

**Our Savior Lutheran Church
Sermon – Tim Leitner, SAM
June 14, 2020
Second Sunday after Pentecost**

+Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ.

As I worked on this message, I started to think, after two weeks of my preaching while Pastor Barnes was fishing, we all will be ready for his return to the pulpit and expecting more uplifting messages. Especially considering my message this week focuses on readings of lament, Jeremiah 20 and Psalm 69. And if that was not enough lamenting, I added a hymn between those two readings, **How Long, O God**. This is one of eight hymns in the ELW categorized under Lament.

While pondering these lamentations, I found myself rather than focusing on what Jeremiah and the psalmist were suffering, I was drawn to how they spoke to God in their time of desperate need. It wasn't whining and complaining. Theirs were cries to God; angry, desperate cries for God's help while questioning God on why God had been silent, absent. Exploring scripture, it is surprising how much lamentation it contains.

My study bible listed 60 psalms of lament, though initially referred to as prayers for help, reading them, we find the authors were lamenting. Our psalm reading today is only a small portion of the 36 verses of Psalm 69, the majority being lamenting. This psalm begins: **Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire...I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.** The author obviously is in serious distress, overcome with troubles and wanting God to intervene maybe even questioning God about His absence/silence.

In the verses we read today, the psalmist laments about being alienated from family members, suffering insults and disapproval. These verses are softer complaints than what the psalmist expressed in the excluded verses. This assigned reading closes with this plea: **Answer me, O Lord, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me. Do not hide your face from your servant, for I am in distress—make haste to answer me. Draw near to me, redeem me, set me free.**

That is end of our reading but it is not the end of the psalm, because the author calls for God to unleash His anger upon the enemy. Finally in verse 29 the psalmist calms and closes with honest hope and faith in God: **But I am lowly and in pain; let your salvation, O God, protect me. I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving. Let the oppressed see it and be glad; For the LORD hears the needy, and does not despise his own. Let heaven**

and earth praise him, For God will save Zion. With all the frustration and desperation, this psalmist fully knew God is the only, one True Hope. Our True Salvation!

Moving to the lamenting from Jeremiah; this is the ‘soft’ portion of this prophet’s lament to God. We hear Jeremiah heaping all the blame on God, for his troubles and tribulations. God has given Jeremiah messages to deliver that no one wants to hear and the delivery of those messages bring nothing but scorn upon Jeremiah.

The prophet is torn up inside, wanting to refuse speaking God’s message, knowing the pain and trouble it causes him but unable to remain quiet, describing that he has a ‘**burning fire shut up in my bones**’ when he attempts to withhold what God has given him to prophesize.

Beyond today’s verses Jeremiah graphically states that he wishes he was never born. But as in Psalm 69, Jeremiah boldly proclaims: **Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.** Jeremiah retained his faith in the midst of his misery and even with his feelings of God’s abandonment.

These readings of lament may sound like whining and complaining from God’s faithful servants but they are prayers for help in times of desperation, in the face of severe troubles. In the times we live in, a prayer for help, such lament as we read today is definitely appropriate. When all appears to be against us, we find guidance here in scripture on how we are to survive these extremely difficult times. We lament.

These scripture passages of lament teach us that we may turn to God in anger and hurt, voicing our troubles and calling out to God who may appear silent/absent. But our lamenting is not to only voicing complaints. They are not words at a time when we turn away from God. It is in turning toward God, crying out for help, being brutally honest that our condition feels hopeless; our pain is beyond what we can handle. Our lament, our cries for help are not final words but rather they lead us back to God’s promise for us.

Knowing we have a God that wants a relationship with us, a God that cares for us enough to listen to our prayers, knowing we have a God that loves us beyond any understanding, brings us comfort. That brings us hope and it strengthens us to carry on with the work God has given us to do here in the world.

In the written version of this message, I included the words for the hymn of lament, **How Long, O God.** I encourage you to read through those words. I found much comfort and hope in the lines: **O God, set free our voice to name the sorrows, name the pain, that we might yet rejoice. Though we are lost, alone, afraid, our God will lead us home.**

Having a relational God allows us, actually blesses us with voices to scream and yell in our frustration and our pain. It allows us to be honest with ourselves about our shortcomings and our sinfulness. With such a loving God, we may cry out for help knowing we are always heard. We have no fear that God will turn away from us because we are HIS, He created us and as we voice our pain and our needs, as we lament; as so many in scriptures has done before us; we find that we are in fact holding onto our faith in God with all our might.

It is a joy to realize that we can turn to God in joy-filled praise and thanksgiving but also turn to God in frustration and suffering. Our God allows and expects us to call out to Him with smiles, in times of happiness but just as importantly call out to Him with tears in our eyes, during our darkest times.

We may feel that we wait for God. that is noted in so much scriptural lamenting, but truly it is that we are so bound up in our troubles, we forget that God is always with us. It is our sin of self-involvement that we miss God's presence. It is in our impatience and wish for our desired outcome that we miss that God is here. God has never and will never leave us.

Knowing we are blessed with such a loving and comforting God, a God that has given us the only hope that we can always trust, a God that is always with us, always available for our prayers of joy or lament. With all that, ***How can we keep from Singing?***

Which is the lead-in to the end of this message. There is a link in the posted bulletin to hear 140 New Yorkers performing a familiar hymn for us. This hymn strongly mixes lament with rejoicing in God's promise, finding strength in God's Love, and recognizing our salvation through Jesus the Christ. The video uses the secular wording of the hymn (both wordings are included below), so, I encourage you to sing along with the words we know so well, especially the chorus:

No storm can shake my inmost calm, while to that Rock, I'm clinging.

Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?

God's blessing and God's love be with you all!

Amen!

How Long, O God

1 ""How long, O God?"" the psalmist cries,
a cry we make our own,
for we are lost, alone, afraid,
and far away from home.

2 The evil lurks within, without,
it threatens to destroy

the fragile cords that make us one,
that bind our hearts in joy.

3 Your grace, O God, seems far away;
will healing ever come?

Our broken lives lie broken still;
will night give way to dawn?

4 How can we hope? How can we sing?

O God, set free our voice
to name the sorrows, name the pain,
that we might yet rejoice.

5 ""How long, O God?"" the psalmist cries,

a cry we make our own.

Though we are lost, alone, afraid,
our God will lead us home.

How Can I Keep from Singing

1: My life flows on in endless song; above earth's lamentation.
I hear the real, though far-off hymn that hails a new creation. **Chorus**

2: While though the tempest round me roars, I know the truth, it liveth.
And though the darkness round me close, songs in the night it giveth. **Chorus**

3: I lift my eyes. The cloud grows thin; I see the blue above it.
And day by day, this pathway smooths, since first I learned to love it. **Chorus**

Chorus: No storm can shake my inmost calm, while to that rock, I'm clinging
Since love prevails in heaven and earth, How can I keep from singing?

ELW # 763 My Life Flows On in Endless Song

1: My life flows on in endless song; above earth's lamentation.
I catch the sweet, though far-off hymn that hails a new creation. **Chorus**

2: Through all the tumult and the strife, I hear the music ringing.
It finds an echo in my soul, How can I keep from singing? **Chorus**

3: What though my joys and comforts die? The Lord my Savior liveth.
What though the darkness gather round? Songs in the night He giveth. **Chorus**

4: The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart, a fountain ever springing!
All things are mine since I am His! How can I keep from singing? **Chorus**

Chorus: No storm can shake my inmost calm, while to that Rock, I'm clinging
Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, How can I keep from singing?