**December 3, 2023 Psalm 80:1-19**

***Light***

**Scripture:** Psalms 80:1-9 NRSV

*(1)Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth (2)before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might, and come to save us! (3)Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved. (4)O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? (5)You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure. (6)You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves. (7)Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved. (8)You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. (9)You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. (10)The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches; (11)it sent out its branches to the sea, and its shoots to the River. (12)Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? (13)The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it. (14)Turn again, O God of hosts; look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, (15)the stock that your right hand planted. (16)They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance. (17)But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself. (18)Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name. (19)Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved. Psalms 80:1-19 NRSV*

**Notes:**

1. *To lament is to be* ***honest****.* 
   1. ***Naming*** reality is important.
   2. Naming our ***painful*** reality helps us process it.
   3. Acknowledging a reality is the way toward ***healing***.
2. *Lament is 70% of the* ***Psalms****.* 
   1. Neglecting the reality of lament is ***problematic***.
   2. Lament is part of ***living*** in a broken world.
   3. Lament is not something to be ***embraced***.
3. *Psalm 80 is a lament that is directed at* ***God****.* 
   1. The people are blaming ***God*** for their terrible situation.
   2. The people still affirm and believe that God is ***good***.
   3. This lament is rooted in ***hope***.
4. *Advent is a season of intermingled* ***lament*** *and* ***hope****.* 
   1. The cry of every longing heart is to be ***saved***.
   2. There is ***hope*** in the midst of the longing too.
   3. We have much to ***lament*** in our lives.
5. *Lament is not the* ***opposite*** *of hope.* 
   1. Lament opens us up to the possibility of hoping and trusting in the ***faithfulness*** of God.
   2. Lament moves us *into* hope built on truth and the ***faithfulness*** of God.
6. There is ***hope***.
   1. God is ***big*** enough for the entire human experience.
   2. God has been ***faithful*** and will be again.
   3. Tell the truth before God and before one ***another***.
   4. God ***continues*** to come, show up and love us.

**Script:**

SO are you ready? This is the first Sunday of Advent after all. I have seen a few memes on Facebook: a giant turkey standing on Santa saying not yet dude; or the turkey squaring off with the jolly ol elf saying wait your turn; And there was one that suggested we place thanksgiving and Christmas six months apart so they do not overlap so badly. I have my preferences, I prefer to wait for one holiday or special occasion to be completed before we begin to market the next holiday. New Years is over before we market valentines day; labor day is over before we market Halloween; and of course, thanksgiving dishes are done before we begin to see the black Friday sales for CHRISTMAS.

Yes we all have our preferences, but no matter how we look at it, we can always find something to lament. Now you may be saying that is an awful fancy term to express complaints. But a lament is a passionate expression of grief or sorrow. What about the holidays brings you these feelings. Is there grief in your life? Is there sorrow in your life?

The scriptures are full of Laments. Lamentations to be one specific book of scripture full of lamentations. And then Ecclesiastes also holds some laments; as well as, the Proverbs and even the Psalms. This brings us to our sermon passage for today, Psalm 80. Psalm 80 is a lament filled with grief, anger, sadness and despair. It is full of emotion, stand with me as we share in the reading of our Sermon Passage, Psalm 80.

*(1)Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth (2)before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might, and come to save us! (3)Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved. (4)O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? (5)You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure. (6)You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves. (7)Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved. (8)You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. (9)You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. (10)The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches; (11)it sent out its branches to the sea, and its shoots to the River. (12)Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? (13)The boar from the forest ravages it, and all that move in the field feed on it. (14)Turn again, O God of hosts; look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, (15)the stock that your right hand planted. (16)They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance. (17)But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand, the one whom you made strong for yourself. (18)Then we will never turn back from you; give us life, and we will call on your name. (19)Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved. Psalms 80:1-19 NRSV*

U.S. Americans live in a culture that struggles to make space for feelings. Some of those feelings could be defined as negative. Few employers offer bereavement leave, and those who do only offer a few days and restrict it to certain family members. We are pushed and encouraged to rush past emotions of anger, fear, sadness, and grief.

Perhaps that is the reason so many of us believe God to be too busy or unwilling to listen to our negative emotions. Maybe because our society indicates that these emotions should be ignored or repressed or hurried through, we also begin to feel that we can’t be angry with God. Or maybe we worry about the repercussions if we express these feelings fully.

But here we are, the first Sunday of Advent, ready to talk about light! Our homes and world are filled with warm spices and twinkly lights. Our anticipation for the season is high and then we open Psalm 80. Psalm 80 is a lament that is filled with grief, with anger, with sadness and despair—and not only that, but those difficult feelings are directed at God! Darkness and light, lament and hope; they are more related than we sometimes like to admit. We can’t appreciate one without acknowledging and understanding the other.

*To Lament is only natural for the human Psyche. To lament is to be honest.* Naming reality is the start of lament. When doctors have to inform someone of a death, they have to use the word “die.” They cannot use euphemisms because if they aren’t clear, people may misinterpret their meaning. Naming reality is important for those experiencing loss, grief, or trauma. The term “gaslighting” is used to describe when someone’s reality is denied by someone else, causing that person to question their own reality. Sometimes saying things like, “it wasn’t that bad,” or failing to believe a lived experience of another can cause this type of questioning, which leads to more issues and damage in the long run.

