

Prayer of the Week:

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of this world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

(Source: Book of Common Prayer 2019, Collects of the Christian Year, The Fifth Sunday in Lent)

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made.

We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen.



The Fourth Poem

Lamentations 4:2-9 (NLT)

March 21st

Intro

The fourth poem of Lamentations makes comparisons between the way things were in the past and the way things are now in the siege.

-Children used to play in the streets and laugh together, but now they are left to beg for food.

-The wealthy used to eat fancy meals, only to find themselves scavenging for food along the ground.

-The leaders of the city we once filled with splendor, but now are dirty, ragged, and unrecognizable.

Chapter four takes a deeper dive into lament.

Three Observations

1. The need for lament continues for as long as injustice and sin continue. Life doesn't always resolve the way we want or hope.

While life is not a formula of predictable outcomes, we can rest in the hope of redemption. Lament IS NOT the loss of hope, but an expression of it! Just as the conditions for suffering persist, so does our lament. This DOES NOT mean we live overwhelmed by sadness or despair. Rather, it means that a full-bodied faith is honest and willing to

engage in the hard realities of life.

2. The most revered are only human.

Look at vss. 7-8, "Our princes once glowed with health brighter than snow, whiter than milk. Their faces were as ruddy as rubies, their appearance like fine jewels. 8 But now their faces are blacker than soot. No one recognizes them in the streets. Their skin sticks to their bones; it is as dry and hard as wood.

Celebrity is the term we've used to describe people we revere as more valuable. The Latin root of our word "celebrity" means "honored." We honor those with the most. Those with the most often have the most because of their beauty. Or their political power.

Lamentations chapter four challenges the celebrity impulse by pointing out suffering and injustice is no respecter of celebrity or power or beauty or platform. There is this universality to the human experience.

This is why the incarnation of God is so important. God held the highest privilege and honor and let that go to enter the human experience. The Creator God became unrecognizable. He entered into the injustice, sin, and brokenness in order to redeem it. May we see Lamentations four, not just as a critique of celebrity (and the ways celebrity has entered the church), but as a reminder of what God has done in Christ.

3. The innocent suffer the most.

Verses 3-4 describe the toll that the siege took on the children of Jerusalem. This points us to an important truth: It is the most vulnerable who suffer the most in a broken world.

Suffering, disaster, injustice are all common to the human experience, but these things disproportionately affect vulnerable communities.

This lament is an invitation to recognize this reality. To admit out loud when we are less effected by an event because of our wealth, access to health care, or color of our skin. Then, to see and know the invitation that God gives the Church to participate in caring for vulnerable communities.