

MARS HILL GRADUATE SCHOOL

THE LANGUAGE OF SUFFERING AND THE WORDS OF LIFE:

A JOURNEY OF GRIEF THROUGH HOLY SATURDAY

AND THE PSALMS OF LAMENT

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In memory of my friend,

Katie Rani Nolan
1980-2009

and her friends,

Luke Gullberg
1983-2009

Anthony Vietti
1983-2009

ABSTRACT

This project explores the identity and activity of God in the midst of grief over the death of a loved one. Part One examines Holy Saturday as a rupture in the life of God and a space within the Christian narrative for grief to take place. It proposes that by listening to the *triduum* story again, as with the ears of a first-time listeners, Holy Saturday can be reclaimed as a space to grieve the death of Jesus, meet the God acquainted with sorrow, and to be surprised once again by Easter Sunday. God is identified as the Triune God who taken death into God's self and made space within God's self for those in the midst of grief to participate in God's life.

Part Two examines the Psalms, identifying the psalms of lament as the languaging of suffering. The psalms of lament are defined as the cry of distress to God. They are identified as the faithful voice to God of protest, accusation, and plea for deliverance. The psalms of lament are dialogue with God regarding suffering, made possible within the covenant wherein God is both at fault for the crisis and responsible for deliverance.

Part Three proposes that the wordless prayer of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:26 is a participatory response of God to the silent suffering of those in the midst of grief, and that Jesus' role as high priest is to represent those who to suffer to the Father and to take up their prayer of lament. Lastly, because of Jesus's ascension and the presence of the Holy Spirit, those who have entered grief are able to speak the words of life to others who suffer and to proclaim the presence of Emmanuel.

Every lament is a love-song.

Will one day love songs no longer be laments?

—Nicholas Wolterstorff, 1987

PROLOGUE

On Saturday, December 13th, I received an e-mail telling me that my friend, Katie Nolan, was missing on Mt. Hood. She and two of her friends, Luke Gullberg and Anthony Vietti, had set out to summit around one o'clock in the morning on Friday. They had hoped to return by two o'clock that afternoon, but they did not come back down the mountain. Rescuers found Luke that Saturday, about 9,000 feet up the mountain. With his body were two of Katie's water bottles, and one of her gloves. Nothing of Anthony's remained.

The news was cold and colorless, just black words on the bright white blank of the computer screen. How was this possible? Was it really Katie? It couldn't be. I sat at that computer as blank as its screen, and considered going to the next room to tell my wife. But I hesitated. It was unreal, Katie lost on a mountain. If I did not speak of it, then maybe it wouldn't be true. But I did tell her. I acknowledged the horror, and told her that yes, Katie was lost, and we didn't know where she was, but a few hundred miles south, somewhere on Mt. Hood. The words were foreign, incomprehensible and true.

I stood on my balcony in Seattle, and looked south toward Mt. Hood in despair. Was Katie still alive? I spoke to her, asked her how she was doing, and asked her if she was in pain. I spoke to God, pleading with God to save her, and if not, to spare her from suffering. My words fell silent; I heard no response. I was overtaken by the mystery of it all, of what exactly happened, of how three experienced climbers could meet tragedy on a mountain they knew well, on a clear and cold December day. I was overwhelmed by the details of what I knew and by the hundreds of things I didn't. Did Katie and Anthony fall, and Luke try to come back for help?

Did Luke fall, and Katie and Anthony try going down the other side? Did something fall on top of all three, scattering them?

The rescue teams continued to scour the mountain for Katie and Anthony, but they found nothing more through Wednesday, when they officially called off the search. The time of waiting, of hoping, was finally over, after five days. I had no words for what I was feeling, so I made a CD of songs that reminded me of her, songs that I knew were about her. I was comforted as Bill Callahan sang,

I started out in search of ordinary things
How much of a tree bends in the wind
I started telling the story without knowing the end...

I ended up in search of ordinary things
Like how can a wave possibly be?
I started running, and the concrete turned to sand
I started running, and things didn't pan out as planned

In case things go poorly and I not return
Remember the good things I've done
In case things go poorly and I not return
Remember the good things I've done
Done me in.¹

This was not how it was supposed to be, and not how it should have been. We started telling a story without knowing the end, and the story ended in tragedy.

Nicholas Wolterstorff also lost his son, Eric, in a climbing accident. He writes of attending Eric's funeral, where "his absence [was] as present as our presence, his silence as loud as our speech."² This is how it was for me at Katie's memorial. We remembered Katie, and

¹ Bill Callahan, "Jim Cain," *Sometimes I Wish I Were an Eagle*, Drag City, Inc. Dc385 (CD), 2009.

² Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 6.

found beautiful ways to celebrate her, but she was not there. "I pity those who never get a chance to see and feel the deadness of the one they love, who must *think* death but cannot *sense* it," Wolterstorff writes.³

To fully persuade us of death's reality, and of its grim finality, our eyes and hands must rub against death's cold, hard body, body against body, painfully. Knowing death with mind alone is less than fully knowing it... For though we aren't our bodies, yet of nothing on earth do we have more intimate possession than these."⁴

At Katie's memorial, we were confronted with these questions of presence and absence. Where was God that day on the mountain? How could this have happened, if God was there? More pressing than the questions of God's whereabouts that day, however, was the question of Katie herself. Her absence was the loudest voice, and the biggest question. I realized that I did not need a theology of grief so much as I needed a theology *in the midst* of grief.

What follows is an account of my own journey of grief following Katie's death. The days of waiting for Katie and Anthony to be found initiated a turn to Holy Saturday, the day of waiting for the resurrection of Jesus. The turn is not to liken the crucifixion of Jesus to the death that Katie experienced, but to search within the Christian narrative for space to grieve. Is God separate from our times of despair? Is God with us in our darkest moments, and if so, does God join us in our grief? Do we participate in the life of God when we are experiencing death?

Holy Saturday is a day of silence; we turn next to the psalms of lament in a search for voice. We need language for our grief and a voice for our suffering. We look to the Psalms in order to direct the fullness of our emotion to God, and to not divorce our experience of death

³ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son*, 36.

⁴ *Ibid.*

from the realm of our relationship with God. We read in Psalm 22, Jesus' own cry of lament, that God is "enthroned on the praises of Israel."⁵ Where is God in the midst of our plea? Who is the God to whom we voice our suffering, and what is God's response to our lament?

We have lost someone we dearly loved, and this search will not bring them back. We may, however, find space for *ourselves* in the narrative of Holy Saturday and in the psalms of lament, and, ultimately, meet the God in our midst who participates with us in our grief.

⁵ Ps. 22:3.

PART ONE: HOLY SATURDAY



HANS HOLBEIN, *Dead Christ*, 1521

I. THE SATURDAY SILENCE

“The deeper the suffering, the more our concepts fail us,” von Balthasar writes.⁶ We conceive of life as a narrative, a story in which parents give birth to children, and foster their development, even after they have children of their own. By the time parents die, they have left generations behind them; grandchildren who have known them and who carry on their legacy. This is how life should be. When a child dies before her parent, or when a parent dies too soon, this narrative is permanently ruptured. The tragedy of this loss exceeds our comprehension. It is a crisis of meaning. Our concept of life as good and ordered has failed and, with that failure, life itself faces the threat of meaninglessness.

For those of us who believe in God, the meaning we ascribe to life is not based on this generational narrative alone. “For the believer, the meaning of life is all tied up with her experience and understanding of God.”⁷ We have believed in the God of life, in God who created life, sustains life, and desires that each of us enjoy life to its fullest. Death, then, threatens our understanding of God as well. We have believed that God is “good, powerful, and knowledgeable... [but] of this we can make no sense.”⁸

Life does not follow the narrative we would choose. Even when we have enjoyed long, full lives with our loved ones, we do not choose for our loved ones to die. The inevitability of death rarely prepares us for the death of our beloved, no matter how long they have lived, and we

⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Von Balthasar Reader*, ed. Medard Kehl and Werner Löser, trans. Robert J. Daly and Fred Lawrence (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 148.

⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, “If God Is Good and Sovereign, Why Lament?,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 36, no. 1 (2001): 44.

⁸ *Ibid.*

mourn their loss when they are gone. We experience life, as Henri Nouwen writes, “as a process of becoming familiar with death, as a school in the art of dying.”⁹ We know “how it feels to be ‘broken in pieces, all asunder’ just by the demands of the daily world,”¹⁰ let alone by the tragedies that rupture time and threaten our understanding of life and God with meaninglessness. No matter how much we would like, our life does not simply move from strength to strength. Neither, however, does the life of God. Within the Christian narrative is a moment of deep rupture: that of Jesus crucified, dead, and buried.

The Saturday practice of silence

The story of Jesus crucified, buried, and resurrected does not lay at the fringes of our Christian story, but is rather the center of Christian faith. Christian tradition refers to this story as the *triduum*, the three-day event attested to by the Gospels, Paul, and the ancient Christian creeds.¹¹ Jesus is crucified on Good Friday, buried on Holy Saturday, and raised on the third day, Easter Sunday. The middle of this story is Holy Saturday, the day in between crucifixion and resurrection, when Christ lies entombed. As early as the end of the first century,¹² the Church honored this Saturday as “the day for quiet contemplation of Christ’s death and repose.”¹³ It was a day of great mourning, of grieving the death of Christ.¹⁴ Christians would gather Saturday

⁹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *A Letter of Consolation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 42.

¹⁰ Gerrit Scott Dawson, “‘Broken in Pieces All Asunder’: Reflections on George Herbert’s Affliction Poems,” *Weavings* 13, no. 2 (1998): 30.

