

SHARING GRIEF, RESTORING HOPE  
Rev. Jason Santalucia

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in Brookfield, Connecticut  
on October 5, 2025

Text: Lamentations 1:1-6

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How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations! She that was a princess among the provinces has become a vassal. She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has no one to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they have become her enemies. Judah has gone into exile with suffering and hard servitude; she lives now among the nations, and finds no resting place; her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress. The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to the festivals; all her gates are desolate, her priests groan; her young girls grieve, and her lot is bitter. Her foes have become the masters, her enemies prosper, because the Lord has made her suffer for the multitude of her transgressions; her children have gone away, captives before the foe. From daughter Zion has departed all her majesty. Her princes have become like stags that find no pasture; they fled without strength before the pursuer.

The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

**Y**EARS AGO, I LEAD a worship service at a retirement community, and going in, I didn't know what to expect. Sometimes those places stick you in a lobby or a cafeteria, and there's all kinds of background noise, people coming and going, and you wonder if anyone can even hear what you're saying. But this time turned out to be a real gift.

There were eight or ten residents at the service, and we were in a nice, quiet, comfortable space with couches and armchairs. I opened with a prayer, read some scripture, gave a little homily, and then we had communion. But what I remember the most was what happened next. I asked if there were any prayer concerns, and most people mentioned something about their health—feeling under the weather. A few people wanted me to pray for their kids or grandkids, who were going through a tough time. But there

was one woman who really opened up and shared her deepest sorrow.

She was a fairly new resident. Her husband had died only a few months before, after fifty-some years of marriage, and after he was gone, she didn't know what to do. On top of grieving, all of a sudden she had to deal with things she'd never dealt with before. Her husband had always been the one who paid the bills, and did the taxes, and got the oil changed in the car. And now she had to do all that stuff.

So, she tried to manage, but it was overwhelming, and after a couple of months she decided she didn't want to stay in the house anymore. It was too much, and it felt too lonely. But the thought of moving was really scary, and she didn't know where to even begin. Finding a new place to live, selling the house, packing up, hiring movers—it seemed like an endless series

of impossible tasks. Plus, she was anxious about all the change—starting a whole new life. She sat up every night worrying about it.

But everything worked out. Her daughter found this retirement community and helped her with the move. The staff was warm and caring, and they were right there whenever she needed something. She made friends right away and got involved in all kinds of activities. By the end of the first week, she was already feeling more relaxed and comfortable. And just as she said that, she broke down in tears. But they weren't tears of sadness. They were tears of relief. It was like she was letting go of all the stress she'd been carrying around for so long. And I could see on the faces of everyone in that group that we were all right there with her. We were all sharing that moment together and offering our compassion and support.

**I**'ve never forgotten that moment. It was powerful. And for that woman, it was healing. But it's not something we often allow ourselves to do—to open up like that when we're hurting, to bare our souls and let ourselves be vulnerable. Instead, we put on a brave face when we're around other people. We keep it together at the grocery store, the doctor's office, the hair salon. Even at church, when people ask how we're doing, we say we're fine when we're not.

I think it's just part of our culture. We're not big on public displays of emotion. And I'm not saying that's wrong, but it's worth asking, what are we missing out on? Because community can be a tremendous resource when we're grieving. Voicing our sorrow to others can help us get through it.

Which is exactly what we see in the book of Lamentations this morning. Lamentations was written in the aftermath of probably the greatest calamity in Israel's history: the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. They laid siege to the city for eighteen months, and when they finally conquered it, they looted and destroyed the temple, they killed thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of people in the streets, and they carted off thousands more in chains. They took them back to Babylon, where they lived in exile for the next 70 years.

It was devastating. The exiles had lost everything—their homes, their land, their culture. And what helped them get through it was not keeping everything in but pouring their grief out in poetry and song—just like we hear in this reading. We hear the cry of this community. "How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations! She that was a princess among the

provinces has become a vassal. She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks."

It's painful and raw and not easy to listen to. Every line is dripping with sadness and despair. But something about putting their anguish into words brought all those exiles together and reassured them that they were still God's people, and God was still with them. And that gave them hope, and hope is what got them through.

Which is exactly what happened in that worship service. When that woman put her anguish into words, something about it brought everyone in that circle together, and we knew God was with us in that moment, and it gave all of us hope.

**S**o the through line here is that lament leads to community leads to hope—hope in God; hope in each other; hope that sustains us, and heals us, and gets us through. And we experience that every week here at Valley, when we go around and share our concerns. What we're doing when we do that is creating a space for lament. We're opening up and saying out loud: "This is what I'm struggling with. This is what I've lost. This is where life feels heavy."

It's not easy. It can feel awkward. It can feel risky to put ourselves out there like that. But it's how God brings us together. It's how the body of Christ is formed. It's how a room full of separate people becomes a community, where we know God is with us, no matter what we're facing.

And what better day to reflect on that than World Communion Sunday? Today we remember that the circle doesn't end with us here in this room. The same Spirit that brings us together is bringing Christians all over the world together. Right now, in hundreds of languages and cultures, in grand cathedrals and storefront churches, in crowded cities and rural villages, in places of safety and places of danger, the body of Christ is being formed again and again.

When I was a kid, I'd sit in the pew and try to picture that reality, in ever-widening circles. First the churches down the street. Then the churches across town. Then churches in other states, other countries, other hemispheres, until eventually my imagination gave out. But maybe that's the point. Communion is always bigger than we can imagine it. It draws us beyond ourselves, reminding us that the body of Christ is vast. It stretches beyond every boundary and border.

And just as lament brings us into community, communion deepens that community into something unshakable. When we come to this table, our grief is not ours alone. Our hope is not ours alone. We carry one another's burdens. We share one another's joys. We belong to one another in Christ.

So when you come forward today, bring your whole self. Bring your losses, your sorrows, the places where you feel weak, or lost, or uncertain. Because here at this table, vulnerability becomes belonging. Lament becomes love. Brokenness becomes wholeness. And communion becomes hope—hope that we are still God's people, and God is still with us.

Let's pray together:

Gracious and merciful God, you hear our cries of sorrow, you join our hearts together in compassion, and you feed us at the table of Christ. We thank you that in our grief you give us companions, in our weakness you give us strength, and in our brokenness you give us hope.

Send us now into the world as one body, to bear one another's burdens, to share one another's joys, and to be signs of your love that has no end. Keep us steadfast in faith, joyful in hope, and bold in love, until the day when all your children are gathered around your table and your kingdom is made complete. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.