



*Silence of the heart
is necessary so you
can hear God everywhere—
in the closing of the door,
in the person who needs you,
in the birds that sing,
in the flowers, in the animals.*

—Mother Teresa

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
28 June 2020

Invitation to Prayer

As we begin this time of worship,
may our minds be still,
may our hearts be open,
may we receive God's love and peace.

Gathering Prayer

Like the bare branches of the winter trees,
I come empty,
transparent,
simple in my longing for you
and for the world that, with your love, might be.

I come to rest in your presence,
to hibernate for a time
in this undemanding Sabbath space
where I might lean on you—the Great Goodness
that enlivens me and all that is.

Warm me with the sun of your love.
Shower me with beauty that I might grow lush with grace.
Fill me with Spirit and send me forth
to be what I encounter in the silence of my prayer.
Amen.

Scripture Reading—Psalm 13 from *Psalms for Praying* by Nan C. Merrill

We are invited to express all of our feelings to God as we would a friend. But sometimes we may be reluctant to do this. Why?

Maybe we are struggling to admit and sit with hard feelings ourselves. We may be stoic and dismiss (or even flee from) our anger, disappointment and pain. We may see lament as being unfaithful since we believe our suffering is a test or punishment from God and therefore it is something we need to endure on our own. Or perhaps we wish to be optimistic and therefore we see lament as a downer that stands in the way of positive thinking.

When we allow our spiritual lives to breath into and, in fact, be life, many gifts are opened to us. The psalms lead the way when it comes to sharing our fulness with God. Read Psalm 13 slowly and prayerfully, pausing at the places indicated, bringing your own experience to the prayer.

How long, my Beloved?
Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear this pain in my soul,
and live with sorrow all the day?
How long will fear rule my life?

*What situation brings pain
to your soul at this time?*

Notice my heart and answer me,
O my Beloved;
Enlighten me, lest I walk
as one dead to life;
Lest my fears say,
“We have won the day,”
lest they rejoice in their strength.

*Where are you experiencing
lifelessness right now?*

As I trust in your steadfast Love,
my heart will rejoice,
for in You is freedom.
I shall sing to the Beloved,
who has answered my prayers
a thousandfold!
Come, O Beloved, make your home in my heart.

*Choose a line from above
and repeat it silently
for a few moments as your prayer.*

Going Deeper

As you reflect on your prayer experience with Psalm 13 just now:

- Where did the prayer of the psalmist resonate for you?
- Where did the words jar or feel uncomfortable for you?
- What, if anything, is being revealed to you?

This week's psalm, Psalm 13, is a psalm of lament. It includes the traditional elements of lament such as expressing one's complaint, invoking God's presence, asking God for help, resting confidently in God's love, offering praise and gratitude.

- When you consider your journey at this time, do you find yourself at home with one of these elements more than the others?
- What, if anything, might this say about your life? about your relationship with God?



A friend may well know that you are sad, but she will feel trusted if you tell her about it. And you will feel a lot better. Friendship with God operates much the same way. God is interested in your willingness to entrust how you are feeling. So when you are sad or depressed, take a moment to become aware of God's presence, of God looking at you.

(from *Praying the Truth* by William Barry)

Now or later, you might try writing your own prayer of lament. Try including the traditional elements—lament, invocation, petition, confidence and praise.

Reflections in Solitude and Silent Meditation

You might choose to read the Reflections in Solitude for this week followed by silent meditation.

How to meditate—from the World Community for Christian Meditation

To meditate, sit still and upright. Close your eyes lightly. Sit relaxed but alert. Silently, interiorly begin to say a single word. We recommend the prayer-phrase, "Ma-ra-na-tha." Say it as four syllables of equal length.

Listen to it as you say it, gently but continuously. Do not think or imagine anything—spiritual or otherwise. If thoughts and images come, these are distractions at the time of meditation, so keep returning simply to saying the word.

Prayers of Intercession

Loving God, we give thanks that you are not far away from us, but are nearer to us than our breath. Though we may travel through shadows of death and seasons of confusion and sorrow, we know you are with us for every day the light of your love dawns. May we trust in your steadfast presence as we bring before you the longings of our heart.

We hold in the light of love the concerns we have for our world...

We pray, *bring us healing, bring us peace.*

We hold in the light of love the concerns we have for our land and our communities...

We pray, *bring us healing, bring us peace.*

We hold in the light of love the concerns we have for those we know and for ourselves...

We pray, *bring us healing, bring us peace.*

Disciples' Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

Blessing

As we move away from this time of Sabbath prayer,
may we carry in our bodies and souls
a silent stillness that enables deep awareness.

May we live out the grace and compassion we've received
leading us to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice.

The love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ and the communion of the Spirit be with us all.

When I heard the news of George Floyd's death and reports of anger bursting through the streets, my heart sank. How long, O God, will some suffer the dehumanising effects of racism? How long will our differences be the target of prejudice, hatred and violence? *How long?* As an advocate of nonviolent resistance and peaceful protest, I do not condone the rioting that erupted in some parts—aggression on all sides. But in my heart, I stand with those who seek to raise awareness and speak out for truth and justice. I am especially moved by the vision of individuals lying prostrate or kneeling on the ground, observing silence for 8 minutes and 43 seconds—the exact time a police officer's knee was pinned on George Floyd's neck.