¹¹ Alan E. Lewis, “The Burial of God: Rupture and Resumption as the Story of Salvation,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40, no. 3 (1987): 334.

¹² Bobby Gross, *Living the Christian Year: Time to Inhabit the Story of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 167.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁴ Catherine Vincie, “A History of Holy Week,” *Liturgical Ministry* 13(2004): 115.

night in a dark and silent church, representing the silence of Christ's tomb.¹⁵ By the eighth century, however, this nighttime service began to be moved later in the day, so that by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Holy Saturday had "lost its character as a day of prayerful mourning of the Savior by being absorbed into the Easter festival."¹⁶ This collapse of Saturday into Sunday, of "moving too quickly from Good Friday solemnity to Easter alleluias," began to be rectified in the Catholic church by the 1950's.¹⁷ In many churches, however, and in most Protestant, non-liturgical churches, this collapse remains. Holy Saturday is no longer a day of silent mourning, but a brief acknowledgement of death, with the certainty of resurrection.

The problem with this certainty of immanent resurrection is that it is not true to the reality of life. Neither is it true to the reality of death. Moving quickly from Saturday to Sunday portrays death as merely an *interruption* of life, not the *rupture* that we know it to be.¹⁸ Interruption implies that "disruption is only temporary: an interval between a past and guaranteed resumption."¹⁹ It assumes some prior knowledge that life will begin again. Death, however, is a rupture of life; it is the cessation of our life with our beloved, and the exhaustion of all possibility of future life with them. "Death is not a partial event."²⁰ Our loved one has died, and our life with her has ceased.

¹⁵ Gross, *Living the Christian Year: Time to Inhabit the Story of God*, 169.

¹⁶ Vincie, "A History of Holy Week," 115.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Lewis, "The Burial of God," 336.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, trans. Aidan Nichols (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 148.

Holy Saturday meets us with silence. Perhaps that is why we in Christian church—the Western, Protestant, non-liturgical church in particular—pass so quickly through Holy Saturday for the sake of Easter Sunday.²¹ We have no category for this kind of meaninglessness, and little social structure for this kind of grief, so we pass instead into concepts more familiar to us: life and resurrection. The Christian celebration of Holy Saturday is a practice of silence, and a practice that we often neglect.

The Saturday gift of silence

We often look to Easter Sunday alone for hope and comfort, but there is goodness in the silence of Holy Saturday for those in the midst of grief. First, the good news of Holy Saturday is that the center of our Christian narrative opens space to for us to attend to ourselves and to our grief. This space is shown, paradoxically, by the Gospel's own silence in regard to Holy Saturday. Of the four Gospels, only Matthew pauses to tell of anything that happens on the second day: the Pharisees secure Jesus' body with Pilate so that no one will steal his body from the tomb.²² We read nothing regarding the grief of the disciples. We can be thankful, with von Balthasar, that the Gospels are largely silent on this day, and with good reason.

The more eloquently the Gospels describe the passion of the living Jesus, his death and burial, the more striking is their entirely understandable silence when it comes to the time inbetween (*sic.*) his placing in the grave and the event of the Resurrection. We are grateful to them for this. Death calls for this silence, not only by reason of the mourning of the survivors but, even more, because of what we know of the dwelling and condition of the dead.²³

²¹ See Vincie, "A History of Holy Week," 115.

²² Mt. 27:62-66.

²³ von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 148.

Staring at death is horrifying. The silence of the Gospels regarding Christ's condition in the tomb spares us the sight of his dead body, but we should not take their silence in regard to the disciples' grief as license not to grieve the death of our beloved. As the Church has traditionally paused on Holy Saturday to grieve the death of Christ, so we can grant to ourselves in the Saturday silence the space to grieve the death of our beloved and to mourn our loss. Death, as we said above, is a crisis of meaning. It is also, however, a crisis of *reality*.²⁴ It is a moment in history that has forever changed our life and has changed who we are. Nicholas Wolterstorff writes,

If someone asks, "Who are you, tell me about yourself," I say—not immediately, but shortly—"I am one who lost a son." That loss determines my identity; not all of my identity, but much of it.²⁵

Death is real, and tragic, and worth the space for real grief. There is space for us within the story of Christ; the silence of Saturday is space for us to grieve.

The second good news of the Saturday silence is the space it creates for us to meet the God of sorrows. Just as our lives do not move only from strength to strength, and that story does not fully explain who we are, this also does not explain our God who is a God "of sorrows, acquainted with grief."²⁶ Our God has also experienced a breach of life, the rupture of death itself. The silence of Saturday is a space in the midst of our own grief to turn to the God

²⁴ Lewis, "The Burial of God," 335. Lewis appeals to the work of Job Sobrino. "Jon Sobrino has suggested that those who stand in the intellectual tradition of the Enlightenment tend to interpret suffering and disaster as 'crises of meaning', by which we seek to explain and accommodate alienating experiences within preconceived models of reality. Our question is how evil may be understood. But that search for meaning is denied for those who can barely hold to existence itself. Theirs is a 'crisis of reality'; and their question is less how to understand evil than how to withstand it, to overcome suffering or at least survive it." This aspect of the crisis of reality, of not seeking understanding as much as deliverance, is largely the stance, as we shall see, of the psalms of lament.

²⁵ Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son*, 6.

²⁶ Is. 53:3, King James Version.

acquainted with grief, and to meet the God who suffers. This is a mystery, as on Holy Saturday we do not face God's presence, but question God's absence. We do not hear the voice of God on Holy Saturday, but are confronted with the silence of God. The presence of Jesus with us depends on our knowledge of his resurrection,²⁷ of which on Holy Saturday we have no guarantee. We can say, however, that just as the death of our loved one has affected who we are, so the identity of God is one who has suffered and died. God, as Jürgen Moltmann has famously stated, is the crucified God.²⁸ The death of Jesus was experienced by the Trinity.

The Son experienced dying in forsakenness, while the Father experienced the death of the Son. We can illustrate this with our own experiences. At my end I shall experience dying, but not my own death, while in those I love, I experience death when they die because I have to survive their death. The death of Christ reaches into the nature of God, the Trinity... Christ's death on the cross is an intratrinitarian event before it assumes significance for the redemption of the world.²⁹

As we face the absence of God on Holy Saturday, before the resurrection has occurred, we face the God who has suffered and who is acquainted with grief. "There is a mystical moment of silence between cross and resurrection," Moltmann continues, "...the crucified Christ is the revelation of the trinitarian mystery of God. Only when we plumb the depths of this pain of God can we grasp the immeasurable Easter jubilation of the joy of God and of the whole creation."³⁰

Holy Saturday is good news for those in the midst of grief. It is difficult, however, to pause in a space as forsaken as this, and remain in grief and in silence for its duration. Still, the

²⁷ James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Doctrine: Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 245.

²⁸ See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

²⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, "The Crucified God, Yesterday and Today: 1972-2002," in *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, ed. Marit Trelstad (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 133.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

presence of Holy Saturday in our Christian story insists that it has something to *say* to us in the midst of its silence, if we pause and listen to the story once again.

II. HEARING SATURDAY

Alan Lewis offers a means to remain in Holy Saturday, and all that it holds: listening to the story again, as if for the first time.³¹ The story of Jesus' Easter Sunday resurrection is rightly told year after year. Christianity has long recognized the capacity for liturgical celebration of the *triduum* to help believers enter the Paschal mystery, "the single mystery that gives meaning to the life of every Christian."³² With repeated hearings, however, the wonder and surprise of Jesus' resurrection begins to wane. Wonder and surprise is essential for human life, which is why Rabbi Abraham Heschel can say,

I would say about individuals, an individual dies when he ceases to be surprised. I am surprised every morning that I see the sunshine again. When I see an act of evil I'm not accommodated. I don't accommodate myself to the violence that goes on everywhere; I'm still surprised. That's why I'm against it, why I can hope against it. We must learn to be surprised.³³

In order to be surprised by the great wonder of Jesus' resurrection, we must hear this story again for the first time. We therefore begin our pause and silence in this space by allowing ourselves the ears of first-time hearers.

³¹ Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001).

³² Mary Alice Piil, "Paschal Mystery, Christian Identity, and Paschal Triduum," *Liturgical Ministry* 5 (1996): 179.

³³ Speaking of Faith, "The Spiritual Audacity of Abraham Joshua Heschel," transcript, American Public Media, <http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/heschel/transcript.shtml> (accessed March 5, 2010).

The first hearing

When we turn to hear the *triduum* story again for the first time, our first realization is not wonderful surprise. Upon first hearing the story, Saturday is not the day before resurrection, but the day after death. It is the day after the last day.³⁴ The story does not begin, after all, as a three-day story. Friday can only be seen as the last day, the day that Jesus has died, and all of our hopes with him. “And the day that follows,” Lewis writes, “is not an in-between day which simply waits for the morrow, but it is an empty void, a nothing, shapeless, meaningless, and anticlimactic: simply the day after the end.”³⁵ Saturday is the day after death.

Holy Saturday is a day when mourning is suspended for those who love Jesus. We see Mary Magdalene having to wait until Sunday to mourn over to Jesus’ body.³⁶ Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, the women who loved Jesus, must wait and mourn in silence. The twelve disciples—now eleven—hide in fear. They are not only afraid for their lives, but afraid because Jesus’ death is also the death of all of their hopes in him and the promises he made to them. The kingdom of God has not come.³⁷ The hope that the meek will inherit the earth is now a naive dream.³⁸ Jesus is dead, and dead with him is the in-breaking kingdom he claimed to embody.³⁹ Ultimately, Good Friday “marked not just the last day for

³⁴ Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, 31.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Judaism grants more space and prescribes more ritual for grief than does Christianity. Still, Jewish observance of the Sabbath takes precedence over rites of mourning. See Rebecca Golbert, “Judaism and Death: Finding Meaning in Ritual,” in *Death and Religion in a Changing World*, ed. Kathleen Garces-Foley (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2006). Golbert writes, “Recognizing that grief does not end after the funeral, Judaism imposes a structure of mourning that marks certain periods of the coming months and years in significant ways. Like other rites of passage, Jewish rituals of mourning occur as a transformative process over time, during which the mourner passes through different stages of grief and healing.”

