

June 28, 2020
4th Sunday after Pentecost



A sacred time for Lament.

Genesis 22:1-14 Psalm 13
Romans 6:12-23 Matthew 10:40-42

ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
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ANNOUNCEMENTS: With blessings from God, the guidance from our Governor, your Church Council and I are ready to open the doors of our sanctuary on July 5, 2020 for worship. Early next week I will be sending out a letter to our entire

membership to explain all the precautions we will be taking to try and keep all of us safe from Covid 19. Please arrive 15 minutes early at the front door to allow time for temperature checks and seating by our ushers, etc. Wearing a mask is mandatory. If you are not ready to return, we understand completely. Do what you feel is best for you. I will continue to provide these bulletins and messages via of mail or email, so no one will feel left out. **Please read the letter carefully so you understand the process of our returning together. It will be a joyous time, for sure, but we must take precautions.** If you have any questions after receiving the letter, call me at 660-8894. Pastor Rosemary.



*And now let us turn our hearts
and minds to worship our God
who makes all things possible.*

CALL TO WORSHIP: *Based on the Genesis and Psalm texts*
Early in the morning or late in the day,
our thoughts turn toward God.
We can be led to a moment of worship any time of day.
We come, trusting in God's steadfast love.
We come, seeking the way of salvation and peace.
God has made an everlasting covenant with us.
We proclaim God's faithfulness continuously.
Sometimes we think God has forgotten us.
Often, we do not understand what God expects of us.

God deals bountifully with us
In much that we take for granted.
God shows us the value of life and helps us celebrate it.
We bring our sorrow and pain to this healing time.
May God provide what we need to grow in Christ. Amen.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION:

Have you forgotten us, God? Will you remain hidden from us forever? We speak of you, but we do not know you. We often distrust those who speak glibly of your intervention in their lives. We marvel at the amazing variety of life on this planet. All that we see with our eyes is but a small hint of all that is revealed through microscopes and telescopes – other worlds of form and beauty so amazing beyond any telling. Yet our spiritual ancestors have known you not only as Creator of all things but as one who knows and loves each one of us. Help us to know you here, today. Amen.

SCRIPTURE TEXT: Psalm 13 (NRSV)

13 How long will you forget me, LORD? Forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

²How long will I be left to my own wits,
agony filling my heart? Daily?

How long will my enemy keep defeating me?

³Look at me!

Answer me, LORD my God!

Restore sight to my eyes!

Otherwise, I'll sleep the sleep of death,

⁴and my enemy will say, "I won!"

My foes will rejoice over my downfall.

⁵But I have trusted in your faithful love.

My heart will rejoice in your salvation.

⁶Yes, I will sing to the LORD

because he has been good to me.

MESSAGE: My colleagues and fellow pastors have suggested that our parishioners may need the opportunity to grieve over the events of the last months. Some of us may be grieving over the loss of a loved one due to Covid 19. Some may be grieving the loss of a job or the reality that there is not enough money in our wallets to pay all our expenses. Graduations, funerals, weddings, trips, vacations, birthday parties, seeing our friends, or hugging our grandchildren have all been changed. You may have your story about loss. And many of us have missed worshipping together in our sanctuary. **Our Psalm for today is Psalm 13; a song of lament.**

A lament is a tool that God's people use to navigate pain and suffering. Lament is a vital prayer for the people of God because it enables us to petition for God to help deliver us from distress, suffering, and pain. A lament prayer is designed to persuade God to act on the sufferer's behalf.

In the Bible we can find 12 individual laments and 11



corporate laments. These psalms typically express a sense of divine loss and longing for God's return. We must remember that the Psalms were written hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus. Psalm 13 is believed to have been written by King David.

While each lament is different, they follow a typical pattern:

- 1.) Invocation/Address to God
- 2.) Complaint
- 3.) Petition(s)
- 4.) Expression of Trust
- 5.) Vow of Praise *(These last 2 are very important)*

COMPLAINT?! Yes, we can complain to God. It's okay. God has broad shoulders. It's alright to shake our fists at God.

We should read Psalm 13 as a lamentation that trusts in God's promise but grieves that God's promise has not yet been fulfilled. We also must remember that our view of time is not God's time.

Verses 1-2 of Psalm 13, "How long will you forget me, LORD? Forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ²How long will I be left to my own wits, agony filling my heart? Daily? How long will my enemy keep defeating me?"

