

**Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church**  
**The 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, June 27, 2021**  
**2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27**  
**“Don’t Ask Why” by Rev. Sue Trigger**

**David mourns Saul and Jonathan**

<sup>17</sup> Then David sang this funeral song<sup>[a]</sup> for Saul and his son Jonathan. <sup>18</sup> David ordered everyone in Judah to learn the Song of the Bow.<sup>[b]</sup> (In fact, it is written in the scroll from Jashar.)

<sup>19</sup> Oh, no, Israel! Your prince lies dead on your heights.  
 Look how the mighty warriors have fallen!

<sup>20</sup> Don’t talk about it in Gath;  
 don’t bring news of it to Ashkelon’s streets,  
 or else the Philistines’ daughters will rejoice;  
 the daughters of the uncircumcised will celebrate.

<sup>21</sup> You hills of Gilboa!  
 Let there be no dew or rain on you,  
 and no fields yielding grain offerings.<sup>[c]</sup>

Because it was there that the mighty warrior’s shield was defiled—  
 the shield of Saul!—never again anointed with oil.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan’s bow never wavered from the blood of the slain,  
 from the gore of the warriors.  
 Never did Saul’s sword return empty.

<sup>23</sup> Saul and Jonathan! So well loved, so dearly cherished!  
 In their lives and in their deaths they were never separated.  
 They were faster than eagles,  
 stronger than lions!

<sup>24</sup> Daughters of Israel, weep over Saul!  
 He dressed you in crimson with jewels;  
 he decorated your clothes with gold jewelry.

<sup>25</sup> Look how the mighty warriors have fallen in the midst of battle!  
 Jonathan lies dead on your heights.

<sup>26</sup> I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan!  
 You were so dear to me!  
 Your love was more amazing to me<sup>[d]</sup> than the love of women.

<sup>27</sup> Look how the mighty warriors have fallen!  
 Look how the weapons of war have been destroyed!

It may have been a coincidence that the Presbyterian Women’s study for 2020-2021 just happened to be about lament, but it turned out to be a wonderful blessing at just the right time. As we were grieving the many losses we were experiencing during the pandemic, our Bible study invited us to learn more about what it means to lament. The study is called, “Into the Light: Finding Hope through Prayers of Lament”. And that is just what we did. As we shared our stories and prayers of lament during online meetings, we learned from

each other and carried each other through a very difficult time. This study was especially meaningful for the Naomi circle that experienced the loss of Mary Johnson and Shirley Sampson last year. Their deaths, and our inability to gather to worship and lament together, made this study even more meaningful.

In today's reading, David grieves the loss of his King and his dearest friend and Saul's son, Jonathan. David invited the community to join him for a time of lament. His words revealed his deep loss. "Saul and Jonathan! So well loved, so dearly cherished! In their lives and in their deaths they were never separated. They were faster than eagles, stronger than lions! 24 Daughters of Israel, weep over Saul! I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan! You were so dear to me!" This song is a public expression of grief coupled with anger at the way Saul and Jonathan were killed. David paints a picture of resentment and fear in the midst of paralyzing grief.

It is interesting that David never asks why Saul and Jonathan were killed. His song of lament doesn't blame God or try to explain what happened as God's will or that God had a purpose for their deaths. I wonder why? Certainly that's what many of us would do. Whenever a tragedy happens, someone is likely to say God had a reason for it. When a community is struck by a hurricane, someone will say it is God caused it as punishment for someone's sinful behavior. When a person dies, someone will say, "God needed another angel." We say these things because we want answers for these mysteries. We offer platitudes to people who are suffering hoping the words will take away their pain. But these theories and platitudes don't give us answers and they rarely give us comfort. In fact, sometimes they can be harmful and cause a person to lose faith in a god who would inflict such sorrow on people.

I understand the desire to have answers. As a pastor, I want to help people find comfort in their grief. It's tempting to think that if you can offer an answer why, then someone will find the peace they need. This week our nation has been watching and grieving with Surfside, FL after the collapse of an apartment building. More than 150 people are still unaccounted for and rescue teams are searching for survivors with hope. If you click around to different news channels, you'll find that all of them are asking why. Why did this building collapse? We're beginning to find clues to the structural reasons why the building fell, but asking why doesn't help those who are waiting to hear whether they have lost a friend or a family member. I've watched reporters ask people who are waiting for news why they think the collapse happened. How do they know? And why would you ask someone who is anxious and fearful to speculate about why the building fell? Because we want to know why. We live in a culture that understands that scientific inquiry can explain cause and effect and somehow we've conflated that with a means of giving hope and comfort. As if knowing why something happened means it won't hurt so much.

What people need is the freedom to mourn without pointing blame and seeking answers. The practice of lament is one way that people express their feelings without the pressure of trying to understand why. David did not call the people of Israel to explain why the battle happened. He called them to weep, to lament in the presence of God. In his song, David did not seek to understand why Saul and Jonathan are dead, instead he told their story and shared his feelings about it.

Lament is certainly part of the grieving process, but we seldom think of it as a proper theological response to the difficult situations in our lives. The author of the Presbyterian Women's study, Lynn Miller, explained that throughout "Scripture, lament usually leads to hope. After crying out to God, the one who laments remembers God. And while that doesn't fix things in the moment—the injustice, the loss still exists—the lamenter is strengthened to face the world and to hope." <sup>i</sup>

Hope doesn't come from trying to answer why a tragedy happens. It definitely doesn't come from claiming that a natural disaster is God's punishment or that God needed another angel or another voice in the heavenly choir. If anything, trying to answer why with these responses can lead to deeper grief and desolation. In other words, don't ask why before you pause to pray and remember what is lost and remember that God is with us when we are ready to seek justice or work for change.

As people of faith, our calling is to invite people to claim the freedom to lament, as David did with the people of Israel. Lament, not technical answers, will lead us toward the hope of God and help us find God's desire for justice. Even in times of loss, God's love never ceases. Lament never promises that time will heal all wounds, but prayers of lament do acknowledge God's presence in time. God's faithfulness and steadfast love is new every morning and is with us through the night. This is not a false optimism that tomorrow will be better, but the assurance that God is faithfully present, even as we lament. Words of hope don't take away the lament in our hearts, it is not a practice designed to give us "closure". Hope comes to us in the midst of our lament and sits with us in the pain. <sup>ii</sup>

Lament is called for and is necessary in our times of sorrow. Lynn Miller noted that recovering lament may be one of the church's most timely gifts to the world. She wrote those words three years before the pandemic. She couldn't have known how right she would be. We should lament, and we must call each other to do so; for in our lament, we find God who shows us a pathway to hope.

This afternoon we will gather to do just that. At 4 p.m. we will gather together to grieve the losses of this last year. Some of us will grieve the loss of family members and friends, others will grieve the loss of time with family, the loss of educational content at school, the loss of businesses and organizations, the loss being together in person for fellowship and worship. We will lament together, in the presence of God who loves us

and promises to comfort us and give us hope with the dawn of each new day. If you cannot join us in person, remember the service will be live streamed.

When tragedy strikes, I encourage you not leap to asking why. Instead, take the time to lament with God and find your way to hope. Lament and remember to give thanks to God for taking the journey with us. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Miller, Lynn, "Into the Light: Finding Hope through Prayers of Lament", PW Horizons Bible Study, ©2021 Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

<sup>ii</sup> Reuschling, Wyndy Corbin, Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year B, Vol. 3, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 2021, p. 110-112.