³⁷ Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, 45.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

Jesus and the end of *his* hopes, but the last day for all hope and for the cosmos as a whole: the apocalyptic end of everything.”⁴⁰ On the day after the end, what is left for the disciples to do but to flee, and hide? The man and the mission to which they have devoted their lives is dead.

Saturday, then, is a day when we must face the failure of Jesus and the failure of God the Father. Jesus has failed to bring his promised kingdom, and God the Father has failed to remain with God’s own beloved Son. Holy Saturday has “finally exposed Jesus to the charge of dismal failure, and God to that of unfatherly unfaithfulness.”⁴¹ Jesus’ own identity as the Son of God is now highly doubtful. Jesus has died, after all, in godforsakenness, “in company with the *godless*.”⁴² The powerful have won over the weak. To Jesus’s cry of “Why?”, to his “protest of human suffering,” God has remained silent.⁴³ In God’s silence, everything God promised remains in doubt.

What a liberating, incomprehensible surprise, then, when at last Sunday arrives! How extraordinary is this reversal? This day after death turns out to be the day *before* the triumph of the God of life over death itself. The kingdom is alive. Jesus’ kingdom is coming, as we had hoped, and is here even now. God has not failed after all. Jesus turns out to be who he claimed. In raising Jesus from the dead, God proclaims “a resounding Yes to Christ, to us—and even to God’s own identity and deity, fatherhood and love, all so questionable while the Son lay buried.”⁴⁴ Those who suffer can have hope after all: God is not absent, in fact God gives life even to those who have died!

⁴⁰ Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, 55

⁴¹ Lewis, “The Burial of God,” 349.

⁴² Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, 55.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

We see, from the vantage point of Sunday, that Saturday has been a boundary between death and life. A boundary is “an invisible line, anonymous and ambiguous, easy to ignore and belonging nowhere. Yet it exists to *create* identity and to *assign* belonging.”⁴⁵ We have been marked by our deep loss; our identity is now in part as those who have lost a beloved. We now see that our identity is also marked by God the Father, to whom we belong, and by Jesus the Son, who identifies with us in our suffering.

The second hearing

Hearing the Saturday story again, we join the in the suffering of those who Jesus left to survive without him. Our lives, as their’s, have failed to go as we planned. The death of our loved one, as with the death of Jesus himself, has opened us to despair and left us with the question of the failure of God: not only God’s failure to protect our beloved, but to grant us a long life with her. We desperately want the resurrection life of Sunday, and we long to go there. But as those who are suffering deep loss, we cannot remain for long in Sunday joy. We return to our grief, or, rather, we realize that our grief has never left us, and we turn to Saturday once again.

We may anticipate that our second hearing of the Saturday story might lessen its blow, but we are mistaken. Once we have heard and experienced the resurrection of Sunday, once our questions and tensions have been met with resolution,⁴⁶ we contemplate Jesus alone in his grave and know that this man, Jesus, really is the Son of God. The Son of God is indeed dead. If anything, hearing the story again moves us to a deeper despair.

⁴⁵ Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, 41.

⁴⁶ See *Ibid.*, 30.

We are faced in our first hearing with God's transcendence. The vision of God in Revelation 21, where God descends from heaven and makes dwelling with humanity, is confronted with our experience of an absent God. God may be above us, but God has not descended to be with us. Then, when God acts on Sunday, when we see that God has heard Jesus' cry, and does not leave him forsaken in death like he was forsaken in life,⁴⁷ we watch God move as from a distance. On this second hearing, however, we are confronted with God's immanence.⁴⁸ Our reflection of Jesus in his tomb is as the slain lamb of Revelation 5, the Lamb who is worthy *because* he was slain. We are moved to praise with those in Revelation when Sunday finally arrives. Having the heard the story once before, however, we now know that Jesus, who is dead, is indeed the Son of God, and that the Father has forsaken him. God-with-us has failed to be faithful, even to God's own Son. If this indeed is true, what hope is there for any of us?

III. *DEAD CHRIST*

In Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, Rogozhin and the prince stand looking at Hans Holbein's *Dead Christ*. 'I like looking at that picture,' Rogozhin mutters.

'At that picture!' the prince exclaimed, struck by a sudden thought. 'At that picture! Why, some people may lose their faith by looking at that picture!' 'Aye, that also may be lost,' Rogozhin assented unexpectedly.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 153.

⁴⁸ Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection*, 81.

⁴⁹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. David Magarshack (New York: Penguin Books, 1955), 210.

The devastating image in front of us, of Jesus dead in the tomb,⁵⁰ does indeed lead us to question our faith. It is incomprehensible that Jesus, who we know from Easter Sunday is God, could be a dead body and that God could be identified with a human corpse.⁵¹ Indeed, if our faith is in a God who is removed from death, then our faith should be lost. To enter grief as a Christian, and to seek God there with us, we can no longer believe in a God who does not enter into death with us. In the midst of our grief, we need a renewed understanding of Emmanuel, God with us. Is God with us in our grief? Is God with our beloved in death?

We spoke above of the suffering of the Father over the death of the Son. When Jürgen Moltmann asked the question, “What does the cross of Christ mean for God himself?”, he writes,

I came face to face with the pain of God the Father of Christ, who suffered with him. If Christ dies with the cry of being forsaken by God, then in God the Father there must be a correspondingly profound experience of his forsakenness by his beloved Son.⁵²

If we believe in Emmanuel, even on Saturday, on the day that stands as Emmanuel’s greatest contradiction, then we must believe that God is with us in the midst of our grief as one who also grieves. On Holy Saturday, the scandal of the death of God is matched only by the promise of God to remain with us, even in death. Is God also with our loved one who has died? “The cry ‘God is dead’... takes on a totally new meaning objectively established by God himself,” von

⁵⁰ Hans Holbein, *Dead Christ*, 1521, in Neil MacGreggor, with Erika Langmuir, *Seeing Salvation: Images of Christ in Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 178.

⁵¹ Lewis, “The Burial of God,” 350.

⁵² Moltmann, “Crucified God,” 132.

Balthasar writes.⁵³ The death of God holds good news, that if God himself was ‘in Christ’, then God himself is also present in the dead Christ among the dead.”⁵⁴

We learn from Holy Saturday that the resurrection of Sunday does not negate the death that has preceded it. Rather, when we come to the throne room of heaven expecting a lion, we are greeted by the entrance of “a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered.”⁵⁵ Jesus is raised from the dead, and is alive now as the crucified God. That God is dead on Saturday and alive today means that we have fellowship in God with the dead, and that we continue to share an ending with them.⁵⁶ Our loved one is gone, and we grieve her death, and no hope we have should silence our cry. We also, however, have the hope that through Christ who died, and was raised, we will share a new beginning with our loved one when we have also ended. The suffering grief of Saturday continues, and we wait for Jesus to complete this new possibility. “We do not grieve as those who have no hope,” Paul declares.⁵⁷ We continue to grieve until God brings all to fullness of life.

⁵³ von Balthasar, *Reader*, 153.

⁵⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 189.

⁵⁵ Rev 5:6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁵⁷ 1 Thes. 4:13.

PART TWO: THE PSALMS OF LAMENT



DEBORAH ANDERSON, *Lamentation*

I. LAMENT: THE CRY OF DISTRESS TO GOD

Where can we go in our grief? Grief consumes us; it leaves us in a void and confronts us with the absence of God. We believe that God comes to meet us in our grief, but it doesn't always feel this way. Tragedy has ruptured our narrative of life. So far, we have looked to the great time-between-time of Holy Saturday for a narrative space where God meets us and holds our grief. Reflecting on Christ in the tomb, we have found hope that he is with the one we have lost in death, and with us as we grieve. This has not, however, negated her death or absolved our pain. We continue to grieve and to cry to God from our loss.

“Ours is the long day's journey of the Saturday,” the Jewish philosopher George Steiner writes.

Between the suffering, the aloneness, unutterable waste on the one hand and the dream of liberation, of rebirth on the other. In the face of the torture of a child, of the death of love which is Friday, even the greatest art and poetry are almost helpless.⁵⁸

We do not remain long in grief before we seek to respond in some way. The burden to cry out loud is often immediate and unrelenting. More often than not, however, we have no capacity for speech. “Death means speechlessness,” Alan Lewis asserts. Not only can we no longer speak with our beloved, but “in the face of death even the language of the living peters out into inconsequence and incapacity.”⁵⁹ We have gone to Saturday to attend to our grief. We turn now to the Psalms of lament to help us find our voice.

⁵⁸ George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 232.

⁵⁹ Lewis, “The Burial of God,” 339.

Our need for lament

Grief and mourning are not often welcome in the Christian church. “We, in the United States, live in a time and place where grief and mourning are frequently truncated. Individuals are made to feel shameful for having prolonged feelings of grief,” LeAnn Flesher observes.⁶⁰ We hear sermons preached at funerals proclaiming that God is “big enough” to handle our questions, fears, sadness, and even our anger. However, we are also told not to despair, because we have hope. We have failed to cordon off space around the cross, so that Easter does not encroach upon it prematurely.⁶¹ We succeed, however, in cordoning off despair from the realm of faithful Christian emotion. The psalms of lament refuse this act. In these psalms, despair, anger, accusation, and doubt are all given voice to God. The psalmists cry from the “depths” to the God who stands accused, and listening. They insist that God moves, and acts, because they are suffering a world that is wrong and broken.

