
“Thus Saith the Lord: Cry... Just Cry”

A SERMON on Lamentations 1:1-6 for the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Preached 5 October 2025 by the Rev. Matthew Emery, Lead Minister

Cloverdale United Church, Surrey, British Columbia, Canada

Because she's hungry.
Because her diaper needs changing.
Because she's too hot.
Because she's too cold.
Because she's bored.
Because she's overstimulated.
Because she needs sleep.
Because she has gas.
Because she's teething.
Because she's sick.
Because of “something small.” Something so small you'll never know what it is.
Because she misses the womb.¹

These are the twelve reasons for your infant to cry, as told by a baby book to author and memoirist Heather Kirn Lanier, back when she was a new mother. That same giant baby “tells [Heather] that [her] newborn is considered ‘easy.’” “She’s easy because she’s consolable,” Heather writes. “If she cries, I can make her stop by nursing her, shushing her, snuggling her, or swaddling her. When all else fails, I sit on a large exercise ball and bounce her, and her onyx eyes turn serene and gaze at the bookshelves. Other mothers warn me that she’ll spit up, but she never does.” Now, the baby book may tell Heather that her baby is considered “easy,” but I’m not sure I think Heather agrees. After all, she also tells her readers of asking her husband, Jeffrey, where was that leaflet the hospital gave them—“The one called ‘Babies Cry a Shit Ton.’” (*I hope you’ll excuse the language.*)

As we listen to the voice speaking in today’s scripture reading—the opening verses of the Old Testament book titled Lamentations—we know that the voice cries out not because of “something small.” Something so small you’ll never know what it is.”

We who hear these words from 2,500 years in the future know that it was something big—something very big—that caused voices to cry out with weeping as they wondered about the presence and power of God. You see, the nation had been conquered. The city and the temple laid in ruin. And the people were being hauled away, off to the foreign conqueror’s capital, Babylon, where we now know the people would be held captive in exile for some 50 years.

For those of us who have been journeying together in worship over these past few weeks as we’ve heard various snippets from the voice of the prophet Jeremiah, we’ve finally now reached the moment wherein all the bad things Jeremiah had been trying to warn about have come true. Because the nation and its people have not been faithful to the covenant God has made with them, and have not followed in the life-giving paths that God set out for them, they have been taken over and all that seemed stable, and right, and even holy, has been destroyed.

Does God *cause* this misery? Or does God not *cause* it, but nevertheless allows it to happen? Or does God have nothing to do with it, except that God is present in and with and through it?

¹ Heather Kirn Lanier, “Twelve Reasons to Cry,” *The Sun*, issue 445 (January 2013); <https://www.thesunmagazine.org/articles/27378-twelve-reasons-to-cry>

These are the sorts of questions that people with the luxury of distance from pain can entertain. In the midst of the pain, though, the attempts to rationalize and explain and logically account for it all—they fall flat. After all, as I distinctly remember a teacher and mentor of mine telling his students, in the midst of tragedy when someone asks “why did this thing happen?” that’s rarely the actual question. After all, there is no answer to that question. The real question is not so much “why did this happen?” but rather, “how will I go on, now that it has?”

In the midst of the pain, the suffering, the sorrow and grief, what the voices cry out for is not explanation or rationalization. The voices cry out simply to be heard, to be witnessed, and to be accompanied—to have someone able and willing to stand with them in the pain, not to fix or to fight, but simply to be.

We who live our lives according to the norms of middle class Euro-North-American culture, we don’t tend to have an easy time with lament. Especially for those of us of British Isles blood in our veins, we are the inheritors of the “stiff upper lip” and the “keep calm[s] and carry on[s]”. Mourning, crying, sorrow, these are things to be carried out behind closed doors—that is, if they ever get carried out at all. Various forms of liberal optimisms at different points across the 20th century furthered the trajectory; amidst the I’m OK, you’re OK, spirit of the 1980s and 90s, our primary hymnal here in The United Church of Canada, *Voices United*, was published in 1996 without any sections or index headings at all labelled “lament” or “struggle”, while candy-sweet sentiments like “Sing a Happy Hallelujah” and “Jesus bids us shine with a clear pure light” are plentiful and easy to find among its pages.

When it comes right down to it, though, any of us who live in the real world know that pain is real. We see the disease, the dismay, and the destruction all around us, and we rightly wonder whether if God is angry, or if we’ve done something wrong, or if rather the universe simply is a cruel and messed up place.

The thing is, though, God knows our pain, too. Even though a lot of people try to say a lot of pious things in the face of suffering, thinking that we can put a “nice” spin on things, all we end up doing is spitting in the face of the Christ who himself cries out from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” It is a strange thing, in a way, if we think too hard on it, this crying out of Jesus from the cross. Jesus cries out that God has forsaken him, and yet he makes this prayer, this cry, right to this very same God. And this is no mere passing comment. This is not a rhetorical question. This is a prayer, a wailing, a cry out from the very depths, unto the very ear of God.

Quite frankly, the infants among us are arguably smarter than we are, for they know to cry out... to cry out in hunger, in pain, in longing. In fact, when a baby is born, her cry is one of the ways we know she’s ok. The cry means his lungs have taken in sufficient oxygen, and that his body is getting ready to live life in the space we occupy between the womb and the tomb. That is to say, the cry means that we are ready to live in the world that God has made and loves so much, the world where God walks alongside us.

And so, my friends, I say to you, don’t shy away from the pain... yours or another’s. Cry, simply cry... and as you do, find yourself surrounded by countless generations who have cried out before you. Moreover, find yourself in the very presence of God, the one whose womb our souls miss, the One in whose heart our hearts find their true rest.

Blessing and honour, glory and power be unto God, now and forever. Amen.