Just like King David, we are always in a hurry. We want God to act **NOW!** I'm sure we've all had that experience. Why hasn't God answered my prayers NOW? What's taking so long? Patience is a virtue that's very hard to achieve. Yet again, God understands when we humans are weak. God has plans for us and we need to get out of God's way. That includes waiting patiently.

In verses 5-6, King David expresses his vows and turns all of his attention to God. David's enemies fall from view and he turns his eyes away from himself. Instead, David casts himself on the Lord and he trusts that when God considers him, all will be well. David finds the grounds for hope in Yahweh's *hesed* – translated here as "unfailing love"

or "enduring allegiance." As a general rule, we would do well to imitate the way in which the Psalms speak of God. And in this case, we learn that David's confidence to praise God in the midst of seeming abandonment comes from God's unfailing promises. (see step 4 and 5).

While God is ever-present and all-knowing, it does not always feel that way. Psalm 13 grapples with this reality and teaches us how to respond. While sinful responses towards God's apparent absence abound (e.g. denying God's existence, celebrating God's non-interference, acting with indifference), Psalm 13 teaches us how to cry out to God, express our sorrow, **and trust in God's salvation.**

What can we learn from this Psalm? According to the late Psalm scholar, Gerald Wilson, "the experience of divine abandonment is real and painful and is rightfully brought to God in laments and questions. God is not offended by our honest questions or even our heated complaints. Both confirm our desire for relationship and our faith that all is not as it should be. Divine absence need not be seen as the result of some failing within ourselves. Even the righteous suffer, and indeed suffering without divine intervention can be understood as one of the hallmarks of faithful living. Suffering the absence of God can be redemptive as others are brought to realize through our experience that the painful realities of life do not deny the existence, power, and compassionate concern of our God. God is worth holding on to faithfully even when we do not experience God as present."

The feeling of God's presence is a mystery. For reasons only known to God, God's presence is hidden. In such moments, enduring Christians must find means of

grace to hold fast to God. Thankfully, the Psalms are one of those means, as we are the places and people who sing those songs together. (The Psalms were written as hymns to be sung.) For that reason, let us continue to meditate on these ancient words and bring them into our private and corporate worship.

No matter our complaints or grief, God remains with us. We are invited to pour our hearts out to God if we feel sad or joyous. Never fear that God is not near, even if we don't see God or aren't sure of God's presence. God will not abandon us. Praise be to God. Amen.

LET US PRAY: Free us, O God, from such absorption in our own concerns that we forget your loving intention for us. We find it hard to view what is happening around us through any eyes but our own. We obey our own ideas rather than joining your intention for the good of all. It is hard for us, who so value our autonomy, to speak of obedience. Yet we are ashamed of things we have done and things we have failed to do. We want to claim your free gifts of eternal life through Jesus Christ. We sense that you intend for us to accept and live within that gift here and now. Help us, loving God. Amen.

BE THE CHURCH

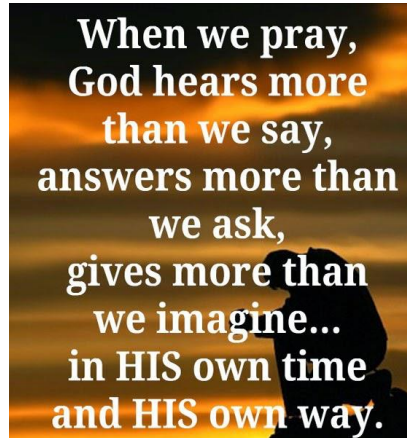
Protect the environment. Care for the poor.

Forgive often. Reject racism.

Fight for the powerless.

Share earthly and spiritual resources.

Embrace diversity. Love God. Enjoy this life.



**When we pray,
God hears more
than we say,
answers more than
we ask,
gives more than
we imagine...
in HIS own time
and HIS own way.**

ST. JOHN PRAYER LIST: Dave Seneczyn, Eric White, Lori Riess, Charles Chamberlin, Donna Isselhard, Mitch Nallie, Candy Pearce, Greg Talley, Carol Meyer, Leah Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess, Rich Schmitt, Shari Hamilton, Charlotte Watson, Becky Ballard, Bill Underwood, Nelson Libell, Father Roger Karban.

ADDITIONAL ANNOUNCEMENT: Beginning June 30, 2020, Tuesday evening at 7 pm, our Zoom Bible Study will begin a new study, this time the Book of Acts will be our focus. The only needed is a Bible and a pad of paper to take notes. Let me know if you would like to join our new study and you will receive instructions on how to "Zoom in". I look forward to sharing the words of this scripture with you.

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