When we name our painful reality, we are able to process and cope with it in ways we can’t when it is ignored. Anxiety and the consequences of anxiety increase when we aren’t able to name the reality we live in. This is something we may have experienced in big and small ways in our own lives: suppressing emotions only works for so long. It turns into consequences on our physical health, explosions of anger, burnout, etc.

Coping with and processing reality is why psychotherapy is so effective because acknowledging and speaking a reality is the way toward healing. Naming reality is important for those who are listening. Collective healing can happen when someone hears and recognizes their own story in someone else’s. “It’s not just me,” or, “I thought I was the only one.”

When a community acknowledges the truth together, the community can heal together. It’s difficult to address a need no one knows is there. Living in a community means caring for one another. Knowing the needs of others helps the community meet those needs and also helps the community to recognize where they have been hurting instead of helping. Often what is intended to be helpful can hurt, and it’s important for the community to hear and acknowledge the truth, even if it’s painful, in order to truly be a helpful and empowering community.

*Lament is 70% of the Psalms but less than 50% of modern worship music.* The majority of modern praise-and-worship songs are not laments, a fact that tends to create a culture that wants to neglect these more “negative” feelings and experiences in the worship community.

Neglecting the reality of lament is problematic because it may cause us to project onto God the false reality that God does not care about our truthful emotions or experiences, or that we have to present ourselves in a certain way before God will accept us. When we neglect lament, we create a community that struggles to embrace people where they are and for who they are. This type of community stops trying to empathize with experiences they can’t relate to, which creates issues related to justice, confession, and repentance. (Many church communities have fallen into this trap and gotten caught in sinful cycles related to racism, misogyny, abusive church systems, and more.)

Lament is normalized in the Psalms as part of living in a broken world. The majority of psalms are laments, which shows us that these are not minor experiences. Difficult feelings are part of the human experience. We all have them! Difficult feelings are also part of the faith experience. Some of our difficult experiences are communal and not just individual. Lament is not something to be avoided but embraced. In addition to the vast number of psalms that lament, there is also an entire book of the Bible devoted to lament (Lamentations). Lament is part of what it means to follow God.

*Psalm 80 is a lament that is directed at God.* The people in this lament are blaming God for their terrible situation. God has fed them tears (v. 5), He is blamed for making them an object of derision to their neighbors (v. 6), He has broken down the walls that protect them (v. 12). The people see God as the one who is behind all things good and bad, but often the people are living with the consequences of their own actions. Even so, they direct their anger at God. Sometimes we do this too. Sometimes we blame God for things that are not God’s fault. This is similar to the ways we place blame on God for things that are often not God’s fault. Even though they blame God for their situation, they still affirm and believe that God is trustworthy, loving, and good. They call out to God to restore them, with the expectation that God will hear them and respond.

This is not the act of someone who believes God will be angry toward them. This is the act of someone who is secure in an abiding nature with a God who has shown himself to be good. They acknowledge God’s past faithfulness (vv. 8–11) They plead for that goodness to be replicated, demonstrating their trust that, if God cared for them then, God will care for them now as well. This lament is rooted in hope. They address God because they believe God will listen and respond. They are not afraid of God’s response. They long for it because they hope it will be a rescuing and loving response.

*Advent is a season of intermingled lament and hope.* The cry of every longing heart is to be saved. We read of people who long for the Messiah to come, they do so throughout years of silence and oppression. There is a lament in that waiting: *Where is God? What is God doing? Has God forgotten us?*

But there is hope in the midst of the longing too. The people are looking, watching, waiting with expectation that God will hear their prayers and respond. We see this in the lives of the faithful followers of God: Anna and Simeon, Mary and Joseph, and even the Magi watching the skies. We have much to lament in our lives, whether our individual traumas and experiences or our communal ones as a faith community, or our societal sins.

*Lament is not the opposite of hope.* Taking time to lament opens us up to the possibility of hoping and trusting in the faithfulness of God: God will be present with us (*Immanuel*), we will be freed from sin, and we will be saved. Laments made in hope open us up to a healthy and whole community with one another. Lament moves us *into* hope that is built on truth and the faithfulness of God.

It might be easy for some to rush past lament. It may be easier to disregard the vast number of psalms that are lament psalms, to rush to the happy parts of the story, but that would miss the beauty in the midst of the grief.

There is hope, even in lament. Lament helps us remember that God is big enough for the entire human experience, even the hard parts. Lament helps us remember that God has been faithful and will be again. Lament helps us remember that we are better, healthier, and more whole when we tell the truth before God and before one another. As we lament, we are open to confession, to repentance, to the beauty of resurrection life in the midst of it all.

As we reflect on this first Sunday of Advent, remember that Christ came to be the light of the world, but also hold closely to a God who continues to come, who continues to show up and love us in the midst of our pain, our grief, our loss, and our trauma. And we long for that Christ to show up again, to meet our deepest needs and heal our deepest wounds. We sing our laments with confidence that he hears us and hope that he will come again.