

## Intro: What do we do when something awful happens to someone we love?

I want to tell you about a psalm, offer you a pastoral invitation, and reflect with you on lost keys...

### Psalm 4

In your Bible it may say 'a psalm of David' with a note about how it might be used in corporate worship (with stringed instruments). It was to be sung... together. A lament, an expression of praise sung in a minor key.

**Laments are expressions of praise, offered in a minor key. They are an appeal to God's compassion to intervene and change a desperate situation.**

"What characterizes psalms of lament is the confidence that the situation can be changed if God wills to intervene. [Distinguish between a lamentation and a lament] 'The lamentation,' says Roland Murphy, 'is an expression of grief over a calamity that is not reversible, whereas the lament is an appeal to God's compassion to intervene and change a desperate situation.' Hence the laments are really expressions of praise, offered in a minor key in the confidence that Yhwh is faithful and in anticipation of a new lease on life." p.60  
Out of the Depths

We don't know if it was written by David or collected by David. Did this come out of his heart or did he come across it in his life and his heart found resonance.

There is not a specific life moment with which this psalm is associated. But some scholars take these clues to offer this conclusion— psalm 3 was written 'when he fled from Absalom', verse 2 seems to suggest betrayal, lies, vanity... This could be something that David found or wrote in a tragic moment of feeling utterly alone and let down. It is a conclusion that has merit.

But part of the beauty of unspecified circumstance is that it allows us to quickly take on the words as our own. For this prayer to become our prayer. For these words to ring out the reverberations of our heart.

In the midst of tragedy, we call because God hears.

*1 Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!*

*2 O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Seal*

*3 But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him.*

Answer me when I call. It is not presumption. It is invitation.

The Lord hears when I call. Not presumption, based on track record. He has had an experience of deliverance in the past so he is asking again.

All of us call to God because we think it might work. We think He might hear us. We think He might do something to change our situation. We have words that have comforted us in the past. We have an experience of God inserting himself in a situation and the trajectory of it changing.

In this, the psalmist writes, 'you have given me relief when I was in distress'. What is translated distress is a word that is used to denote restraint, to feeling limited in space. // Many of you are familiar with a translation, called The Message by Eugene Peterson and I appreciate how he

pictures this... For, 'you have given me relieve when I was in distress...' he writes, 'once in a tight place, you gave me room.' // And this is the experience of tragedy, injustice, shock... things collapse, our world shrinks, it feels suffocating. We cry out for relief.

Based on your faithfulness in the past, I am going to ask again. There is always an echo, a resonance, a sense that draws us in to prayer, that moves us to cry out. I remember... "Feeling hemmed in and constrained by his human enemies, he asks the God of his 'righteousness' (the One who knows he is innocent) to give him room, or to release him from the straits and pressures to which he has been subjected. He requests God's grace, which would bring release from the human accusations..."

v. 3 the Lord hears when I call to him.

Tragedy, suffering, great distress... we can spin up a lot of activity. When we feel stuck in a tight spot, we start squirming around trying to get out- we manage people, we spin stories, we gin up promises and deal... we all do it.

Instead the psalmist says, I am calling to you because you hear. I am calling to you because you have worked in the past. I am calling to you because I am in a tight place and you got me out of this in the past. Be gracious to me again. Hear me again.

In the midst of tragedy, we call to God because He hears.

*Transition: But what do I do with my feelings? With all the emotions and fears of the moment?*

We demonstrate trust by choosing to worship

4 Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah

5 Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD.

I am so grateful for verse 4. Be angry and ponder. Feel and Think. Pour out your heart without filter. Say everything in your mind without second guessing or edit. Let the monkeys in your mind strike up the band and march around for a while making speeches.

When tragedy happens, we cannot stuff. We have to be able to dump and get it out. Verse 4 and 5 give permission with constraint. They acknowledge feeling and thought and offer 2 ways...

- a. Feel and think everything, but remember context and location matters. When our emotions and thoughts about fear, being wronged, betrayed, treated badly are so raw... there is opportunity for catastrophic collateral damage to the people around you. **GOD CAN HANDLE ALL OF IT.** If I can be honest, I have never dropped an F bomb AT another person in conversation. I'm young... but also grateful. I have poured out F bombs in my prayers. I have told God how angry I am and hurt and how rotten He is at His job of running the universe. God can handle it. Nobody else should have to.

"you can tremble with anger and rage, but don't sin by doing anything! You can speak your evil words within your hearts, but don't speak them out loud! Lie still and silent upon your beds, where you can do no harm."

Psa. 4:4 Complain if you must, but don't lash out. Keep your mouth shut, and let your heart

do the talking.

