

LOVE'S SORROW: In the Shadow of the Cross—Worship in Minor Key
Lamentations 5:1-22
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LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/loves-sorrow-in-the-shadow-of-the-cross-worship-in-minor-key/>

Let's remember what this book of the Bible is all about. God's people were carried off into captivity in 586 BC. Now, the narrators of Lamentations are at Ground Zero. I hear a maturing in their journey of sorrow. To their credit, they admitted their sins. Note that first, they acknowledge their ancestors have sinned (v. 7). But now, they take full responsibility (v. 16)—we have sinned. This is what makes the season of Lent powerful. We own up to our sins.

But I also hear a maturing in their journey of sorrow. They are willing to lament, to name their sorrows. Note the laundry list. They have witnessed the crumbling of family life (vv. 2-3, 11-14); of economic and social structures (vv. 4-5); of national security (v. 6); of all spiritual assurance, because the Temple was destroyed (v. 18). In their theology, if the Temple was gone, God was gone.

So we hear their cry. Why? Where is God? Here's a phrase which helps me: "God is silent, not absent" [Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Imagination*, p. 177]. How might our faith grow if we really believed that and lived as if it were true? Many of you have seen this beautiful thought someone wrote on the wall of a Nazi death camp: "I believe in the sun, even when it does not shine; I believe in love, even when I am alone. I believe in God, even when He is silent."

Verse 20 captures their doubts completely: "Why have you forgotten us completely? Why have you forsaken us?" Almost identical to the words of Jesus on the Cross (Mark 15:34).

And that leads us quietly, reverently, tenderly to the Cross, where the Book of Lamentations has been pointing for six weeks. The Suffering Servant, Jesus Christ, cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). Think about the Cross. And about the words we sing so often...."sorrow and love, flow mingled down..."

Here's a thought. Maybe we Protestants move past the Cross and suffering too quickly. Historically, Roman Catholics depict crosses with the Savior still hanging on them. Protestants, by and large, show an empty cross, to demonstrate that Jesus didn't stay there. But I repeat. Maybe we move too quickly from the suffering of Jesus. Someone is going to end up angry with me for what I am about to say. But maybe we should learn from our Catholic sisters and brothers. And stay long enough to hear our Savior's lament.

Let me offer an example of what I'm talking about. Some of you will remember two weeks ago, I introduced you to Pastor Saw Waldo, pastoring some Myanmar Baptist

refugees who are living in Thailand. Some of them have been living in exile for 30 years. Waldo wonders out loud about God's silence. "I'm wondering why the champion of the weak and vulnerable, the God of freedom, is silent. How can we believe in a personal God in a world where refugees' basic rights are denied and violated?" And then he answers his own question. He says that despite what his people suffer, he still believes in the crucified, executed God. He says we find solace and transformative power in that poverty, loneliness and abandonment of Jesus Christ [Brian Kaylor, *Word and Way*, August 2017, p. 20].

This Sunday, more than any other on the calendar, we worship in minor key. We'd rather not. We all like rich major scale harmonies. In the sufferings of Christ, God draws us to God's Self. The Israelites had to learn (and we do, too) that God is not after buildings or programs; God is seeking a real, personal relationship with us, with our hearts (v. 21 "restore us to yourself...").

We are sinners. Christ forgives. We are lost. Christ finds us. We are hopeless. Christ offers satisfying life that never ends. We suffer and await Christ's glory.