We need the psalms of lament to help us find our voice. Death has taken us beyond the limits of language, and have lost the tradition that can offer us the words to grieve. Anguish is not separate from human experience, “broken on the wheels of living” as we are,⁶² but an integral part of what it means to be human. We need the psalms of lament to live into our humanity, and to present ourselves fully human before God.

⁶⁰ LeAnn Snow Flesher, “Lamentation and the Canonical Psalms,” *Living Pulpit* 11, no. 4 (2002): 36.

⁶¹ Lewis, “The Burial of God,” 344.

⁶² Thornton Wilder, *The Collected Short Plays of Thornton Wilder*, vol. 2 (New York: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1998), 74.

Defining lament

We begin with a simple definition of lament: *the cry of distress to God*. This definition asserts the most important characteristic of the psalms of lament: they are the faithful voice of suffering to God.

As a genre, the psalms of lament follow a general pattern of moving from *plea* to *praise*.⁶³ Of all the psalms of lament, only Psalms 44 and 88 do not include this turn to praise. Both plea and praise are then marked by several characteristics. The plea commonly includes a) an address to God, b) the complaint, c) the petition.⁶⁴ Less essential than these, but what we most often find shocking in these psalms of lament, are d) motivations for God to act, which are always desperate and often close to bribing and intimidating God, and e) imprecation, “the voice of resentment and vengeance that will not be satisfied until God works retaliation on those who have done wrong.”⁶⁵ Likewise, within praise we often find a) an assurance of being heard, b) the payment of vows, and, finally, c) doxology and praise.⁶⁶ Psalm 13 is a good example of this basic form.⁶⁷

- 1 Lord, how long will You continually forget me?
How long will You hide Your face from me?
- 2 How long will I store up anxious concerns within me,
agony in my mind every day?
How long will my enemy dominate me?

⁶³ Walter Brueggemann, “The Costly Loss of Lament,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 36 (1986): 57.

⁶⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 54.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 54-57.

⁶⁷ Gail R. O'Day, “Surprised by Faith: Jesus and the Canaanite Woman,” in *A Feminist Companion to Matthew*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine, with Marianne Blickenstaff (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 114-37.

- 3 Consider me and answer, Lord, my God.
Restore brightness to my eyes;
otherwise, I will sleep in death,
- 4 my enemy will say, “I have triumphed over him,”
and my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.
- 5 But I have trusted in Your faithful love;
my heart will rejoice in Your deliverance.
- 6 I will sing to the Lord
because He has treated me generously.

We see the address and complaint in vv. 1-2, the petition in v. 3, the motivation in v. 4, and then the turn to praise in vv. 5-6. Verse 5 expresses the assurance that God has heard the complaint, and v. 6 voices the doxology, “I will sing to the Lord.” We see through these verses that “by the end of Psalm 13, God’s bountiful, gracious acts are as real to the psalmist as God’s silence and seeming abandonment at the beginning.”⁶⁸ Something has happened in the silence between verses 4 and 5 that has turned the psalmist words from petition to praise. This turn to praise is vital for our discussion, to which we will return later. For now, we simply note that these psalms of lament pay attention to both plea *and* praise.

In all, the function of the psalms of lament are “to appeal to God’s compassion.”⁶⁹ They are the cry of distress to God, where the one in suffering exclaims, “out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.”⁷⁰ We will reflect on this verse as we look more closely at the psalms of lament and what they contribute to us. We begin with the *depths*, listen to the *cry*, and then dare, with the psalms of lament, to speak of *God*.

⁶⁸ O’Day, “Surprised by Faith,” 121.

⁶⁹ Claus Westermann, “The Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament,” *Interpretation* 28, no. 1 (1974): 24.

⁷⁰ Ps. 130:1.

II. OUR DISTRESS: THE DEPTHS

The word “distress” does not suffice for what we experience in the midst of suffering and grief. It is the place of silence, absence, and loss. We are angry, enraged, and stricken down by our grief and deep sadness. Loss is deep and ever-deepening. We not only mourn the loss of everything we had together with our loved one, but the loss of all potential life with her. We are left with only memory, and our memories, as Wolterstorff confesses, “all lead into that blackness. It’s all over, over, over. All I can do is *remember* him. I can’t *experience* him... Nothing new can happen between us.”

Hope, faith, life and love all end in our despair. Newness is suspended, and overtaken with death. It is ending with no beginning, death with no hope for future life. Silence is often our only response. The suffering is often so painful that we cannot yet even grieve, overtaken as we are. The crisis presents a “dismantling of the old, known world and a relinquishment of safe, reliable confidence in God’s good creation... a rush of negativities, including rage, resentment, guilt, shame, isolation, despair, hatred, and hostility.”⁷¹

The poet Luci Shaw describes her emotions when the surgeon came out of the operating room to tell her that her husband, Harold, had terminal lung cancer.

With his words, clear and colorless, hanging in the air, I felt no sorrow or grief, just an awful numbness. I couldn’t cry. I remember that in a terrible effort to move towards normalcy, like rising from a dive under water to the surface of a lake, I asked him some questions, though I can’t recall them. My legs felt heavy, as if I’d been drugged... I had a sensation of running without motion, as in a nightmare.⁷²

⁷¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 10.

⁷² Luci Shaw, *God in the Dark: Through Grief and Beyond* (Grand Rapids: Broadmoor Books, 1989), 21.

We search in vain for language, for normalcy, for meaning, at times even for emotion itself.

The language that we have for this kind of suffering always turns to poetry. The image that the psalms use for this grief is the “depths.” The deep, whether the depths of the sea or the depths of the earth, is a place of chaos and fear.⁷³ The deep is life-threatening. For ancient Israel, the sea was the great unknown, a place beyond human understanding. “Darkness covered the face of the deep” in the creation account in Genesis.⁷⁴ The Israelites travelled through the deep of the Red Sea, which God made dry but killed the Egyptians pursuing them.⁷⁵ Jonah was cast into the deep heart of the seas, to appease the Lord who had caused the storm.⁷⁶

The depths of the sea threaten with death; the depths of earth are often death itself. The depths are the grave, the bottomless pit, and, at times, Sheol, literal hell. The figures of impending doom in the apocalyptic literature of Daniel and Revelation all rise from the depths, whether earth or sea. When heaven and earth are recreated, we read that “there [is] no longer any sea.”⁷⁷ At the destruction of evil, when creation at last overcomes chaos, the figures that rose from the depths are thrown back to the deep, “the lake of fire.”⁷⁸ The deep is the place of death, evil, chaos, and damnation.

“Out of the depths I call to you, Lord,” the psalmist cries,⁷⁹ that is, out of this place of darkness, torment, and suffering. The psalms of laments are poems from these depths. They are

⁷³ Tremper Longman, III, Leland Ryken, and James C. Wilhoit, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), s.v. “deep.”

⁷⁴ Gen. 1:2. See also Prov. 8:28.

⁷⁵ Ex. 15:5, 8; Ps. 77:16, 106:9.

⁷⁶ Jonah 1:11-15. Jonah refers to the seas as the “deep” in 2:3, 5.

⁷⁷ Rev. 21:1.

⁷⁸ Rev. 19:20. See also Rev. 20:10.

⁷⁹ Ps. 130:1.

written facing death, whether from enemies, from sickness and wounds, from mortality itself, or from even the wrath of God. They are written from under both the threat of imminent murder and the forces of evil that are against full and joyful life. The psalms themselves describe the depths with poetry. From the depths of their distress, the psalmists mourn,

I am worn out with groaning;
All night I drench my bed with tears,
Flooding my couch till it swims.
My vision is darkened with anger.⁸⁰

They lament the absence of God,

How long, Adonai?
Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I keep asking myself what to do,
With sorrow in my heart every day?⁸¹

My God! My God!
Why have you abandoned me?
Why so far from helping me,
So far from my anguished cries?⁸²

They accuse God, suffering under God's wrath,

For I have been eating ashes like bread
And mingling tears with my drink
Because of your furious anger,
Since you picked me up just to toss me aside.⁸³

They mourn God's silence,

Adonai, I am calling to you;

⁸⁰ Ps. 6:6, *Complete Jewish Bible: An English Version of the Tanakh (Old Testament) and B'rit Hadashah (New Testament)*, trans. David. H. Stern (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1998).

⁸¹ Ps. 13:1-2b, *Ibid.*

⁸² Ps. 22:1, *Ibid.*

⁸³ Ps. 102:9-10, *Complete Jewish Bible.*

My Rock, don't be deaf to my cry.
 For if you answer me with silence,
 I will be like those who fall in a pit.⁸⁴

The depths are marked by darkness, sadness, and despair. We experience the depths as God's own absence, wrath, and silence. All of this experience, however, finds voice in the psalms of lament. Nothing is out of bounds. "All the multifarious forms of human affliction, oppression, anxiety, pain and peril are given voice in the lament," writes Westermann.⁸⁵ The psalm of lament are not content to remain in the depths, but demand release, deliverance, and new life. The world, and our experience of it, is not how it should be, and we need to tell God about it.

III. OUR CRY

Silence overtakes us in the depths. In the immediate moment of loss, we cannot comprehend what has happened, and we have no words to explain it or communicate it. Silence can be an appropriate, even healing response, especially when we sit with someone else who is grieving.⁸⁶ When we are in the midst of grief, however, we cannot stay too long in silence before we must cry out.