- b. Verse 5 says to offer right sacrifices. Make a choice to worship. Put yourself in the presence of God by being with God's people. You may not feel it, but if you are in a place where God is active and moving, there is an opportunity for God to bless you, heal you, change you.

### **We demonstrate our trust by choosing to worship.**

With all that we have poured out from our hearts and our minds, we choose to come in here, to bring it all and trust that God will sort it out. It is a practical demonstration of what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 6— when you fast, wash your face, anoint your head. When you give, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Feel and Think everything... AND make a deliberate choice to worship— make a deliberate choice to make it about God and not just about you.

I know that we have all appreciated the rhythms of daily prayer since Christine's accident— knowing there are people who will be there at the same time and that I can choose to go and **demonstrate my trust**, that I am not in bondage to my mind and my heart— I am in submission to my Lord whom I love.

We call to God because He hears. We demonstrate our trust by choosing to worship.

*Transition: even so... there will be moments when we wonder if God hears and there will be doubts about His ability to do good.*

### In the midst of tragedy, we look for the face of the Lord.

6 There are many who say, "Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!"

7 You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

Who will show us some good? The tone is skeptical. Can anyone do anything about this? Tragedy offers a broad road to despondency... futility.

That's what Isaiah experienced at the end of the 8th Century BC when King Uzziah died. Uzziah reigned for 52 years. The nation was prosperous. Everyone felt like they were on course to return to the glories of King David. Then he died. And questions abounded. There were many who say, 'Who will show us some good?' Isaiah stumbled into the temple, the Lord's house. He was mourning the loss of his king and his eyes saw His true King... holding the universe together, abounding in holiness. Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord.

In the midst of tragedy, the assault of doubt and skepticism will be palpable. It is when we are vulnerable to disbelief. Yet... It is why C.S. Lewis would say that when we are trying to listen to God, God shouts in our pain. The line between us and him becomes thin.

The psalmist acknowledges, there are questions and doubts all around. He remembers that blessing of Aaron— May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you. And give you peace. In the midst of tragedy, we look for the face of the Lord. We see Him in the faces of those around us. We see Him in our outstretched arms of praise and longing. We see Him in the sacrament of His body and blood.

He prays for an inner joy which would be greater than those outward manifestations of joy which characterized his society.

In the midst of tragedy we look for the face of the Lord.

Who will show us some good? Who can help? Those questions can leave us despondent. Despondency can drive us to frenetic activity. Without trust in the blessing of God, without trust that seeing His face means the presence of grace... we will work (and strive).

So the psalm closes with one more demonstration of trust: in peace, I will both lie down and sleep.

We demonstrate trust by choosing to both lie down and sleep

*8 In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.*

There is only one God. You alone make me dwell in safety. The word translated safety has a similar root to the word translated trust in v. 5 You alone make me dwell in trust.

I had a good friend who told me he never prayed for his kids to be safe. Safety is an illusion. He always prayed for his kids to be brave. And (I would offer), we are able to be brave because of where we dwell our trust. Feeling safe is completely dependent on the ONE who is making us safe. Do you trust that He can do it? Do you dwell in trust?

If so, than you demonstrate it by both lying down and sleeping. You choose to vulnerably put yourself in an embrace of care. Sleep is a demonstration of faith- I will stop working. I will rest knowing that God is holding the universe together. "At day's end I am ready for sound sleep, For you, God, have put my life back together."

In the midst of tragedy, we call because God hears.

We demonstrate trust by choosing to worship.

In the midst of tragedy, we look for the face of God.

We demonstrate trust by choosing to both lie down and sleep.

### A Pastoral Invitation for Christ Church

1. Assume the best about your leaders. They are doing an incredible job managing communication and emotions and heartache. They love Jesus. They love you, the church. They love the Warner and Taylor Families.
2. This tragedy is an opportunity for you to grow in the ways you pastor one another. **The ring theory of grief** (LA Times, April 7, 2013 by Susan Silk and Barry Goldman)

Comfort in. Dump out.

A tragedy is like a bunch of concentric circles. At the center is the person closest to the grief. As you move in concentric rings out from center, you go through people more and more removed from the grief, though still deeply impacted. To grieve well in a community, you only dump your own grief outward, to rings further out from yours, you extend comfort inward... So for me, it has been appropriate for me to talk about my grief, fear with my parents who are further removed from this situation, but it would not be appropriate for me to talk about my need for comfort and my grief with Christine's parents, who are so close to the center.

What is excruciating for you as a church is that the person closest to this grief is the person you look to first when YOU are in grief. Cliff is such an excellent pastor, but in many ways he is not available to you as your pastor in this tragedy. And that is another layer of grief on top of grief. You need each other in this. We are accustomed to dumping our grief on our pastors. We should. But in this moment of fear and sadness, we must all do something that might feel counterintuitive— dump out, pastor one another. Some of you are intuitively good at this. I have watched you do it. Some of you will grow through this. I've seen it happen.

