

Second Sunday in Lent, C
Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18
Psalm 27
Philippians 3:17-4:1
Luke 13:31-35

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Heartbreaking. The word is everywhere. *Heartbreaking.*

The world takes in images of Ukrainian families camped in subway stations, refugees massing at borders, neighborhoods bombed and tanks rolling and bodies being buried. It is *heartbreaking*.

In the middle of a Portland street a woman with mental illness rages, flailing her arms and screaming her troubles to the air. It is *heartbreaking*.

A therapist tells of a teenage client who died of a drug overdose. “It’s *heartbreaking*,” is all he can say.

Another young black man dead from gun violence. Earth’s oceans rising from global warming. *Our hearts just keep breaking.*

When Aaron and I lost our parents to death last year, we treasured every sympathy card we received. One person wrote, “*My heart breaks with you.*” Such a simple message. It didn’t solve anything, but there was solidarity in knowing we weren’t alone in being *brokenhearted*. Other hearts were joining ours. It gave us strength.

Sometimes it feels like the weight of the world’s struggle is breaking our hearts. And when things are *truly heartbreaking*, what is a person of faith to do?

One time-honored response is **lament**, which Jesus models today.

Lament is the kind of prayer where we pour out broken hearts to God. It’s one of the most honest forms of prayer there is. In lament we express grief and sadness and fear and anger, we name what troubles us. We lay it all before God. We admit we don’t have a solution. We don’t know what comes next. But we believe that if anyone does know – it’s God. And if anyone can make a difference – it’s God.

Lament is a practice tailor-made for this particular season of Lent. So let’s take the time to explore what that could mean.

The Bible is full of laments – including two-thirds of the Psalms. Reading through the book of Psalms, you cannot miss the way people cry out to God against enemies who threaten and betrayers who steal and all those who abuse. Psalmists lament loneliness and loss, illness and danger. They bring their pain and the world’s pain freely before God.

The church ignored these lament psalms for a long time, embarrassed by how raw they are, believing worship was meant to be upbeat and positive. Our old hymnals used to print only the happy psalms. But that was less than honest. We cannot always be thanking and praising God. When life breaks our hearts, God wants to hear it, and God's people need to speak it.

Our newest hymnal includes all the psalms, including those that wail with heartbreak and plead for God to crush enemies. They may seem ugly, but they are undeniably real. Scripture trusts that God can handle the real struggles of real people, because God has promised to be faithful with unfailing love, justice, and righteousness.

Do we trust God that way? Do we trust that when we cry out our deepest woes, God will stay and listen... God will not turn away... God will hang on with us through the dark night... and yes, God will help, one way or another.

In the Bible, lament brings transformation. Lament provokes change, one way or another. There is almost always a turning point in biblical laments. God responds, not necessarily wiping out all evil, but God gets people through. Courage is restored. Hope returns. God's people are able to breathe again, greet another day, give thanks. They move through the crisis in God's company, until they are together on the other side, closer than before.

Lament moves faith forward. It actually deepens our relationship with God. As we practice lament, we grow and mature in faith.

And Jesus shows what lament is about.

Jesus laments over Jerusalem. He knows he will die there. His eyes are wide open to danger from that crafty fox, Herod -- but instead of cursing, Jesus weeps, in sadness, and tenderness, and longing:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!

He could be lamenting any city, any place where human power resists the new life God brings. It could be a lament over Moscow, or Washington DC. A lament over Chicago or Portland or Kyiv. A lament for the whole human family, distorted by lies and divisions and greed and incompetence and war and power that serves only itself. Jesus cries:

How often I've yearned to gather your children together like a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

It's the brokenhearted cry of a parent, desperate to stop their child's self-destructive behavior. We've cried that cry ourselves, at times. Jesus isn't writing Jerusalem off, far from it. Like a mother hen, Jesus wants to gather them under protective wings. Shelter them, comfort and cradle them, repair and heal them. If only they would come home. But they always turn away. It is *heartbreaking*.

Yet there is beauty in how Jesus holds onto tenderness in the face of danger. He allows his own heart to be broken by the tragedies people inflict. He shows us how God's heart breaks with us. We should never doubt that. In fact, the place of our deepest pain is exactly the place where God meets us. Because that's how profound God's love is.

And there is more. Even while Jesus' heart is breaking – maybe *because* it is breaking – Jesus shows incredible resolve to move ahead with God's healing work. He is courageous, intentional, deliberate:

You tell that fox that today, tomorrow and the next day I'll keep right on healing and casting out demons. God's healing work will not be slowed down by your threats!

Christ's broken heart only fuels his resolve to be a mother hen, not a fox. To heal instead of hurting. To make space for aching grief and deep love -- and also courageous action.

Because God is never deterred by the dangers and evils that make us afraid. No matter who is plotting, no matter what death lies ahead. God will always keep on healing people and calling out evil. God will always continually gather us in – to find refuge under God's wings, to shelter with God, and stand firm in God's promises. Even when our hearts are breaking. Especially then.

God gives us the gift of lament, and in this Lenten season, I believe we're meant to use it early and often. What will that look like?

It might be downright scary. I've heard more than one person confess, *My heart is so full and so fragile right now, I can't even take in this terrible news from Ukraine. I just don't know what to do with it.*

Lament knows what to do. When our hearts are breaking, we cry out to God. Especially when the situation is too big for us to handle.

We might be afraid that if we truly open our broken hearts to God, the flow of lament will never stop! We might be afraid our lament will sound like weakness. But our deepest fear? That lament will do no good. That when we pour out heart and soul, so truthfully, so honestly –nobody will be listening. That's the fear of every person who trusts the Lord. It's a vulnerable place to be.

Yet remember who Jesus is, vulnerable on our behalf. The mother hen. The place of sheltering love, welcoming hospitality, open-hearted compassion. Always calling us

home. Always ready to listen. God is our place of refuge. Scripture says, *The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.* (Ps 34:18) *God heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.* (Ps 147:3)

So, trusting in who God is, we might speak our lament like this:

Holy God, today we are daring to trust you. You made us your own in Baptism. You have guided us all our days until now. We don't know any other God but you. So we are daring to cry out.

We might borrow the words of the Reverend Fran Pratt, in her Litany for Ukraine:

*"Holy God, We are sad and sick at heart
That war has once again been waged on innocents, on anyone.
We lament and mourn this tragedy, we cry out for bloodshed to cease.*

*We cry out for peace and safety for all Ukrainians.
We cry out for wise and bold leaders who are clever, creative, and committed to the good of all.*

Thwart the bloodthirsty and power-hungry, God.

Deny the greedy.

Lay waste to the plans of the wicked.

Confuse the minds of evil-doers.

Somehow, we must not let evil win the day. Help us.

Oh God, war brings us to the very ends our ourselves -

The edges of our own humanity, the far reach of love.

Hear our broken cry."

Adapted a lot from Litany for Ukraine by Rev. Fran Pratt ©Fran Pratt [franpratt.com](http://www.franpratt.com)
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Lament is *holy brokenheartedness*. Lament is solidarity with everyone who suffers.

We keep our hearts open, the way Christ did. And we grow in faith as we allow God to lead us into a deeper understanding of who God is.

Human love will fail, but God's love endures.

Human wisdom is so often foolish, but God is wise beyond all knowing.

Human greed consumes others, but God's generosity feeds multitudes.

Human lust for power kills, but God's divine power saves and heals.

And we should not be surprised if, as we lament and pour out our hearts, God's spirit stirs in our troubled souls, and leads us to new resolve. A vision of what the next step will be. Amen.