Psalm 39 voices this movement from silence to speech,

I was speechless and quiet;
 I kept silent, even from |speaking| good,
 and my pain intensified.

⁸⁴ Ps. 28:1, *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Westermann, "The Role of the Lament," 24.

⁸⁶ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981), 40-43.

My heart grew hot within me;
 as I mused, a fire burned.
 I spoke with my tongue...

Hear my prayer, LORD,
 and listen to my cry for help;
 do not be silent at my tears.⁸⁷

In the depths of distress, the psalmist initially chooses silence, but his pain is too great to keep silent. It burns within him, and the silence only intensifies his pain. Unable to withstand it, he cries out to God, “Listen!” and demands that God not remain silent in return. Silence has held its sway, God has been absent, and the psalmist speaks. “The lament is the language of suffering,” Westermann asserts. “In it suffering is given the dignity of language: It will not stay silent!”⁸⁸ The lament echoes the cry of Job, “Teach me, and I will be silent.”⁸⁹ But not until God responds.

Lament as the voice of suffering

The cry of lament is the language of suffering. Just as both praise and lament are components of healthy spirituality, there are times when the cry of lament, not silence, and certainly not praise, is the only appropriate response.⁹⁰ The psalms of lament assert that, faced with the silence of God, we do not return silence for silence, but respond instead in speech. The time of silence has passed, and we cry out to God. Our suffering demands it. “The lament, at its

⁸⁷ Ps 39:2-3, 12, Holman Christian Standard Bible.

⁸⁸ Westermann, “The Role of the Lament,” 31.

⁸⁹ Job 6:24.

⁹⁰ Walter Brueggemann, “Prerequisites for Genuine Obedience: Theses and Conclusions,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 36, no. 1 (2001): 38.

heart, is *giving voice to the suffering* that accompanies deep loss, whatever that loss may be,”

Wolterstorff affirms.⁹¹

Lament is not *about* suffering. Lament is not *concerning* suffering. Lament does not count the stages and try to identify the stage in which one finds oneself. Lament is the *linguaging* of suffering, the *voicing* of suffering. Behind lament are tears over loss. Lament goes beyond the tears to voice the suffering.⁹²

Lament is not without tears, nor is it without moments of silence. Both, in fact, lay behind the lament. The cry of lament is, above all, the *linguaging* of suffering.

The bold voice of lament

The extremes of suffering require extreme language. “One can never speak forcefully to God from a position of security. Some levels of spirituality are grasped only when balancing on the edge of the abyss.”⁹³ In the depths, we are pushed to the brink by the incongruity between God’s promise for the full life every living thing and the death we so often suffer.⁹⁴ The psalms of lament are filled with accusations against God and requests for vindication. Psalm 44, for example, not only contradicts the the claim of Psalm 121, that God does not sleep, but appropriates the language that Elijah used against the prophets of Baal.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Wolterstorff, “If God Is Good,” 42.

⁹² Ibid..

⁹³ Belden C. Lane, “Hutzpa K'lapei Shamaya: A Christian Response to the Jewish Tradition of Arguing with God,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 23, no. 4 (1986): 579.

⁹⁴ Kathleen D. Billman and Daniel L. Migliore, *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope* (Cleveland, Ohio: United Church Press, 1999), 107.

⁹⁵ Lane, “Hutzpa,” 579.

Is even this sort of language faithful? The psalms of lament insist that bold prayer, even when “the line between insolence and prayer is extremely fine,”⁹⁶ remains a faithful voice when spoken from the place of suffering. As Moltmann writes,

In the grief over the death of every beloved person and every abandoned child, we hear the eschatological cry: How long? ‘Come Lord Jesus, come soon’ (Rev. 22.20). The people who utter this cry are hungering and thirsting for the victory of God’s righteousness through the raising of the dead and the annihilation of death itself. The people who weep over this unredeemed world and its victims love life, and are not prepared to come to terms with existing conditions. It is not unbelievers who are seized by this ‘divine sadness’, but believers.⁹⁷

This bold prayer of lament is faithful because it is prayed by a faithful prayer in the midst of deep suffering.

The cry of protest

The song of lament that expects response from God also expects that God’s response will involve new creation, and new life. Lament psalms into two categories: psalms of protest and psalms for deliverance from suffering. The lament can protest many things, such as the prosperity of the wicked, that oppression of the poor, and the threat of death, but they are all uniquely the protest against God. They echo Job’s protests, as he “clings to God against God.”⁹⁸ They are in the same tradition of protest in Jewish spirituality within which Abraham argues with God to spare the city of Sodom,⁹⁹ Moses argues with God, and against God’s wrath, for the life

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 193.

⁹⁸ Westermann, “The Role of the Lament,” 32.

⁹⁹ Gen. 18:22-33.

of Israel,¹⁰⁰ and Jacob wrestles with the angel, refusing to let go without a blessing.¹⁰¹ The Psalms embark on the protest against God that is so easy to suppress in favor of submission.¹⁰² These are not docile prayers. Once again, their existence alone, within the worship texts of Israel, affirms their validity. “That the lament is heard implies that God has accepted their protest.”¹⁰³

The cry for deliverance

The lament psalms are marked by their vigorous protest against God when God seems more diabolic than good.¹⁰⁴ They are all, ultimately, songs that demand God’s action to resolve the problem protested and the pain suffered. Above all, the meaning and function of lament is “to lay out one’s own inner sufferings before the one who alleviates suffering, heals wounds, and dries tears... The true function of lament is supplication; it is the means by which suffering comes before the one who takes it away.”¹⁰⁵ The cry of lament is a desperate cry. They are songs of last resort. To whom else can we turn?

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” As Christ speaks those words, he too is in the wilderness. He speaks them when all is lost... “*My God, my God.*” Though God is not there for him to see or hear, he calls on him still because he can do no other.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Ex. 32:11-14.

¹⁰¹ Gen. 32:24-32.

¹⁰² Walter Brueggemann, “The Friday Voice of Faith,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 36, no. 1 (2001): 16.

¹⁰³ Westermann, “The Role of the Lament,” 30.

¹⁰⁴ See A. Roy Eckardt, “Between the Angelic and the Diabolic,” *Theology Today* 51, no. 3 (1994): 408. “This moral obligation to reject the Devil’s work means that human beings must oppose God should the divine and the diabolic appear to coalesce, a responsibility that has been assumed throughout Jewish tradition and is currently even invading Christian thought.”

¹⁰⁵ Westermann, “The Role of the Lament,” 32.

¹⁰⁶ Frederick Buechner, *Listening to Your Life: Daily Meditations with Frederick Buechner*, compiled by George Connor (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

IV. THE GOD OF LAMENT

What do we learn of God when we voice our lament? Our grief has pushed us into the depths, and we have responded. In the intensity of our pain, we have had no other choice but to voice our suffering to God. As Walter Brueggemann writes,

All such experiences of disorder are a proper subject for discourse with God. There is nothing out of bounds, nothing precluded or inappropriate... Everything must be brought to speech, and everything brought to speech must be addressed to God, who is the final reference for all of life.¹⁰⁷

Attentive to our own despair, and courageously turning from silence to voice, we began our lament by addressing it to God.

Our voice has not been an easy one, either. Our speech has emerged from the extremities of language. The depths of despair have pushed our experience and voice to the limits, and we have responded boldly. The God who address in the midst of our suffering, likewise, is an extreme God. We have believed that God hears and that God cares. We have also experienced, however, God's silence and absence. We have accused God, spoken against God, and protested God. The claims that we make for God in the midst of grief is that this God who cares is also at fault, and that this God who listens desires the interaction of full relationship with us.

The voice of complaint: God's self-binding love

Our lament to God has been a desperate act, a voice of complaint and protest to the God who is the only one able to right the wrong and to relieve our suffering. We have turned to God in desperation, in need of salvation. In voicing our complaint to God we believe that "this is the

¹⁰⁷ Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, 52.

God who heard the cries of the children of Israel in their slavery and came down to save them.”¹⁰⁸ The mere existence of the lament psalms as part of Israel’s worship attests to the fact that God hears and accepts this form of prayer.¹⁰⁹ They consistently plead with God to hear the cry of the suffering, and to act.

Even the absence and silence of God does not keep the lamenters from continuing to cry out for relief. Our belief that God listens and cares is consistent with God’s own promises, with the “self-binding character of God’s covenantal love.”¹¹⁰ The law or court imagery within many of the lament psalms takes seriously the covenant that God has made with Israel. This covenant works both ways, assuring both God’s own claims against Israel and the rights that Israel has to hold God accountable to the promise to save. “The paradoxical bind, therefore, cuts in two directions. Israel is bound to God, even in the act of accusing God, while God is bound to Israel by the free response of God’s own self-limitation.”¹¹¹ We plead with God to save us because God has entered into this covenant that binds us to each other.

The voice of accusation: the God we protest

Our lament, as we have seen, is both plea and protest. We plead with God, who is the only one who can relieve our suffering and bring us salvation. We do this because of God’s own covenantal promises. Our plea is a protest *to* God. We also, however, voice our protest *against* God, who bears the fault of our suffering.

¹⁰⁸ Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content and Message* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980), 86.

¹⁰⁹ Westermann, “The Role of the Lament,” 30.

¹¹⁰ Lane, “Hutzpa,” 575.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 573.

