

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

According to the book *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope* (Wipf & Stock, 1999), many classic denominational works of prayer and worship like the *Book of Common Prayer*, the *Missal of the Roman Catholic Church*, and even the green *Lutheran Book of Worship* that many of us know so well omitted between 60 and 70 percent of the lament or lament-like psalms.

Newer worship resources, like our red *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, have begun to change that practices and include all the psalms. Psalm 69, which we hear in today's readings, is one of those psalms of lament that may be less familiar to you.

In our world today, as people get involved in movements such as #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, and #ClimateStrike, engaging with such a potent psalm can be even more important. Our communities are groaning—and there is often no greater gift the church can give than to free people to let it all out. Is there a way this lament psalm might be used to help release the pains that people feel, and lift them up as an offering to God?

Let Us Be Gathered

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
whose steadfast love is everlasting,
whose faithfulness endures from generation to generation.
Amen.

Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess our sin.
Silence is kept for reflection.

Reconciling God,
we confess that we do not trust your abundance,
and we deny your presence in our lives.
We place our hope in ourselves
and rely on our own efforts.
We fail to believe that you provide enough for all.
We abuse your good creation for our own benefit.
We fear difference and do not welcome others
as you have welcomed us.
We sin in thought, word, and deed.
By your grace, forgive us;
through your love, renew us;
and in your Spirit, lead us;
so that we may live and serve you in newness of life. Amen.

Beloved of God,
by the radical abundance of divine mercy
we have peace with God through † Christ Jesus,
through whom we have obtained grace upon grace.

Our sins are forgiven.
Let us live now in hope.
For hope does not disappoint,
because God's love has been poured into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Song

Our gathering song today is "Lift High the Cross" (ELW # 660). One of the musicians of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Orion, Illinois, leads our singing.

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/JwyejWTCCjc>.

Prayer of the Day

Let us pray.

Teach us, good Lord God,
to serve you as you deserve,
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labor and not to ask for reward,
except that of knowing that we do your will,
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

Let Us Hear God's Word

A reading from Jeremiah:

⁷O Lord, you have enticed me,
and I was enticed;
you have overpowered me,
and you have prevailed.
I have become a laughingstock all day long;
everyone mocks me.
⁸For whenever I speak, I must cry out,
I must shout, "Violence and destruction!"
For the word of the Lord has become for me
a reproach and derision all day long.
⁹If I say, "I will not mention him,
or speak any more in his name,"
then within me there is something like a burning fire
shut up in my bones;
I am weary with holding it in,
and I cannot.
¹⁰For I hear many whispering:
"Terror is all around!
Denounce him! Let us denounce him!"
All my close friends
are watching for me to stumble.
"Perhaps he can be enticed,
and we can prevail against him,
and take our revenge on him."
¹¹But the Lord is with me like a dread warrior;
therefore my persecutors will stumble,
and they will not prevail.
They will be greatly shamed,

for they will not succeed.
Their eternal dishonor
will never be forgotten.
¹²O Lord of hosts, you test the righteous,
you see the heart and the mind;
let me see your retribution upon them,
for to you I have committed my cause.
¹³Sing to the Lord;
praise the Lord!
For he has delivered the life of the needy
from the hands of evildoers. (Jeremiah 20)

*The Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.*

A reading from the Psalms:

⁷Surely, for your sake I have suffered reproach,
and shame has covered my face.
⁸I have become a stranger to my own kindred,
an alien to my mother's children.
⁹Zeal for your house has eaten me up;
the scorn of those who scorn you has fallen upon me.
¹⁰I humbled myself with fasting,
but that was turned to my reproach.
¹¹I put on sackcloth also,
and became a byword among them.
¹²Those who sit at the gate murmur against me,
and the drunkards make songs about me.
¹³But as for me, this is my prayer to you, at the time you have set, O Lord:
"In your great mercy, O God, answer me with your unfailing help.
¹⁴Save me from the mire; do not let me sink;
let me be rescued from those who hate me and out of the deep waters.
¹⁵Let not the torrent of waters wash over me, neither let the deep swallow me up;
do not let the pit shut its mouth upon me.
¹⁶Answer me, O Lord, for your love is kind;
in your great compassion, turn to me.
¹⁷Hide not your face from your servant;
be swift and answer me, for I am in distress.
¹⁸Draw near to me and redeem me;
because of my enemies deliver me. (Psalm 69)