One more temptation in times of tragedy— we are all tempted to want to demonstrate our closeness to the grief epicenter. We embrace a 'suffering hierarchy'. I have felt it. I have felt insecure about where do I fit? why am I here? We will all feel it to some degree as we process our life together in community. Offer that to Jesus. Offer that to your small group. You belong in this church. Your prayers are heard by your Father in heaven and they are an encouragement to Christine, her family and friends. We are the body of Christ— this utterly unique creation that is dependent on each part and values every contribution. May you grieve and labor well together.

## A Reflection on Lost Keys

Luke 24:39 *See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.* 40 *And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.* 41 *And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling,*

Why does Jesus show them his hands and feet? Why are they filled with joy and marveling?

- The best stories don't just have happy endings. The best stories go very bad and then at the very end turn out good AND all of the bad is incorporated into the goodness.
- The bad things are part of the deliverance, the means to the deliverance, taken up in the deliverance.
- What are the nail prints? Up until 3 days ago, the disciples thought that life was about to be amazing. They were convinced that they were going to be recognized and praised— they had arrived. // But when the nails went in to Jesus hands and feet, they knew that their lives were over. The nails ruined their life. // We get news like that, that ruins our life- a letter, a text, a diagnosis, a rejection, a comment. The nails ruined their life. // But as Jesus stands in front of them, He is saying, No. Look closely at them. No. Touch the nail prints, the scars... in my glorified body, that say No. These nails didn't ruin your life, they saved it. There is a happy ending not in spite of the nail prints, but because of the nail prints. The scars are caught up in the redemption.

Though the Bible makes no promise to take away our suffering in this life, it does give us hope that suffering will one day be ended forever. The image of God wiping away tears from the eyes of his people communicates not merely the cessation of earthly suffering, but consolation for earthly suffering.

But if there is a NEW heavens and a NEW earth, then the christian hope is not just a compensation for what we have lost, but a restoration of the world and the life we have always wanted, that changes everything we think about suffering. It is not just elimination... it is redemption

Here is why: Have you ever lost your keys? You valued your keys before you lost them. When they were gone, you were afflicted with key loss, you experienced suffering. All you could think about was finding your keys. You make bargains with God. You enlist unsuspecting children and strangers. It's a nightmare.

But when you find your keys, you are filled with joy. You maybe give a little shout. You most likely danced.

Yet, they are still the same keys! You don't dance every time you pick them up normally. You dance because of the suffering of not having them.

You appreciated your keys before the nightmare of losing them but not like you love them after the nightmare. The joy of finding them was not a joy in spite of the pain. It was a joy that was enhanced by the pain of loss. The pain was taken up into the joy and the nightmare made the joy greater!

That is the ultimate defeat of pain and suffering. To say pain is an illusion or that we will be compensated for it is one thing, but **to say that suffering in the end will be the servant of your joy is astounding.** Christian hope doesn't just compensate you for suffering, it undoes it. Our momentary affliction Achieves an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. There has never been an understanding of suffering that is more hopeful than that. It is an astounding teaching of the bible.

The Biblical view of things is resurrection— not a future that is just a consolation for the life we never had but a restoration of the life you always wanted. This means that every horrible thing that ever happened will not only be undone and repaired but will in some way make the eventual glory and joy even greater. The answer of Christianity is: everything sad is going to come untrue and it will somehow be greater for having once been broken and lost.

**There is an upside-down-ness to suffering** that is best demonstrated by lost keys... Suffering and loss are taken up into joy because there is a true and good end to our lives and there is a true and loving Father with a strong and compassionate Son, in community with a powerful and convicting Spirit... and they have all the keys, they wipe away all the tears, they will make everything new, and restore all that was lost.

**Dorothy Sayers quote:**

As Dorothy Sayers wrote: “For whatever reason God chose to make people as they are—limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death—he had the honesty and courage to take his own medicine. Whatever game he is playing with his creation, he has kept his own rules and played fair. He can exact nothing from us that he has not exacted from himself. He has himself gone through the whole human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death. When he was man, he played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it all worthwhile.”

We may not find out why we are experiencing pain and suffering (contra Karma). But we can be fully confident in this: We do not experience suffering because God does not love us or He’s mad at us or fed up with us. You can never say: I am experiencing this because God doesn’t love me. No, “It can’t be that he doesn’t love us. It can’t be that he is indifferent or detached from our condition. God takes our misery and suffering so seriously that he was willing to take it on himself.”