We are not comfortable with making these claims about God. The bold prayer of lament is not a comfortable prayer. They are, in fact, dangerous. Annie Dillard tells the story of an eighteenth century Hasid, a ritual slaughterer who, Dillard writes,

every morning bade goodbye to his wife and children and wept as if he would never see them again. His friend asked him why. Because, he answered, when I begin I call out to the Lord. Then I pray, “Have mercy on us.” Who knows what the Lord’s power will do to me in that moment after I have invoked it and before I beg for mercy?¹¹²

If the power of the Lord is this dangerous, then how dangerous is it to face God with accusation? The psalms of lament do exactly this. They are spoken to the God who listens, who cares, and has the power to change the situation. They also attest to a theological tradition that holds God accountable for God’s actions. In the discrepancy between God’s promise and our lived experience, the psalms of lament ask, who else is there to blame? Only God can be held accountable for God’s own faithfulness. If God has acted so much on the behalf of the Israelites, then why is not God acting now?

The lament psalms accuse the God who is at fault within covenant faithfulness. “Doubt about God, even the kind of despair that can no longer understand God, receives in the lament a language that binds it to God, even as it accuses him,” Westermann writes.¹¹³ We see this well if we return to Psalm 44, the accusation against God that borders on the verge of blasphemy. The psalm begins,

God, we heard it with our ears;
our fathers told us about it—
a deed which you did in their days,
back in days of old.
With your hand you drove out nations

¹¹² Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1990), 9.

¹¹³ Westermann, “The Role of the Lament,” 32.

to plant them in [the land],
 you crushed peoples
 to make room for them.

For not by their own swords
 did they conquer the land,
 nor did their own arm
 give them victory;
 rather, it was your hand,
 your arm and the light of your face;
 because you favored them.¹¹⁴

The same psalm that contradicts Psalm 121:4, that claims that “the guardian of Israel never slumbers nor sleeps” and demands that God wake up, and that uses the speech that Elijah used against the prophets of Baal to do so,¹¹⁵ opens with proclamation of God’s faithfulness in the past. This is language of the covenant, where Israel appeals to God’s own faithfulness in the past for God’s continued faithfulness today. It “follows the law-court pattern of prayer, in which the Almighty is called to be faithful to the divine word.”¹¹⁶ The psalms of lament build their own desperate case against God who, as both the defendant and the judge, is both the one at fault for the suffering of Israel and the only one who can remedy the situation. They build their case on God’s own faithfulness in the past.

Role reversal: the God who interacts

The psalmists of lament do not stop with claiming God’s fault for the evil under which they are suffering. They also claim that God accepts the accusation. God holds both the plea

¹¹⁴ Ps. 44:1-3, *Complete Jewish Bible: An English Version of the Tanakh (Old Testament) and B’rit Hadashah (New Testament)*.

¹¹⁵ See above.

¹¹⁶ Lane, “Hutzpa,” 567.

and the protest, and desires to hold it. This is because God desires this momentary reversal of relationship in order to form us into full selves.

George Steiner writes, “it is in Hebraic intuition that God is capable of all speech acts except monologue.”¹¹⁷ God desires conversation with us. This conversation is for the sake of relationship with God where each party, we and God, is fully invested in the other. In true dialogue, both sides must hold up their side of the conversation.¹¹⁸ This interaction, Brueggemann argues, forms both us and God into full participatory selves. “One of the enduring questions of the lament psalms is this: How seriously should we take their daring affirmation that God somehow depends on Israel for God’s God-ness?”¹¹⁹ We are not comfortable with this question.¹²⁰ Relationship, however, requires two whole persons. Likewise, we find in the psalms of lament a momentary reversal of roles, where Israel “assumes provisional primacy and preeminence in the relationship.”¹²¹

This role reversal is scandalous to us, even if is momentary and within the depths of despair. Even more shocking to us, however, is that “this capacity for reversal of roles is understood as appropriate to Israel’s faith and is willingly embraced by Yahweh.”¹²² God desires to meet us fully, and considers it not unfaith at all, but actually “an act of daring, serious faith.”¹²³ The God whom we address in our lament, from within the depths, is “like a mother

¹¹⁷ Steiner, *Real Presences*, 225.

¹¹⁸ Brueggemann, “The Friday Voice of Faith,” 16.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*: 17.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Brueggemann, “Prerequisites,” 37.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Brueggemann, “Prerequisites,” 37.

who dreams with this infant, that the infant may some day grow into a responsible, mature covenant partner who can enter into serious communion and conversation.”¹²⁴ God, in the midst of our sufferings, desires relationship with us to the extent that God is not only willing, but desires, to momentarily trade places with us.

The voice of praise: the God who transforms

The God whom we address from the depths is a God who listens, cares, and acts on our behalf. We persist in our complaint and protest even in the face of God’s absence and silence, because God desires to hear our protest and accusation against God. We experience in the lament a momentary reversal of roles, which has the capacity to form us into full selves.

Brueggemann summarizes well the God we face in our despair.

The lament makes an assertion about God: that this dangerous, available God matters in every dimension of life. Where God’s dangerous availability is lost because we fail to carry on our part of the difficult conversation, where God’s vulnerability and passion are removed from our speech, we are consigned to anxiety and despair and the world as we now have it becomes absolutized. Our understanding of faith is altered dramatically, depending on whether God is a dead cipher who cannot be addressed and is only the silent *guarantor* of the status quo, or whether God can be addressed in risky ways as the *transformer* of what has not yet appeared.¹²⁵

This God, who we faithfully protest, to whom we cling and cling against, is also the God who saves.

¹²⁴ Brueggemann, “The Costly Loss of Lament,” 60. Brueggemann appeals here to the psychological theory of Object Relations as an analogue for understanding this belief of ancient Israel. See also Brueggemann, “Prerequisites,” 40. “It is my judgment that, long before and development of personality theory in the twentieth century... Israel understood that health personhood requires the dialectic of being able to *cede* one’s life over to holiness and being able to *claim* one’s life over against holiness. I do not suggest that contemporary personality theory verifies Israel’s ancient theological covenantalism, but that ancient covenantalism anticipates our more recent learnings.”

¹²⁵ Ibid.: 64.

We have spent the majority of our time with lament focusing on the plea of the lament, on the cry of distress to God. The psalms of lament are not lamentation only, however. They almost always include a dramatic, surprising turn to praise. We have given most of our attention to the plea because we have historically found it much easier to move quickly to praise than to pay attention to our grief. We must fully experience our grief in order to make the turn to praise at all. The turn to praise, however, marks the transformation that has happened as we have voiced our complaint to God and our protest against God.

The movement from plea to praise in the psalms of lament often does not seem like a movement at all, but a hairpin turn, or a flip of a switch, a change of voice often in mid-stanza. Psalm 43 concludes,

My soul, why are you so downcast?
 Why are you groaning inside me?
 Hope in God, since I will praise him again
 for being my Savior and my God.¹²⁶

What has happened here? Many insist that the turn to praise is in response to God's saving action, and not a naive hope. "In that move [to praise] the situation and/or attitude of the speaker is transformed, and God is mobilized for the sake of the speaker. The intervention of God in some way permits the move from plea to praise."¹²⁷ Other turns to praise are not the validation of God's action at all, but a *vow* to praise once God brings deliverance to the one in suffering.

May [God] repay the evil
 to those who are lying in wait for me.
 In your faithfulness, destroy them!

¹²⁶ Ps. 43:5. *Complete Jewish Bible: An English Version of the Tanakh (Old Testament) and B'rit Hadashah (New Testament)*.

¹²⁷ Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," 57.

Then I will generously sacrifice to you;
I will praise your name...¹²⁸

Regardless of how this transformation occurs, it has caught us by surprise. We are transformed by God in the midst of prayer, and in our lament have been caught up in praise. The God to whom we have been praying, after all, is the God of the Exodus, who hears the cries of those who suffer, and responds to save. God even makes it that we are involved in this act of salvation.

The Old Testament cannot pin God down to a single soteriology; it can only speak of God's saving acts within a whole series of events, and that necessarily involves some kind of verbal exchange between God and man. This latter includes both the cry of man in distress and the response of praise which the saved make to God.¹²⁹

Our grief will persist. The wound will not remain raw, but it will remain.¹³⁰ However, in our prayer of lament, we have involved God in our suffering and God has involved us in our healing. The death of our loved one has forever changed who we are, and God responds with the invitation of the psalms of lament: to cling to God against God, to present ourselves as full selves before God, and to meet God in a new intimacy that transforms us in the midst of our suffering.

¹²⁸ Ps. 54:5-6a. *Complete Jewish Bible: An English Version of the Tanakh (Old Testament) and B'rit Hadashah (New Testament)*.

¹²⁹ Westermann, "The Role of the Lament," 22.

¹³⁰ Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son*, 5.

V. *LAMENTATION*

“Words create worlds,” Rabbi Abraham Heschel reminds us.¹³¹ The prayer of lament creates a new world that breaks into the dark world of our despair. We have experienced rupture, the breach of life, the end of the life of one we have loved. Still, praise has erupted from the depths of our despair. We have entered a new intimacy with the God of sorrows. Our world has been overwhelmed by our loved one alone in her grave, and we are overwhelmed again by this new world of suffering in which God meets us.

In Deborah Anderson’s icon, *Lamentation*,¹³² Mary cradles the dead body of her son, Jesus, in her lap. Mary, “the one who must keep on living,”¹³³ has in her lamentation a moment with her beloved son before he enters the grave. It is the last moment that she will have with him as she has known him. What despair is she feeling in this moment? Her son, whom she knows to be the Son of God, who once spoke of the blessedness of those who mourn,¹³⁴ has been violently murdered. Mary rejoiced at the gift of his presence with her,¹³⁵ but now in her lap is the cruelest contradiction of her song. God is not mighty. God’s mercy has failed, and the violent have conquered the humble. Mary’s magnification has become lamentation.

