

Week 1: What does it mean to Lament?

When we feel blessed in life, when we experience goodness and wholeness, Christians turn to God in praise and thanksgiving. *But life isn't always like that!!*

- **Question: Are praise and thanksgiving an appropriate response to pain and suffering?**

(A suggested Biblical answer at the end of this sheet)

What happens when we experience the opposite of goodness and blessing? What happens when we have to face chaos, brokenness, suffering and death, or a sudden sense of our human vulnerability?

Lament is a prayer coming out of acknowledging times of pain in life.

Lament is for a time when we need to take our cries to God and yet, God seems very far away, "O my God, I cry out by day, and you answer not; by night, and there is no relief for me" (**Psalm 22:3**).

In more modern terms the Psalm might say, "I call to you, O Lord, and all I get is your answering machine!"

- **Question: Have you had times like this in your own life? How does this feel?**

Despite the wide-ranging presence of prayers of Lament in the Bible, Christians have by and large lost touch with this dimension of prayer.

- **Question: Why is that do you think? It is something we need to recover?**

Most of us can admit that we sometimes *feel* like saying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me/us?" but too often we might then think, "I should not feel this way! I am losing my faith!" The tradition of Lament corrects this false, naïve and overly rationalistic view of faith.

It teaches that truly we do at times, **experience God's absence**; we do feel alone and confused, and we do doubt God and ourselves. Lament teaches that at such times it is not a failure of faith to shake our fist at God and cry out, but an act of faith. It teaches that we cry out directly to God because

deep down we know that our relationship with God counts; it counts to us and it counts to God.

The lost tradition of lament counters a romantic view that faith means everything will be lovely, that we will never get upset, that we sit around holding hands and saying how wonderful everything is. This is unreal. Lament suggests that it is right to express our uncensored feelings before God.

- **Question: When was the last time you let yourself Lament?**

So ..

Lament is a more appropriate response to suffering than praise because it engages God in what troubles us. It is also a better direction than retaliation in kind, for returning hatred with hatred. Lament invites us to state that we do feel pain, hurt and anger, but acknowledges these are not a good basis on which to act. The Christian tradition teaches that the fact I feel a certain way does not give me permission to go out and dump my negativity wherever and on whomever I want. Instead we take it to God!

Lament embraces the truth that doubt is not opposed to faith; although despair is. We see this in the case of the father who brought his son to Jesus for healing (Mark 9:24). When Jesus encouraged the father to have faith, he replied, "I do believe, help my unbelief!" .

In despair we are ready to give up on our relationship with God. In our doubt, on the other hand, we can find in lament a response that is a sign that our faith is alive and kicking but we are struggling with God's response; our Christian tradition of lament is a vital but somewhat lost part of the rhythm of faith itself.