A reading from Romans:

^{1b}Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.
⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he

died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6)

*Word of God. Word of life.
Thanks be to God.*

*The holy gospel according to Matthew.
Glory to you, O Lord.*

[Jesus said to the twelve:] ²⁴“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

²⁶“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³²“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

³⁴“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

³⁶and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

*The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.*

Reflection on the Readings

When Jesus initially called the disciples, it was a simple invitation, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men and women.”

It was a new job opportunity, so to speak, and Jesus took them through a training period.

They sat at his feet. They learned from him. They watched him perform miracles. They asked questions and he answered. They went with him on the highways and the back roads, and they began to understand what this ministry that Jesus came to do was all about.

But that was in the beginning. Now, Matthew shows us that something changes.

The disciples move from being those who sit with Jesus and those who learn from Jesus to now being those sent into the world. Jesus sends them out to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, and cast out demons. He sends them out to be about the work of ministry—to be about the business of rescuing and redeeming humankind.

Jesus then basically tells them, “It’s serious work. And as you go out, I need you to understand some things. I need you to undergo a radical reorientation in how you look at life and how you look at this mission. You’re going to go out, but don’t think that life is going to be any different for you

than it has been for me. The student is not greater than the teacher. The servant is not greater than the master.”

It’s a harsh message. We like to believe that things get better. We can be tempted to believe (at least sometimes) that when Jesus calls us to follow him, that he will, one way or another, create a zone of acceptance and comfort that won’t come with the same kind of challenges that Jesus had to face.

But this is where Jesus reorients us. It won’t be a ministry of awards and popularity. It won’t be tied to prosperity and abundance. It won’t be exempt from public ridicule and opposition.

Instead, Jesus calls us to understand in new ways what it means to be his disciples and the cost that we will have to undergo. It will be a call to radical obedience. It will be a call to be obedient even when the world turns against you, even when the world rejects your message. It is a call that, indeed, may cost us our life. Not necessarily in blood (although for some that may be true), but perhaps in our relationships with others—parents, children, even spouses. Perhaps the cost will be in the work that we do—our job, our employment, our volunteering. Perhaps it will be in the places that we live. All of it can be severed in obedience to God’s will.

But that leads to the second reorientation that Jesus casts upon us. It is the reorientation of our perception of persecution. If we’re honest, no one likes opposition. No one likes to try to do what they’ve been called to do and have to deal with resistance in every direction. No one wants to have roadblocks. No one wants to be accused of things that are not their intent.

But Jesus is saying to the disciples, “Don’t be afraid. Don’t be afraid of those who will oppose you, for your life is so much more valuable than you can imagine.”

If you are to carry forth the ministry of Jesus Christ, you will place yourself in the presence of powerful opposition. You will find yourself being counter-cultural. You may even be anti-cultural.

Does that mean making ourselves premature martyrs? No—not at all.

What it means is that, as his disciples, Jesus is commanding us to not be held hostage by fear.

Fear is a powerful thing. As the science fiction author Frank Herbert so aptly once put it in his *Dune* novels: “Fear is the mind-killer.” In other words, and to put it more accurately, a culture of fear can oppress people—it can hold them in systems of bondage and slavery.

And so perhaps that is a portion of why Jesus doesn’t come today to cast a simple rendering of peace, but to cast a sword: so that we and our culture may be set free from slavery and bondage to fear.

Howard Washington Thurman was an African-American author, philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader who spoke to the issue of fear and how we, as Jesus’ disciples, may counter fear as we seek to minister and be the hands of God’s work.

