

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Psalm 6
SERMON TITLE: A Good Cry

How long has it been since you had a really good cry? Now I'm not talking about shedding a tear or two while peeling an onion. I'm talking about a good, anguished cry that expresses the pain and hurt of life.

Now I've had some really good, anguished cries over the course of my life, mainly over the deaths of loved ones like my dad. But I suppose one of the most intense emotional experiences that brought forth a flood of tears happened several years ago. I was serving the United Methodist Church in Fredericksburg when one Friday morning I got a call from the Fredericksburg Clinic where two of our church members worked. They also were close personal friends. David was the head of the lab and Connie was the office manager. The person who called me didn't say what was going on but simply urged me to come to clinic immediately.

When I walked into Connie's office, David and Connie were both there along with several other co-workers and a DPS officer. The story I heard shocked me to the core.

On a road out from College Station, a burning truck had been found. There was one body in the truck, burned beyond recognition. The body had been taken to the Travis County Medical Examiner's office in Austin. The license plate identified the vehicle as belonging to David and Connie. But the person who used the truck was David and Connie's son, Luke, a senior at Texas A & M University.

Connie was frantically calling as many people as she could think of who might know of Luke's whereabouts. No one had seen him. It began to look more and more like Luke was the one in the accident.

To make sure, the TPS officer suggested that Luke's dental and medical records be taken

to Austin immediately. I volunteered to make the trip. For two hours—driving from Fredericksburg to Austin—I cried so hard that I could barely see the road.

When I arrived at the Medical Examiner's Office and handed over the records, the dental X-rays left no doubt. Luke was dead. I had to call David and Connie to give the news. And then I had to drive back to Fredericksburg with the tears still flowing and this indescribable ache of grief in my gut. By the way, also I prayed anguished prayers, confronting God with the question: Why?

As it turned out, early in the morning, Luke had died after giving an intoxicated friend a ride home to a city near College Station. During the return trip, Luke had fallen asleep at the wheel. The truck had run off the road and caught fire. Luke had not been able to get out.

So how long has it been since you had a really good cry? Now believe it or not, this is a question that makes a difference for our faith because the scriptures encourage us to express our pain before God and even before one another.

Did you hear what Psalm 6 said? *I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. My eyes waste away because of grief; they grow weak because of all of my foes.*

The whole psalm is a heart-cry for healing and deliverance: *O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger, or discipline me in your wrath. Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror. My soul also is struck with terror, while you, O Lord--how long?*

Now did you notice that the psalm is written in the first person singular, but it's included in Israel's prayer book? Isn't that interesting? One person's expression of pain is taken up by the whole community and shared.

In fact, the psalms are full of such cries of lament. Did you know that there are more lament psalms in the Bible than any other kind of psalm--which is to say that Israel cried to God frequently and publicly? Israel used these prayers to plead with God for deliverance from all kinds of suffering—whether personal or national. Israel even cried in worship. Imagine that!

And apparently, Jesus learned from his people how to express his pain. The shortest verse in the Bible is John 11:35. Do you know what it says? ***Jesus wept.*** When our Lord was on the cross, the words of lament from Psalm 22 were upon his lips. Mark's gospel says, ***And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "E'lo-i, E'lo-i, la'ma sabachtha'ni?" "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"***

So how long has it been since you had a really good cry—an anguished cry directed to God? Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann has written that ***hurting people will not receive help if they keep silent*** about their pain. ***The lament cannot be answered and resolved by God unless it is spoken.***¹

And speaking the lament before God is an incredible act of faith. In spite of unrelieved pain—and intense doubts—and even feeling abandoned by God—Israel tenaciously persisted in crying to God for deliverance. Their faith and their hope were in God. And we're encouraged to trust and to hope in the same way.

And sometimes, our persistence pays off and our prayers of lament are answered in just the ways that we desire. The psalmist wrote: ***The Lord has heard the sound of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lords accepts my prayer.***

But sometimes the outcome is not what we desire. To be sure, the psalms of lament are bold in expressing pain and in making demands upon God to end the pain. But finally, the

¹Brueggemann, Walter. *Israel's Praise: Doxology Against Idolatry and Ideology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press,

psalms and God's people, let God be God.

Do you remember the prayer Jesus uttered in the Garden of Gethsemane? *My Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.* This was his heart's cry. But then, Jesus let God be God: *yet, not my will but yours be done.*

A woman named Georgia Harkness once wrote a prayer of lament that expresses her own willingness to let God be God. The prayer goes like this: *O God, who dost forgive our iniquities and heal our diseases, we cry unto thee. Our strength has been brought low, and we know not that the future holds. In our bodies, there is pain; in our souls, anxiety and unrest. If it may be, restore us to health. We ask no miracle of deliverance, and if in the order of nature our suffering must continue, help us to accept it without rebellion. If it must lead us toward the valley of the shadow, help us to fear no evil, but to go bravely into thy nearer presence. In thy good keeping, all is well. Into thy hands we commend our bodies and our spirits. Do with us as thou wilt. Amen.*²

Now this may not be your prayer, but what is your prayer? How long has it been since you had a really good cry—an anguished cry directed at God? Why not today? Why not this morning in worship? So I pose to you three questions. Focus on the one that claims your attention: *What individual pain do you bring before God this morning? If we, as a church, were to cry unto the Lord out of our pain, what would we say? If, as a nation, we were to sing a song of lament to the Lord, what words would we use?*

1988, 141-142.

² Harkness, Georgia. "General Conference 2008: Devotion for May 1, 2008." General Conference 2008: . 1 Sep. 2009 <<http://www.generalconference2008.org/2008/05/devotion-for-ma.html>>.