

**Proper 8B, June 27, 2021, St. Anne's
2 Samuel 1:1, 17 – 27; Psalm 130; Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43**

Sadly, loss is an inescapable part of life, and the resulting grief and emotional pain can't just be wished away. It doesn't matter whether you're experiencing the physical death of someone you love, the loss of a relationship through divorce or other break-up, the loss of a dream, the loss of a job or some other loss - *grief* is a normal and necessary part of our healing process. Which is why every culture around the world has rituals to help us deal with mourning and grief and to help us mark the transition. But our North American culture has steadily downplayed mourning rituals of all kinds until they are practically non-existent. We prefer to try to hide death - both physical and metaphorical) and pretend it doesn't happen. Even funerals are no longer seen as a time for us to *mourn* our loss but rather to celebrate the life. And while it's good to remember all that was good about a loved one – it's doesn't take away our need to mourn their loss from our life. And tragically more and more often the funeral is just eliminated altogether. I'm always deeply saddened when people tell me that they can't have a memorial service for a now deceased loved one because "they said they didn't want a funeral." They didn't want anyone crying over them. I always think that's a terrible and incredibly **selfish** thing to do to your family and friends. As if somehow not allowing them to have a formal chance to say good-bye will prevent them from feeling sad that you're dead. Our culture tries to treat death as something to be dealt with as quickly as possible so we can 'move on'. The thought seems to be if you just skip over those few days or weeks of mourning then you won't have to feel sad at all. But it just doesn't work that way. Tragically we've lost the ancient art of *lament*, and I think we need to relearn it.

Today's OT passage is David's lament over the death of King Saul and Saul's son Jonathan. This lament is an extraordinary piece of literature and I think it would be wonderful if we could create such a beautiful piece of poetry for *every* funeral. In this poem David expresses his deep grief over the deaths, and his undying love for his friend Jonathan.

But the really interesting thing about this lament for King Saul is... well, that David is *lamenting* him. If we'd read the chapters that precede today's text you'd be *surprised* that David isn't *celebrating* Saul's death! Because David is grieving for a man who has tried to **kill** him on *numerous* occasions. But, David clearly had a very high theology of the role of an anointed king and believed that no human should lift his hand against God's chosen king. And to give David his due, despite his numerous *dubious* actions during his time as 'king-in-waiting' he *refused* to kill Saul **even** when he had chances to do so. According to the narrator, it was **Saul** who'd grown increasingly mentally unstable - paranoid and jealous of David's military skill and popularity. So, in his lament David gives Saul his due as a *king* who, *despite* his faults, still did great things for Israel.

On the other hand, there's no surprise **at all** about David's genuine, *deep* grief over the loss of his close friend Jonathan. While some people speculate about whether or not David and Jonathan had a sexual relationship, the truth is we don't, and *can't*, know one way or the other. But what **is** clear, is that theirs was a relationship of great depth. Jonathan, despite being Saul's eldest son and *heir*, and therefore the one with the *most* to lose from David's popularity, *consistently* supported David. *Three times* Jonathan made a covenant with David. And *three times* he saved David's life by warning him of Saul's

intention to kill him. We're told that in his covenant, Jonathan's soul (or the word can be translated as life) is bound to the soul of David and he loves David as he loves his own *life*. This love is clearly reciprocated when David declares Jonathan's love as surpassing the love of a woman. Which is probably intended a metaphor to try to express the depth of their relationship and its closeness. In a very real sense, David has lost his *soulmate*. The one he could share both laughter and tears with. Joy and sorrow. The person who stood by him through thick and thin. This was a relationship that could bear all the emotions that life brings. And so, David **laments**.

Like our best human relationships, our relationship with God also needs to be big enough, and deep enough, to survive all the myriad of emotions we encounter in life. The Old Testament shows a healthy understanding of grief and the various ways people deal with it. And it shows God as able to hear and accept the *whole range* of human emotions - anger, joy, sorrow, trust, blame, revenge, questioning God, asking "**why**" - all these and more are acceptable to God. I think we've forgotten that the whole range of emotion - including *lament* - is a natural part of our relationship with God and each other. God doesn't expect us to be constantly happy and upbeat. Nor is God *Donald Trump* constantly demanding our praise and affirmation. There are times in our lives when we *need* to weep, or shake our fist at God and **rage** at life's *unfairness*. Like a true friend, like a *soulmate*, God is still *with* us even *when* we cry out in anger or pain or blame. God is able to 'take' our anger and rage. Maybe your anger is justified or maybe it's *not* - but either way, God **is** with you.

So, it's *okay* to take all our emotions to God. It's *important* to *lament* and mourn when life is painful. Just as a deep and authentic relationship with another *person* requires honesty and emotional depth, so too does our relationship with God. If we limit our relationship with God to just **praise** God, or asking for what you *want*, then it's going to be a very stunted relationship. You have to be able to take **everything** to God - both good *and* bad. And so, as people of faith, we need to create a church where death and loss can be faced, and our grief and yes, sometime our anger at God, can be safely expressed. David's lament reminds us not to move away from our pain too *quickly* after something bad happens.

Grief **is** normal and natural - but we need to remember it's **not** the final word. David grieved deeply over the death of Jonathan- but he didn't **stay** there. God was still at work in his life and David still had life to live. The promise of God is not that nothing bad will happen, but that death and loss *aren't* the **end** of the story. There **will** be healing – whether in this life or the next. The God who calls us to follow, also calls us into deep and true relationship amidst the ambiguities, and ups and downs of life. Like David, we can lament our losses, shake our fist at God when we need to, and then continue to walk in love and friendship with the God who loves **us** and asks for honest relationship in return.