

## **Intoning Our Lamentation – June 28, 2015**

### **2 Samuel 1**

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You may have heard of or even read the books in the popular Harry Potter book series, written for kids but enjoyed by all ages. Harry Potter is a young boy whose parents were murdered when he was a baby, and he has lived with his cruel aunt and uncle ever since. Possessing magical abilities like his parents, Harry is a student at school for witches and wizards. During his time there, a great evil power is returning to the world – the same power which killed his parents. Throughout the series Harry learns that only he can face and conquer this evil wizard who threatens the world, and each year that passes the side of evil and destruction continues to grow.

Midway through the series, Harry meets Sirius Black, a man who was wrongly imprisoned and who had been a close friend to Harry's parents. In Sirius, Harry has finally found the father figure he has been longing for all his life, and they quickly develop a close relationship. Yet for Harry, tragedy seems to ever lurk in the shadows nearby. Like Harry's parents years before, Sirius is wrenched from Harry's life and murdered by a pack of evil wizards.

In a scene not long after the death of Sirius, Harry is standing in the office of the headmaster of Hogwarts, the Wizarding School. Dumbledore is speaking calmly with Harry, and within himself, Harry can feel the anger rise to fill the emptiness of the great loss he feels. His rage turns toward the old wizard, and he begins throwing things around the office. Dumbledore allows him to vent and tells Harry that this suffering he feels is part of being human.

Harry roars his response, "THEN I DON'T WANT TO BE HUMAN!" And he continues to trash the office. The paintings of previous headmasters that line the walls begin to respond to this destruction with cries of anger and fright. Yes, in the wizarding world, pictures can talk.

*I DON'T CARE!" Harry yelled at them, snatching up a lunascope and throwing it into the fireplace. "I'VE HAD ENOUGH, I'VE SEEN ENOUGH, I WANT OUT, I WANT IT TO END, I DON'T CARE ANYMORE-"*

*He seized the table on which the silver instruments had stood and threw that too. It broke apart on the floor and the legs rolled in different directions.*

*"You do care," said Dumbledore. He had not flinched or made a single move to stop Harry demolishing his office. His expression was calm, almost detached. "You care so much you feel as though you will bleed to death with the pain of it."*

*"I- DON'T!" Harry screamed, so loudly that he felt his throat might tear, and for a second he wanted to rush at Dumbledore and break him to; shatter that calm old face, shake him, hurt him, make him feel some tiny part of the horror inside Harry.*

*"Oh yes, you do," said Dumbledore, still more calmly. "You have now lost your mother, your father, and the closest thing to a parent you have ever known. Of course you care."*

*"YOU DON'T KNOW HOW I FEEL!" HARRY ROARED. "YOU...STANDING THERE...YOU..." But words were no longer enough, smashing things was no more help. He wanted to run, he wanted to keep running and never look back, he wanted to be somewhere he could not see the clear blue eyes staring at him, that hatefully calm old face. (Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, J.K. Rowling, p. 824)*

When we examine this morning's lesson from 2 Samuel, we must realize that much time has passed. Last week we heard the story of David killing the Philistine called Goliath. Following that event, David became a skilled soldier and leader in Saul's army, and he developed an intimate friendship with Saul's son Jonathon, the heir apparent to Saul's throne, and he was married to Saul's daughter Michal. Saul developed a mental condition that caused him to fly into rages against David, trying to kill him. David's friend Jonathon would try to calm his father and convince him that David was on his side. And his wife Michal hid him from her father's wrath. That worked for a while. But eventually, David had to escape Israel, and surprisingly he ended up living with the Philistines. On two occasions he had the opportunity to kill Saul, but he did not. He still recognized Saul as God's anointed, the king that God had chosen for Israel.

David and Jonathon were the closest of friends. Vowing their loyalty to one another and professing a closeness to each other that surpassed marriage. What is described in scripture is a rare type of friendship, not easily found.

