides them a path for healing, and extends them grace and mercy.
And remarkably, God takes their words of complaint and adds them to the sacred text called the Bible.

The Book of Psalms is a collection of prayers that express all kinds of human emotions . . . hatred of our enemies, pain at our losses, anxiety about the future, lament at our circumstances, wonder at God's mercies, and communal concern for the world.
If we are ever at a loss for words, the psalms are a great place to go.
And, of course, Jesus Himself prayed the psalms and used the psalms to communicate His own suffering and pain.

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Jesus understood well that to be human is to know pain.
If you are human, then suffering is real.
Life is hard. “Life disappoints and hurts all of us”¹ in both big and small ways

The author and theologian Richard Rohr who has a new book out called *The Tears of Things* summarizes it this way: “our felt reality is invariably wept reality.”²

And when life comes at you, it is easy to get stuck.
When we have experienced trauma and loss, it is natural to shutdown. It is natural to want to crawl inside of ourselves and stay there.
Grief can weigh us down. Grief can overwhelm us. Grief can isolate us.
Grief is something that accumulates over a lifetime . . . there are times in our world when we feel grief upon grief about what is happening.

We can get clogged with the heaviness of it.
We can seek escapes to release the pain.
We can grow violent in the impotence of it, thinking retaliation will help.
We can quit caring. We can disengage.

But none of these are the way of love. None of these develop the empathy that we need to follow Jesus into the world.

God offers us a way forward by encouraging us to name our pain and express our pain.
God does not hurry us. God will listen as long as it takes.
God does not, however, want us to get stuck.
The grief process that God gives us is a way forward to heal and to be transformed and to stay open to the world when we are at our most vulnerable to wanting to shut down and stay shut down.
God invites us to express our pain, but not so we will stay there.
God invites us to keep living and to keep loving and to keep forgiving.
This is the cost and the gift of following Jesus.

By naming where we are before God and within community is an empowering act of resilience in a world that is hard.

In our second reading, we get an upside-down version of a fox being in the hen house.
This time, the hen is taking on the fox.

Herod — the murderer of John the Baptist — is busy building a kingdom — a kingdom of the fox.
This kingdom is built on fear and greed, selfishness and cruelty, manipulation and oppression.
But Jesus offers us a different kingdom . . . a kingdom of the Mother Hen God. The Mother Hen God who longs to gather us, comfort us, strengthen us, shelter us, provide the grace and love we need when the kingdom of the fox is thriving.
Jesus too laments. Jesus grieves the path that Jerusalem is taking.

¹ Richard Rohr, cac.org, March 5, 2025.

² Richard Rohr, cac.org, March 5, 2025.

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Jesus does not cower. He continues to extend love and grace in the face of fear. He extends generosity in the face of scarcity.

He offers mercy to Jerusalem, the city where He will die an excruciating death.

Jesus laments but doesn't stay in the lament. As He says, there is work to be done, and Jesus will finish the work that He has been given.

Jesus laments over Jerusalem. His lamenting does not change Jerusalem, but it changes Him. He remains open to the work that needs to be done. He remains close to His Father.

Jesus moves through lament as He moves through the cross.

He knows there is something on the other side.

There is resurrection. There is the promise of something new.

There is the promise of the Good Shepherd in the valley of deepest darkness.

There is the promise that God's mercies are new every morning.

In God, we have a love big enough to hold our sorrow and our outrage.

In God, we have a love that can heal and transform us so we stay open to love.

May it be so.