

21.05.02

LAMENT - expression of grief or sorrow.

LIVE INTRODUCTION TO SERMON-

START with breath and prayer...

As scholar Brueggemann says “in lament, pain is brought to speech, and when it’s brought to speech, it turns to energy. If it’s not brought to speech, it turns to despair.”

As we sit with lament this morning, we come as witnesses - bearing witness to one who is mostly voiceless.

Part of our work as followers of Christ is to create spaces for pain to be brought to speech - our own pain, and the pain of others. Brueggemann said this can be painful. Inconvenient. And yet it’s necessary, for hearing and naming our pain converts us and with God’s help, converts those who listen. Sitting with the pain of others has the power to break us out of our numbness. For some, it’s the numbness of having so much, of being the powerful and privileged in the land.

This has been a long season of lament, of lockdown, of saying “how long Oh Lord?”,

It’s been a long season of lament as we watch those we know and love die, not sure how to mourn in this time of COVID,

A long season of lament as we watch those we don’t know - lives of those with various skin tones and colors die from mass shootings, police violence, human brokenness.

We come before God and before one another, creating space for our laments to be heard.

Today we hear the story from the book of 2 Samuel, the story of David and Bathsheba. We will hear the story read from our sacred scripture, woven with the voice of Bathsheba, who is nearly voiceless in our text. Join me in holding her lament. And as you hold her lament, consider what it might be to give voice to your own lament - bringing the pain you hold, to speech - before God and before others.

I want to acknowledge the work of Wilda Gafney, from *Womanist Midrash* - as it deeply shaped Bathsheba’s voice in what follows.

(Material from Wilda Gafney's *Womanist Midrash* used throughout this monologue)<sup>1</sup>

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful.

*My life was ordinary - my husband was often gone for long stretches, a soldier in the king's army. Usually the king would be leading his men in battle, but this time we're told he stayed behind while all the men of Israel went to war. Why? Why didn't he lead his men? Oh this choice, to stay behind, it's where my story begins.*

David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, 'This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.' So David sent messengers to fetch her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.)

*Now I am named in your text, Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam, wife of Uriah the Hittite. My name means "daughter of an oath". I am a promise kept.*

*And promises I have kept. I was always faithful to my husband. Simply out taking a bath. Yes, the king sent messengers, sent his men - to fetch? No, they took me, as an object of his desire.*

*Why me, I have often wondered, why? He already shared his home with 6 other women and their children. Did he need to claim one more?*

*Yes, he lay with me. Some have said there was a hint of consent. Where did you get that notion? Does a woman, a woman whose husband is not home, have any power? This was not consent. No, this was rape.*

Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, 'I am pregnant.'

*I returned home. Alone. No guards escorting me. I was left to find my own way, and what a long, lonely walk it was. But do you not think the neighbors knew? No one was there to greet me, welcome me home, comfort me, protect me.*

*And then the bleeding did not come. Dread filled me - my worst nightmare come true.*

*But how to let the king know? I couldn't just walk up to the palace and demand to be seen. No, once again I am voiceless, unseen. Woman. And so the humiliation continued. Word traveled through messengers. My pain, shared from mouth to mouth, whispered, finally into the ear of the king. How many carried my secret, knew the shame I carried within my body?*

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<sup>1</sup> Gafney, Wilda. 2017. *Womanist Midrash: A reintroduction to the women of the Torah and the throne*. Westminster John Knox Press.

*Now listen - listen to what happens next. I knew none of this - for I was home, alone. Unspeakable treachery was happening while I carried on with making a life, unaware, uninformed. Alone.*

So David sent word to Joab, 'Send me Uriah the Hittite.' And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, 'Go down to your house, and wash your feet.' Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. When they told David, 'Uriah did not go down to his house', David said to Uriah, 'You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?' Uriah said to David, 'The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing.' Then David said to Uriah, 'Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.' So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

*Uriah, he was a good man, a faithful man - faithful to his king.*

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, 'Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die.' As Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant warriors. The men of the city came out and fought with Joab; and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite was killed as well. Then Joab sent and told David all the news about the fighting...; and he instructed the messenger, 'When you have finished telling the king all the news about the fighting, then, if the king's anger rises, and if he says to you, "Why did you go so near the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? Who killed Abimelech son of Jerubbaal? Did not a woman throw an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so near the wall?" then you shall say, "Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead too." ' (DO NOT USE)

So the messenger went, and came and told David all that Joab had sent him to tell. The messenger said to David, 'The men gained an advantage over us, and came out against us in the field; but we drove them back to the entrance of the gate. Then the archers shot at your servants from the wall; some of the king's servants are dead; and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.' David said to the messenger, 'Thus you shall say to Joab, "Do not let this matter trouble you, for the sword devours now one and now another; press your attack on the city, and overthrow it." And encourage him.' (OMIT)

*Not only Uriah died, but many other women became widows that day. The king's sin ruined many a life that day. Yes, this is my story, but the pain is not mine alone.*

When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.