Following a fierce battle between Israel and the Philistines, both Saul and his son Jonathon are killed. This news is brought to David by an Amalekite who claims to have killed the mortally wounded Saul, though in a previous text it is written that Saul killed himself by falling on his own sword. Immediately David expresses disbelief and shock at the news, questioning the messenger on how he could know this. David's grief is raw and

fierce. He weeps and fasts and tears his garments as is the custom. David and all his men mourn these deaths. Then David has the Amalekite messenger slain for his audacity at taking the life of God's anointed.

David is passionate. He feels things deeply. His intensity is evident in his actions and reactions and it is certainly evident in his poetry in the psalms he writes. In response to this double tragedy – the deaths of both the king and the heir to the throne, David composes a lament – almost like a eulogy – extolling the virtues of Saul and Jonathon and the extent of the loss their deaths reflect.

Additionally in his lament, he commands his enemies not to rejoice at this tragedy. This is not to be a time for celebration or revelry. He demands that the nation's enemies show restraint out of respect for those who have fallen. This is how David can himself highlight and focus on Saul's positive qualities even though in his madness, Saul had been trying to destroy David. David still sees him as God's anointed and as someone who had been a mentor to him.

David demands that this lament be taught to all of Israel. The nation is in mourning, and David steps up as a leader to help the people deal with their shock and grief. He is not afraid to pen the powerful emotions that are stirred by such a tragedy, and while the public expression of grief is more refined than David's private, anguished personal grief, he gives the people permission to mourn this grave loss.

Eugene Peterson writes, "Teach this lament. Teach this way of dealing with Saul's enmity and Jonathon's love. Teach one another how to take seriously these great cadences of pain, some coming from hate, some coming from love, so that we're not diminished but deepened by them – find God in them, and beauty. Put form and rhythm and song to them. Pain isn't the worst thing. Being hated isn't the worst thing. Being separated from the one you love isn't the worst thing. Death isn't the worst thing. The worst thing is failing to deal with the reality and becoming disconnected from what is actual. The worst thing is trivializing the honorable, desecrating the sacred. What I do with my grief affects the way you handle your grief; together we form a community that deals with death and other loss in the context of God's sovereignty, which is expressed finally in resurrection." (*Leap Over a Wall*, p. 119)

It seems like often our society tries to hide or minimize expressions of pain and grief. We take a stoic approach to our responses, as if we're afraid to seem weak or appear vulnerable. Or we feel embarrassed when confronted with someone else's outpouring of

grief. We don't know how to respond. We've lost the ability to empathize because for so long we've suppressed our own pain. Lament allows us to reclaim our feelings, to allow them to simply be. To honor them and to give them space to exist, so that once felt, hope can enter in to that space.

A few days ago I watched part of the video of the funeral service for the pastor of the AME Church in Charleston where the massacre at an evening bible study took place. President Obama led the eulogy for the Rev. Clementa Pinckney, saying, in part, "He embodied the idea that our Christian faith demands deeds and not just words, that the sweet hour of prayer actually lasts the whole week long, that to put our faith in action is more than just individual salvation, it's about our collective salvation, that to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and house the homeless is not just a call for isolated charity but the imperative of a just society."

He spoke also about the tragedy itself, and how God's grace was there. He talked about how the families of the nine who were slain showed forgiveness toward the alleged shooter. He talked about the ongoing issues of racism and mistrust in our nation. But the theme throughout was about God's grace. There is always room for God's grace.

And then toward the end on the president's message, he paused, seemingly caught up in the emotion of the experience, but then he began to sing, slowly, the opening line of the hymn Amazing Grace. When I watched the video for the first time, I was struck by the response of one particular man. He was sitting on the podium on left side of the president, wearing a robe and dark glasses, and he seemed a bit distracted. But when the president began to sing, he took off the glasses and stood up, and the expression on his face was amazing. It showed astonishment at first as if he could not believe what he was hearing, and then his expression melted into something akin to joy – perhaps it was the grace that the president and the others who had joined in - were singing about. But that man's countenance was incredible to behold.

I don't know him, and I cannot be certain what he was feeling or thinking, but what I saw in his face, was a possibility. The possibility that the pain and shock and tragedy of this horrific act of hatred and violence might hold a kernel of grace. The possibility that lament might give way to hope.