Here in Australia, footy player Eddie Betts shared something of his own experience:



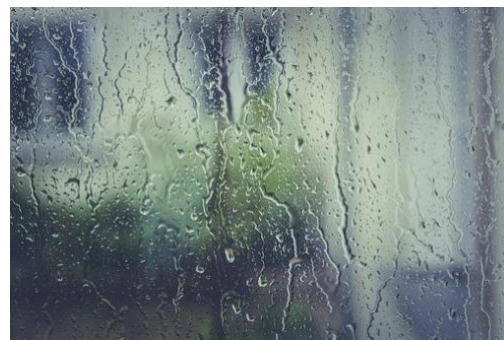
I was really proud taking a knee for Black Lives Matter and racism in Australia and you know it happens in our backyard as well. We've got 432 deaths in custody here in Australia and that was since 1991. My grandfather Eddie Betts—my dad's Eddie Betts, my grandfather is

Eddie Betts—he was sick in Port Lincoln. He went to the doctors, the doctors turned him away. He had chest pain, they thought he was drunk. They rang the police on him, they took him to the cells. He died alone in the cells by himself at age 49, my grandfather Eddie Betts.

The week of George Floyd's death, was a difficult one for me. Many with whom I interacted were interested in conversing about "the terrible things happening in the US." I was happy to listen to all who wished to express their upset. But the majority seemed intent on criticising—the Black Lives Moment, Americans in general, or the US Government. Or they fired off opinions and solutions based on their limited or even non-existent experience of racism (and the US), including the suggestion that "black people need to stop stirring up trouble."

It was impossible for me to know how to respond. I was truly overwhelmed by the scenes coming from the country of my birth. Even more, I was quite appalled by some of the reactions I was hearing and by the apparent unwillingness to listen—overseas and here at home. I felt a pastoral word was needed, but the swirl of emotions paralysed me. In short, I was undone. That week, I did not write a Reflection in Solitude. I felt silence was the best I had to offer.

Since then, and through the example and nurture of Christian community, I have found myself more often redirected towards a more lifegiving means—lament. When we feel aggrieved, overwhelmed and undone, when it is obvious that not all is right with the world and we long for justice, compassion and peace to come more fully into our midst, the practice of lament is a wellspring for our tears and complaint. We can share the fulness of our experiences with the Source and Keeper of our Lives and, in doing so, find the confusion and weight of our sorrow lifted and the path of love revealed before us.



Lament is different than chatting about a concerning situation in the world or our lives. (i.e. "Did you hear about the COVID outbreak in Victoria?" "Yes, isn't it awful!") In my experience, sharing without the depth prayer can bring—especially lament—often leads to dramatizing and judging. Our chatty exchanges simply bolster our perspectives about certain people or situations rather than opening us toward a wider, more gracious landscape. They often increase our anxiety and shut down the possibility of positive response. This is certainly the case for me when someone tells me about the latest Trump Tweet!

In contrast, lament helps us give voice to our feelings in a way that increases hope, trust and freedom. Lament includes movements such as sharing sorrow and complaint, inviting the presence of the Holy One into our suffering, expressing our hopes and desires, giving ourselves over to what will be in trust, and offerings of praise and gratitude.

As significant as each element might be, the most important thing to bring to our lament is our tears—the pouring out of our helplessness and grief before the God of history and all creation. In her insightful and meditative book, *The Fountain and the Furnace: the Way of Tears and Fire*, Maggie Ross writes:

The gift of tears is a sign of change, of conversion of heart. The tears that are a gift are a sign of willingness to let go, of desire to let go, and the power of God acting in response to the person's prayer of longing ... The gift of tears is a sign of self-forgetfulness, a willing nakedness, a desire that comes from within to create space for God by letting go of our conscious pursuit of security, power, attachment.

Lament, then, clarifies and purifies our service and actions for justice. It places our confidence not in what we are able to accomplish or even in the ends which we have in mind. The movement towards trust in what will be and, even more, *trust in the One who holds all creation in love and care*, slowly loosens our grip on firmly held positions and frees us to be and love.



By way of example, I share my honest lament about the moment we are in...

Ground of my Being,
may your love hold me steady
in the midst of these changing times.
Even as I am grateful for the growing confidence
in South Australia's COVID free days,
I confess the transition is demanding
and, in some ways, unwelcome.
Like the sunny days and warmth of autumn,
gone is the season of solitude and stillness.
Again, the cars rush by.
Again, the expectations press in.
How long will we experience this transition?
When will our lives cease to whirl?

Across the screen flash fresh announcements.
Into my inbox arrive more recommendations.
Updated charts, revised plans, checklists and steps
bringing new procedures for implementation.
How long will we experience this transition?
When will our lives cease to whirl?

Overwhelmed
I rise sleepless in the night.
In the cold I feel you in the serene darkness,
the warm blanket wrapped around me,
the confidence that morning will come.
By day, you delight me
with birds at the feeder and the gift of rain.
I encounter you in stories of life
shared over cups of soup and buttered bread.
I do not know the future
but I know you are there, in it, whatever will be.
I am silent with you
and come to trust in the grace
that has already opened so much in me.
Thank you!
My Love, my God.

Lift from me the confusion of this whirling.
Calm and quiet my soul.
Free me to be fully alive in your world—
in my small, daily bit of it.
Amen. May it be so.