*Finally, word of my husband. I hadn't heard from him for quite some time - but that's how it goes in war. As the child grew within me, I was given the news. What did I know of the treachery involved, you might wonder... when did I learn of the king's involvement, the king's deliberate ordering his death? Hmmm... eventually we all knew.*

*Yes, I made lamentation for him. I wailed, I, his wife, mourned the loss of the only husband I knew.*

*And then, as my belly grew and grew, finally the men returned, this time 'gathering me', collected as a possession. There is no asking for my hand in marriage, no proposal...and again, no consent. I was made yet another of his many wives.*

*And then the birth. A son! Born of my womb, sucking on my breast. How could I not love this new life, even if it resulted from unspeakable horror? This was a child, born of my own flesh and blood.*

But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, 'There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meagre fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveller to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.' Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, 'As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.'

Nathan said to David, 'You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.'

*Nathan knew, was aware of the sins committed. Nathan speaks of my innocence, my powerlessness. I am not at fault. The fault lies entirely with the king. Should I find joy in this pronouncement of vindication? Joy? When in the story the prophet tells the king he refers to me as a lamb? Not even human. An animal. David, the king, responds with such righteous anger at the taking of a lamb. What about me? Does he see me, too?*

*And how can there be any joy, when once again, the pain inflicted by the king will bring havoc to more women - the wives once again used as bartering chips, used to shame the king. Do we not matter? Are we not equal in the eyes of the LORD our God? "Oh God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?" (Psalm 22: 1-2)*

*The shame of the king becomes the shame of his people.*

David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' Nathan said to David, 'Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die.' Then Nathan went to his house.

*This king admits his sin. One line, just one line naming all his wrongs: 'I have sinned against the Lord.' That's it. No catalogue of sins against the countless others whose lives are broken.*

The Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became very ill. David therefore pleaded with God for the child; David fasted, and went in and lay all night on the ground.

*The story continues in your text, telling of how my husband, David, the father of my child, fasted and prayed for 7 days. When the child, another unnamed victim, dies, he washed, changed and worshipped the Lord, then he ate, saying*

The elders of his house stood beside him, urging him to rise from the ground; but he would not, nor did he eat food with them. On the seventh day the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead; for they said, 'While the child was still alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us; how then can we tell him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm.' But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, he perceived that the child was dead; and David said to his servants, 'Is the child dead?' They said, 'He is dead.'

Then David rose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes. He went into the house of the Lord, and worshipped; he then went to his own house; and when he asked, they set food before him and he ate. Then his servants said to him, 'What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while it was alive; but when the child died, you rose and ate food.' He said, (OMIT)

'While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, "Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me, and the child may live." But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.'

*Done. Over. time to move on. Is that how tragedy is for the powerful? Tell me, when you learn of the suffering, the death, of others - ones you have not touched, have not cared for - for those who remain nameless to you - can you simply say a prayer of lament and turn back to your life? Is that how it goes? The nameless are cast aside, easily forgotten? Those of us who knew the names, we do not forget so easily. The pain remains, marks us, shapes us.*

Then David consoled his wife Bathsheba, and went to her, and lay with her; and she bore a son, and he named him Solomon. The Lord loved him, and sent a message by the prophet Nathan; so he named him Jedidiah, because of the Lord.

*And so my story continues. Somehow out of my tragedy again comes new life. This is the way of the LORD. Our scriptures tell us: 'the LORD makes all things new.' (Isaiah 43:18) Yes, the LORD continued to provide. The LORD opened my womb 4 more times - blessed me with children, blessed me with laughter, blessed me with a future. I am not heard of again in scripture for more than 30 years. But, if you look carefully, my story re-surfaces when I help secure the throne for my son, Solomon.*

*Eventually, at some point Lament turned to joy. Out of sadness life came forth. The LORD is faithful. I will claim that. But I beseech you, you who are listening. Do not turn this story of mine into a fairytale that ends 'happily ever after'. It's not so neat and tidy.*

*Hold my lament, my pain, knowing it's not all there is to me. This story is not all there is to David.*

*Lament is one part, and just one part, of all of our complex, beautiful, messy lives.*

*While the words of this psalm are attributed to King David - that complex, God fearing man that he was - I claim them as my own, and offer them as a blessing for you, may your pain find hope in God:*

### **Psalm 13**

How Long, Oh God? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I wrestle with my anguish,  
and wallow in despair all day long?

I trust in your love;  
my heart rejoices  
in the deliverance you bring.  
I'll sing to you, Yahweh, for being so good to me.

Sermon response song:

[Lament Songs - Album by The Porter's Gate | Spotify](#)

From audio conversation with Brueggemann used in call to worship:

<https://www.restorecommons.com/walter-brueggemann-lament-and-narratives/>

Starts at 3:10 - 6:30