Why, then, are we comforted by this image? Why does this icon lead us into prayer? Mary fills us with deep sadness. Simeon’s prophecy has come true: a sword has pierced Mary’s

¹³¹ Susanna Heschel, “Introduction,” in Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays edited by Susanna Heschel* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), viii.

¹³² Deborah Anderson, *Lamentation*, used with permission of the artist.

¹³³ von Balthasar, *Reader*, 149.

¹³⁴ Matt. 5:4.

¹³⁵ Lk. 1:46-55.

soul.¹³⁶ Yet, in this intimate moment of suffering, Mary reveals to us that those who mourn are indeed blessed. Her song of praise was “fully aware of the reality of pain and loss.”¹³⁷ The Gospels do not provide Mary with words in this moment of Jesus’ death as they do during her anticipation of Jesus’ birth. Serene Jones imagines that Mary learns her lament from Rachel, who wept for her own murdered children.¹³⁸ In *Lamentation*, we have an image of this lament that Rachel has taught her.

In embracing Rachel, Mary learns that one cannot have great hope without simultaneously bearing great grief. Mary must, then, learn again from Rachel about the brokenness of the created order that can, from the perspective of the Magnificat, only be named and mourned... In our grief as well as in our hope, we embody the glory of God, for our grief bears witness to what *should not be* and therefore to what *actually is* and *should be*, according to God’s creative and redemptive intentions. This is what Rachel teaches Mary, in their imagined encounter. And Mary is then able to claim her own grief as a symbol of hope, a defiance of sin, and impetus for acting creatively toward the imagined future that has laid claim on her... She is a mother who has watched her son suffer and die. And this should not be.¹³⁹

Mary was willing to make space in her own body to bring Jesus to life, and to usher in the new life that God sought to bring through him. Likewise, as we reflect on Mary’s lamentation, we find that Mary creates a space for *us* to join her in her grief and to again open the possibility for new life.

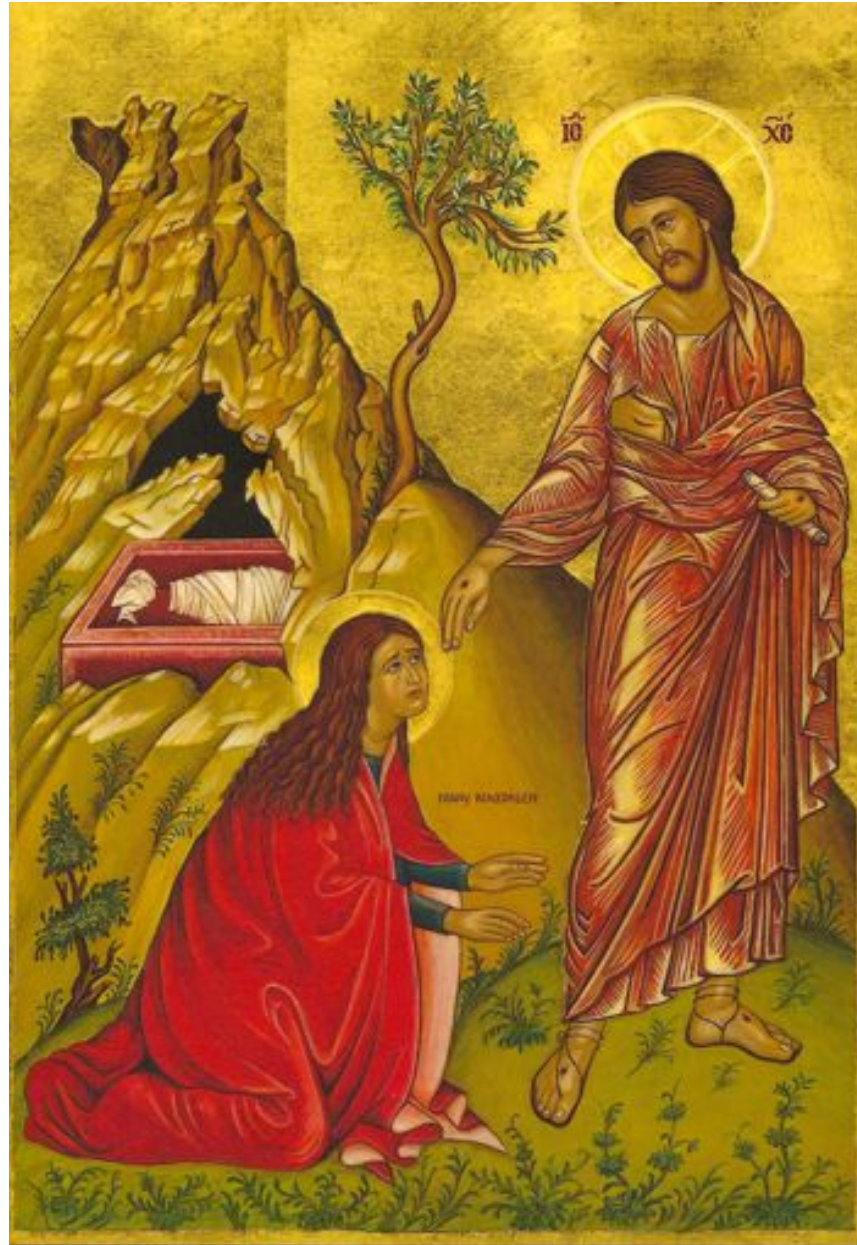
¹³⁶ Lk. 2:35.

¹³⁷ Billman and Migliore, *Rachel's Cry*, 3.

¹³⁸ Serene Jones, *Trauma and Grace* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 120-22.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 121-22.

PART THREE: EMMANUEL



DEBORAH ANDERSON, *Resurrection/Mary Magdalene*

I. THE PRAYER AND PRESENCE OF GOD

The death of a loved one, especially the death of one who is young, is a rupture of life as we know it should be. Under the threat of meaninglessness, we turned to Holy Saturday for space in our Christian story to grieve, and to meet the God in midst of our mourning. We traversed the psalms of lament in search for a voice for our suffering. We tended to our despair in the depths, and entered a new world of suffering in the presence of God. As the *triduum* story attests, however, and to which our prayers of lament turn in praise, Saturday is not the end of the story. Easter Sunday stands as a great surprise of newness. Sunday is neither a reversal nor a negation of death, but a day when new life breaks into our ruptured lives, when our ruptured story is renewed. Because of Easter Sunday, we are brought into a new relationship with God. Our Saturday silence is now met with the “inarticulate groanings”¹⁴⁰ of the Holy Spirit, and our cries of lament are now taken up to the Father by the Son.

The prayer of the Spirit

Attentive to Holy Saturday, we appealed above to Jürgen Moltmann’s insistence that the death of Jesus was experienced by the whole of the Trinity. Jesus the Son suffers the forsakenness of the Father, and the Father suffers the death of the Son. What, then, of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit? “There is a famous medieval image of the Trinity, the so-called mercy seat or chair of grace, sometimes even called ‘the pain of God,’” Moltmann writes.

With an expression of intensive pain God the Father carries in his hands the crossbeam of the cross on which the dead Son hangs, while the Spirit in the form of a dove descends from the face of the Father to the face of the Son. This is an image of the Trinity with the cross at the center. What we are shown is the

¹⁴⁰ Rom. 8:26.

brehtaking scene of Holy Saturday... There is a mystical moment of silence between cross and resurrection.¹⁴¹

Holy Saturday has been for us a day of mourning and deep silence. The Holy Spirit was present in the “mystical moment of silence” of Holy Saturday, and the Holy Spirit, our Comforter, is present in the midst of our silent grief today. Specifically, the Spirit is present with us as one praying on our behalf when we do not have the words for ourselves.

As Paul writes in Romans 8:26, “the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.” According to James Dunn, these “sighs too deep for words” are the Spirit’s “inarticulate intercession of and for the saints.”¹⁴² They are the prayers of the Spirit on our behalf, the wordless prayers of silence when our suffering is greater than words can articulate.¹⁴³ “It is not the speech of high spiritual rapport or profoundest prophetic inspiration which achieves effective communication with God, but the speech which expresses human inability,” Dunn writes. “It is the Spirit speaking with primal speech, putting believers in touch with their deepest being where language fails.”¹⁴⁴

The prayer of the Son

What better news is there in the midst of the suffering that brought us to the limits of language than that the Holy Spirit takes up our prayers to God? Perhaps there is no greater news,

¹⁴¹ Moltmann, “Crucified God,” 133.

¹⁴² James D. G. Dunn, “Spirit Speech: Reflections on Romans 8:12-27,” in *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Sven K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 83.

¹⁴³ Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 578-80.

¹⁴⁴ Dunn, “Spirit Speech,” 90.

but there is more news. The Holy Spirit is not the only person of the Trinity who prays on our behalf. Jesus the Son, as our high priest, takes up our prayers as well. As our high priest, Jesus takes our “feeble” and “inarticulate” prayers and makes them his own.¹⁴⁵ Jesus represented us on the cross,¹⁴⁶ and represents us now before the Father in his intercession for us. Just as the Jewish high priest on the Day of Atonement “stood before the people as their divinely appointed representative,”¹⁴⁷ so Christ “comes from the Father to be the true priest, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, in solidarity with all humanity... bearing upon his divine-human heart the names, the needs, the sorrows, the injustices of all nations.”¹⁴⁸ In this sense, Jesus’ cry from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” remains before the Father today as Jesus takes up our lament and makes it his own. We have voiced to the Father the “I” of our lament. In his prayer as high priest, Jesus is our “we.”