He put it like this: “To the child of God, a scale of values becomes available by which people are measured and their true significance determined. Even the threat of violence, with the possibility of death that it carries, is recognized for what it is: merely the threat of violence with a death potential. Such a person (a child of God) recognizes that death cannot possibly be the worst thing in the world. There are some things that are worse than death. To deny one’s own integrity or personality in the presence of the human challenge is one of these things.”

Thurman goes on to declare, “The core of the analysis of Jesus is that every person is a child of God, the God of life that sustains all of nature and guarantees all the intricacies of the life process itself. Jesus suggests that it is quite unreasonable to assume that God, whose creative activity is expressed even in such details as the hairs of a person’s head, would exclude from God’s concern the life, the vital spirit, of

the persons themselves. This idea—that God is mindful of the individual—is of tremendous import in dealing with fear as a disease.”

Every person a child of God. Freed from death. Freed from slavery. Freed from fear. This is the same counter-cultural message that we also hear today from Paul as he writes about baptism in his letter to the Romans. In being reminded that we are children of God and joined to Christ, we are turned to new courage and toward new fearlessness.

Within this new fearlessness is also this: a radical reorientation of our perception of peace.

As we have heard, Jesus said, “I did not come to cast peace, but I came to cast sword.”

Now that’s a hard statement for us to comprehend because we like to talk about the Prince of Peace. We like to associate Jesus with a baby’s crib, starlight, soft blankets, and sheep that don’t stink. We like to imagine the Spirit blowing in soft gentle breezes and the whispering sounds of fields and trees. We like to picture the Father bringing us into a heaven filled with puffy clouds, the sound of harps, a reincarnation of our grandparents’ homestead, all the family we have ever known (except for the weird ones, of course), and things that will no longer change.

But what Jesus is really saying to us is that peace is not maintenance of the status quo. Peace is not the absence of creation. Peace is not avoiding change. Peace is not removing ourselves from conflict. Rather, peace is the practice of refining of all that is not part of God’s realm, so that righteousness and justice may reign. Peace is the realignment and movement and change of our priorities and our relationships.

In this way, Jesus redefines peace for us. Through Jesus, we realign our priorities and our commitments, and we begin to see all of these relationships according to God’s design for our lives.

And in this there is a creative tension that we do not avoid. In this peace, there is a creative tension that causes us to strive for the highest common denominator, not the lowest.

The radical reorientation of our perception of peace means that we begin to seek *shalom*—not just “peace” but the wholeness of God among all people.

Jesus sends us out as the baptized—as children of God—with the authority to embody and represent and testify to this radical new peace to every person in every place. He does this knowing that we and the world we encounter with that message will never again be the same.

Let us pray.

*Gracious God,
it’s not easy doing what you’ve asked us to do,
but because you go with us,
we can dare to submit ourselves to your work in our lives.*

*We thank you for your Holy Spirit which gives the courage to stand firm,
to die to ourselves, to rise to you,
and to do the work you have called us to.
Amen.*

Hymn of the Day

Our hymn of the day is “Oh, Praise the Gracious Power” (ELW # Musician Josh Jones leads us in singing the words to this song as set to a new tune written by him and one of his friends a little more than ten years ago.

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/0Si8lsrZFgE>. (Note: The original text of the song has seven stanzas. Josh sings stanzas 1, 2, 4, and 6 in this video recording.)

*1 Oh, praise the gracious pow'r
that tumbles walls of fear
and gathers in one house of faith
all strangers far and near:*

*Refrain
Praise Christ, praise Christ,
whose cross has made us one!
Praise Christ, praise Christ,
whose cross has made us one!*

*2 Oh, praise persistent truth
that opens fisted minds
and eases from their anxious clutch
the prejudice that blinds: Refrain*

*4 Oh, praise the word of faith
that claims us as God's own,
a living temple built on Christ,
our rock and cornerstone: Refrain*

*6 Oh, praise the pow'r, the truth,
the love, the word, the tide.
Yet more than these, oh, praise their source,
praise Christ the crucified: Refrain*

Prayers of Intercession

Although not included in Josh's video recording of "Oh, Praise the Gracious Power" in 2008, I have no doubt that he would include the third stanza if he were recording it again today:

*3 Oh, praise inclusive love,
encircling ev'ry race,
oblivious to gender, wealth,
to social rank or place.*

Let us pray.

