



Making Room for Lament

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“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?” - Psalm 22:1 NRSV

Lament is an ancient practice, as hold as humanity itself. We shake our fists at the heavens and wonder where God is. We cry and wail when death breaks our hearts. We take to the streets to grieve injustice. We pour tears into our pillows and ask for a sign of life’s (or God’s) purpose.

We do a disservice to ourselves when we refuse to admit the pain of our lives and spirits. Lament is a necessary expression of the soul.

And listening to lament—showing up in love to recognize lament’s heartache—is a necessary practice of community.

If one person’s lament is not heard and acknowledged by another, it festers. If a community’s lament is met only by silence from the wider community, the sorrow swells. If the raging of the heart never experiences God’s grace whispering, “I hear you,” the lament builds. In Psalm 22, the poet is desperate for recognition—for community—in order to not feel alone in grief. “God has left me. Others despise me. Those who hear me, mock me.”

We injure one another when we refuse to acknowledge, to receive, to sit uncomfortably with the lament of others. Those who wanted Colin Kaepernick to stand so they didn’t have to pay attention to the lament represented in his kneeling not only strove to silence the pro football player but also to silence the lament of communities impacted by racialized police violence. Those who required Serena Williams to lower her voice when injustice unfairly applied its own rules were, in effect, insisting that Black women collectively keep silent their protests against misogyny. Those who preferred Anita Hill and Christine Blasey Ford not to describe the pain caused by men’s violence against them made a mockery of their trauma.

The rejection of public lament, the policing of protest, the preference that pain keep quiet, the refusal to hear dissent and to take seriously its grief: these are acts of community that undermine our collective well-being.

But to witness pain and to grieve for one another’s heartache: this is how community fosters grace and compassion.

To show up with love, not with judgment, when lament takes to the streets or the sports arena or the halls of Congress or perhaps just the kitchen table: this is how communities begin to imagine hope together.

“Where two or three are gathered,” Christians often remind one another. We are called to gather, to show up, to be witnesses to and for one another—even when the grief is uncomfortable, even when the lament makes us nervous, even when the rage of protest feels like it could tear us apart. Sharing our pain is precisely the experience that calls us together.

Let us not abandon one another, even as we trust that God does not abandon us.

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