A newfound silence

In the prayers of the Spirit and the Son, the silencing of Saturday becomes a new silence of prayer.¹⁴⁹ In the mystical silence between cross and resurrection, the Trinity has opened space for us in the suffering of God. We share in in God’s suffering, and God shares in ours. In the “narrative gap” of Holy Saturday, in this “hiatus of expectant waiting,”¹⁵⁰ Sarah Coakley writes,

¹⁴⁵ James Torrance, *Worship, Community & the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 46.

¹⁴⁶ See further Douglas John Hall, *Professing the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 526-48.

¹⁴⁷ Torrance, *Worship*, 47.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁴⁹ For the language of silence and silencing, see Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 35.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

we ‘make space’ for God to be God. Prayer which makes this ‘space’ may take a variety of forms... Such prayer may use a repeated phrase to ward off distractions, or be wholly silent; it may be simple Quaker attentiveness, or take a charismatic expression... What is sure, however, is that engaging in any such regular and repeated ‘waiting on the divine’ will involve great personal commitment and (apparently) great personal risk... But whilst risky, this practice is profoundly transformative.¹⁵¹

We have met this risky and transformative prayer in the psalms of lament. As we practice this prayer in the silent space of Saturday, we participate in the prayers of the Spirit and the Son to the Father and the Spirit and the Son participate in ours. We are taken up, with our prayers, as full selves into the Triune God who has experienced the death of the cross. As Serene Jones describes, what we feel as we enter the space of such deep rupture is the simultaneous emotions of *mourning and wonder*:

Mourning fully and wondering openly... this is what remains: the soul-response evoked by the cross. To mourn and to wonder, that is what the spirit yearns for when it stands in the midst of trauma and breathes in the truth of grace. Mourning and wonder—neither one answers the question that trauma poses to grace. They are, instead, states of mind that, if nurtured, open us to the experience of God’s coming into torn flesh, and to love’s arrival amid violent ruptures.¹⁵²

God has arrived in our mourning and in our wonder. Love has come to us at last, even here, if not especially here, in the middle of our deepest grief.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 34-35.

¹⁵² Jones, *Trauma and Grace*, 161.

II. *RESURRECTION/MARY MAGDALENE* ¹⁵³

Who better exemplifies this holy waiting for God than Mary Magdalene? In the dark, early morning of the Sunday after Jesus' death, Mary Magdalene goes to his tomb.¹⁵⁴ She has gone there to mourn, “for in cultures which do not try to pretend that death does not exist that is the human and proper thing to do. She will do the duty of the nearest and dearest—sit by the body and weep.”¹⁵⁵ Mary seeks “the One she loves... at the hollow tomb, weeping from vacant eyes, groping after him with empty hands.”¹⁵⁶ What a shock it must be, when she arrives at the tomb and finds that it is empty! She runs to Peter and the beloved disciple, John, in distress. “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him,” she exclaims, and they run to the tomb to see for themselves. Having entered the tomb, and confirmed for themselves that Mary is seeing correctly, Peter and John return to their homes, “for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.” They are not filled with faith, nor do they console Mary or each other.¹⁵⁷ They simply leave.

Mary, however, does not return home, but, instead, remains in her grief, weeping outside of the tomb. But she seeks the body of her missing Lord. When she enters the tomb herself, Mary does not see Jesus' burial linens, as had Peter and John, but instead two angels, dressed in white. “Woman, why are you weeping?” the angels ask her. She replies with the same words

¹⁵³ Deborah Anderson, *Resurrection/Mary Magdalene*, used with permission of the artist.

¹⁵⁴ We recount here the story of Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene as told in John 20:1-18.

¹⁵⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the 4th Gospel* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 262-63.

¹⁵⁶ von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, 51.

¹⁵⁷ This insight is from Newbigin, *The Light Has Come*, 264.

that she had told to Peter and John, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” Mary then turns around, and sees another man in the tomb with her. “Woman, why are you weeping?”, he also asks her, and then adds, “Whom are you looking for?” Thinking that he is the gardener, Mary replies, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.” Strangers have taken the body of her beloved Jesus, and she needs to touch him, to see him, and care for his remains.

The gardener, however, speaks her name—“Mary!”—and Mary recognizes that he is Jesus.¹⁵⁸ The shock of his missing body is overmatched by this unfathomable surprise. She is overcome, and moves to new language. “Rabbouni!” she cries in Hebrew, “Teacher!” She runs to him, and holds onto him.¹⁵⁹ Her beloved has returned! Mary, “despite her sorrow, ‘seeks’ Jesus and finds him,”¹⁶⁰ But then she receives a second surprise: “Stop clinging to me,” Jesus tells her. “I have not yet ascended to the Father.” So far, we have viewed this three-day story, of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, with Easter Sunday as its end. But we are surprised to see that even Sunday is not the end of the story. Mary cannot cling to Jesus because he has to leave again, and go to the Father.

“Stop *clinging* to me,” Jesus tells Mary, “for I have not yet ascended to the Father. “Stop clinging to *me*, but “go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your

¹⁵⁸ Mary’s recognition of Jesus at the sound of his voice reflects Jesus’s parable in John 10:3-4, where the good shepherd “calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.” See further Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, 333.

¹⁵⁹ Though Mary’s action of clinging to Jesus is not stated explicitly, it is implicit in the grammar of John’s Greek. See further F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 389.

¹⁶⁰ Newbiggin, *The Light Has Come*, 333.

Father, to my God and your God.”¹⁶¹ Mary, “like the faith community she represents, cannot rest in the embrace of her beloved. She has a mission.”¹⁶² She, the one who remained in her grief, who “roam[ed] alone in a darkened cemetery,”¹⁶³ becomes the first to see the risen Jesus, and the first to announce the Easter goodness of Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus gives to Mary the words of life, the promise of God-with-us. “Jesus indicates that his permanent presence is not by way of appearance, but by way of the gift of the Spirit that can only come after he has ascended to the Father.”¹⁶⁴ Mary Magdalene carries with her the absence of Jesus, and now also proclaims the good news of Jesus’ presence.

Death is not a gift, and neither is suffering in itself. We will suffer more tragedy, and we will have more grief to bear. We will, however, voice our suffering to the Father, and will cling to God against God. The gift is that God will hear our cry of lament in intimacy, will meet us in our despair, and will join us in our prayer. “Where can I go from your spirit?”, the psalmist asks. “Or where can I flee from your presence?”

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
 if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
 If I take the wings of the morning
 and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
 even there your hand shall lead me,
 and your right hand shall hold me fast.
 If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,
 and the light around me become night,”
 even the darkness is not dark to you;

¹⁶¹ See further Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 219.

¹⁶² Adeline Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom: A Feminist Historical-Literary Analysis of the Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 161-62.

¹⁶³ Schneiders, *Written*, 99-100.

¹⁶⁴ Raymond E. Brown, cited in Harold W. Attridge, “‘Don’t Be Touching Me’: Recent Feminist Scholarship on Mary Magdalene,” in *A Feminist Companion to John*, Vol. 2, edited by Amy-Jill Levine, with Marianne Blickenstaff (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003), 144.

the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.¹⁶⁵

We, who have suffered tragedy, who have chosen to attend to our grief and address it to God, are uniquely able to speak the good news that Jesus, our priest, himself prays for us, and that the Spirit, our Comforter, prays with us. We are given the words of life: Emmanuel.

¹⁶⁵ Ps. 139:7-12.

EPILOGUE

We still do not know the day when Katie died. Spring has now arrived in Seattle, and the cherry blossoms that Katie loved have begun to open. Sometime soon a search team will return to Mt. Hood to try to find Katie and Anthony and provide some answers toward what happened that day, how long they suffered, and how they died. But we will never know *why* they died. “My wound is an unanswered question. The wounds of all humanity are an unanswered question,” Nicholas Wolterstorff writes.¹⁶⁶ “To lament is to risk living with one’s deepest questions unanswered.”¹⁶⁷

My own journey of grief, through Holy Saturday and the psalms of lament, has been with the God who is acquainted with sorrow and who has joined me in my prayer. “When we are free to articulate our sufferings unashamedly to God, who is ultimately responsible,” Gerrit Dawson writes,

we are better able to believe that the God who has come alongside us is indeed present in the midst of all grief... We offer up our sufferings, and consider the griefs with which Jesus was, and is, acquainted. With him, we are taken out of ourselves into the communion that makes these days bearable.¹⁶⁸

God, I believe, bears these days with me. God is with Katie, and has been with me as well. God has brought me peace. “The shalom that God desires for us is embodied shalom... Therefore, I join the psalmist in lament.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son*, 68.

¹⁶⁷ Wolterstorff, “If God is Good,” 52.

¹⁶⁸ Dawson, “Broken,” 36.

¹⁶⁹ Wolterstorff, “If God is Good,” 52.

Lord, hear me!
Katie has died, and it is wrong!
Her body is absent from us, thousands of feet above us,
her absence is as present as her laugh once was,
her absence is more present than you.

You shook that mountain.
You made the mountain and then you shook her off of it.
You shook that mountain, and left her there.

You left us waiting,
 waiting,
hoping for her life,
needing to be able to grieve.

If you hear me like you say you do,
if you look down into the depths,
if you still travel there
 like you used to,
then be with me now
and bring me peace.

You sit with the homeless under bridges,
 you find new homes for them
 and schools for their children,
like Katie once did.

You meet me in my despair,
and join me in song.
You bring me friends who pause with me,
 and embrace me
 and speak your words of life.
You bring me peace
 and lead me into joy.
Make your presence known to me
 and I will sing your praise.

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