Called into unity with one another and the whole creation, let us pray for our needy world, responding to each petition with words from today's psalm, "your love is kind."

A brief silence.

O God, Father in heaven, hold your church in your loving arms. Protect believers who face persecution for your sake. Bless the work of evangelists and teachers as they translate their faith into other languages. Strengthen our pastors, deacons, and church councils for their ministry during these troubling times.

A brief silence.

Hear us and help us, O God: your love is kind.

O God our provider, here in the north the summer solstice reminds us of your care for the whole creation. Renew the places where our land, air, and waterways have been harmed. Feed all your creatures, both the animals and the humans, with the sustenance they need for life. Guide us to sources of energy that do not destroy the earth you have created.

A brief silence.

Hear us and help us, O God: your love is kind.

O God our ruler, inspire leaders who will work toward justice for all. Lead us to ways of life that are free from racial and ethnic prejudice. Strengthen the world's democracies, and sustain those who are working to secure free and safe elections. Give a home to refugees. Form our military and our police to maintain peace and to inhibit violence.

A brief silence.

Hear us and help us, O God: your love is kind.

O God our physician, bring healing to all who are sick and suffering. Preserve the world from more waves of the coronavirus, and guide researchers who are seeking a vaccine. Protect those whose jobs expose them to contagion. Support our health care workers. We especially remember before you Pat, Valetta, Paul, Vallie, LaVaune, Kathy, Frank, Lisa, Rita, April, Bev, Bob, Beth, Marlene, and all those we name before you now.

A brief silence.

Hear us and help us, O God: your love is kind.

O God our peacemaker, inhabit each household in the land with your powerful peace. Train us to live together in harmony, especially when quarantined together. Nourish marriages, and sustain extended families. Protect children from harm of every kind.

A brief silence.

Hear us and help us, O God: your love is kind.

O God our source of life, bless all fathers and father figures as they face both long-standing and emerging family needs. Comfort those who long to be fathers and those for whom this day is difficult.

A brief silence.

Hear us and help us, O God: your love is kind.

O God our beginning and our end, we bless you for all our forebears in family and faith who have lived and died in you. Remind us of their sacrifices, and at the end bring us with them in your household of joy.

A brief silence.

Hear us and help us, O God: your love is kind.

Receive these prayers, O God, and those too deep for words; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Offering Prayer

God of goodness and growth,
all creation is yours,
and your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.
Water and word are signs of your abundant grace.
Sustain us through these gifts,

that we might proclaim your steadfast love
in our communities and in the world,
through Jesus Christ, our strength and our song.
Amen.

Let Us Be Sent in Service

Song

“I Love to Tell the Story” (ELW #661) is our sending song today. One of the musicians of Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Resurrection in Halifax, Nova Scotia, leads us in our singing through this fresh new video recording.

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/4m7AnpacSXw>.

*1 I love to tell the story
of unseen things above,
of Jesus and his glory,
of Jesus and his love.
I love to tell the story,
because I know it's true;
it satisfies my longings
as nothing else would do.*

*Refrain
I love to tell the story;
'twill be my theme in glory
to tell the old, old story
of Jesus and his love.*

*2 I love to tell the story:
how pleasant to repeat
what seems, each time I tell it,
more wonderfully sweet!
I love to tell the story,
for some have never heard
the message of salvation
from God's own holy word. Refrain*

*3 I love to tell the story,
for those who know it best
seem hungering and thirsting
to hear it like the rest.
And when, in scenes of glory,
I sing the new, new song,
I'll sing the old, old story
that I have loved so long. Refrain*

Sending Prayer

Let us pray.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever.
Amen.

Benediction

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,
nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

God, the creator, ✠ Jesus, the Christ,
and the Holy Spirit, the comforter,
bless you and keep you in eternal love.