

A Service of Lament
Psalm 71 :1-16
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
July 26, 2026
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

The reality is that this life comes with trials, with trouble, with deep hurts, with sorrow. Sometimes we feel this in very personal ways. Sometimes we feel it in communal ways.

But we are often hesitant to express it. And we are often discouraged from expressing it.

We hear things like “Look on the bright side.” We ask each other for positivity, even to the point of toxic positivity or unrealistic optimism. We have forgotten, or never learned, how to sit in negative experiences and feel them without being consumed by them.

And yet, those difficult experiences happen. We know what it is to grieve. We know what it is to be hurt. We know what it is to see the pain of another and feel helpless in the face of it. We know what it is to look around our lives or our world and feel despair. And these feelings can overwhelm us.

But our faith gives us a place to put these experiences and these feelings. Because in the Judeo-Christian tradition we understand God as one who is big enough to handle the whole of who we are. We understand God as one who can hear our greatest joy and our deepest pain and who remains in relationship with us. We understand God as one who knows the pain of the world and who grieves along with us.

And so, the practice of lament is a faithful practice. It is a practice that is rooted in trusting relationship with God. It is a practice that affirms the companionship of God, not as one who waves a magic wand to make all pain go away, but as one who walks with us.

And there is power in the act of lament. After all, as Jaco Hamman says, lament both “acknowledges the limitations of an embodied life” and “affirms the value of an embodied life”; lament “grants permission to grieve and protest” and “empowers when someone feels vulnerable”; “it prepares the way for new understandings of God; it strengthens our self-understanding as responsible agents; it purifies anger and the desire for vengeance; it promotes solidarity with those who suffer; it revitalizes praise and hope” (Jaco Hamman, PhD, *When Steeples Cry: Leading Congregations Through Loss and Change*, Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005).

Lament gives us a place for honest naming of the realities, but also a place to be open to new possibilities. It is “a life-giving and life-affirming task” (Hamman).

Song “Out of the Depths” Words by Ruth Duck

Psalm 71:1-16

¹ *In you, O Lord, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.*

² *In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
incline your ear to me and save me.*

³ *Be to me a rock of refuge,
a strong fortress to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.*

- ⁴ *Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.*
- ⁵ *For you, O Lord, are my hope,
my trust, O Lord, from my youth.*
- ⁶ *From my birth I have leaned upon you,
my protector since my mother's womb.
My praise is continually of you.*
- ⁷ *I have been like a portent to many,
but you are my strong refuge.*
- ⁸ *My mouth is filled with your praise
and with your glory all day long.*
- ⁹ *Do not cast me off in the time of old age;
do not forsake me when my strength is spent.*
- ¹⁰ *For my enemies speak concerning me,
and those who watch for my life consult together.*
- ¹¹ *They say, "Pursue and seize that person
whom God has forsaken,
for there is no one to deliver."*
- ¹² *O God, do not be far from me;
O my God, make haste to help me!*
- ¹³ *Let my accusers be put to shame and consumed;
let those who seek to hurt me
be covered with scorn and disgrace.*
- ¹⁴ *But I will hope continually
and will praise you yet more and more.*
- ¹⁵ *My mouth will tell of your righteous acts,
of your deeds of salvation all day long,
though their number is past my knowledge.*
- ¹⁶ *I will come praising the mighty deeds of the Lord God;
I will praise your righteousness, yours alone.*

All of us can name things that break our hearts. From childhood through adulthood we know what it is to look around and see people who are hurting, a world that is living in conflict, creation straining under our misuse. From childhood through adulthood we know what it is to experience our own broken heartedness, sometimes because of the words or actions of people closest to us.

We see it in our world today. Fires burn and waters flood. People live in places where wars are raging and sirens ring with warning to take cover. Diseases ravage whole populations. People of color live in fear as they go about simple daily tasks like traveling to work or taking their children to school. Protestors are arrested or killed for practicing their rights. Even we, who once felt far from the possibility, go through training to be prepared in case of an active shooter.

We see it in our own lives as jobs are lost, as loved ones die, as relationships are broken - sometimes not even understanding why, as aging too often means loss of physical capacity or rational abilities.

We know what it is to experience pain, and to witness and be heartbroken over our own struggles as well as the pain of others, of our community, of creation, of the world.

Cameron Trimble reminds us that “The Bible gives us a language for moments like this. It teaches us the sacred act of lament. Lament is the cry of the brokenhearted, the prayer of those who cannot see a way forward but still reach out to God. The psalms are filled with laments—raw, unfiltered expressions of pain, anger, and sorrow. They remind us that God does not turn away from our grief. Instead, God meets us in it, holding us when the weight of the world feels unbearable” (Cameron Trimble, “A Time for Lament” at Piloting Faith, January 13, 2025, [A Time for Lament - by Rev. Cameron Trimble](#)).

And it’s not only in the psalms that we see this faithful practice of lament. “The prophet Jeremiah knew what it meant to lament. He wrote, ‘Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people.’ (Jeremiah 9:1). Like Jeremiah, we are called to let our hearts break open for those who are suffering. To weep with those who weep. To stand in solidarity with those whose lives have been upended.

Trimble goes on writing, “But lament is not the end of the story. It is a way of making space for hope to emerge. When we lament, we acknowledge the depth of the pain, but we also affirm our belief that this pain does not have the final word. We cry out to God, trusting that God hears and responds. And we commit ourselves to action—bringing comfort to the hurting, advocating for justice, and working toward a world where such tragedies are less frequent” (Cameron Trimble, “A Time for Lament” at Piloting Faith, January 13, 2025, [A Time for Lament - by Rev. Cameron Trimble](#)).

Lament, it allows us to honor our real feelings of pain and distress while also holding tight to the promise of God’s presence with us.

When Dale read the scripture he named that the psalm we heard today is written in the traditional form of lament. And it contains those elements - an honest expression of complaint and petition as well as trust and praise.

The form that laments traditionally follow goes like this (from Jaco Hamman’s work):

- They begin with an address to God, crying out to the one who we trust is present.
- A complaint is then issued - naming the various problems being experienced by an individual or community. The complaint often has a full range of emotions.
- A confession of trust comes next because lament happens within trusting relationship. The one crying out does so *because* they trust that God will hear.
- Trust is followed by petition, an appeal to God for deliverance, intervention, and presence. This petition is not about striking a bargain or getting promises for God’s intervention, but it is about naming what is needed and seeking help.
- Following the petition, the prayer offers words of assurance, a statement of confidence that God hears.
- And finally the lament concludes with praise, a commitment to remain in relationship with God, and a recognition that God also feels the grief.

Lament both allows honesty and, as Cameron Trimble wrote, “is a way of making space for hope to emerge” (Cameron Trimble, “A Time for Lament” at Piloting Faith, January 13, 2025, [A Time for Lament - by Rev. Cameron Trimble](#)).

So, we are going to take a few minutes to practice writing our own prayer of lament.

[Write a prayer of lament]

Please pray with me.

God of all, we know that you are with us.

And we need you because we look around and see so much brokenness. We see people hurting people, people devaluing people. We see fear being chosen over love. We see wars in our homes, on our streets, and around the world. We see the ways that power and wealth are chosen over the needs of our neighbors. We see creation crying out, pushing back against the ways that our choices have brought destruction and deterioration.

And the brokenness isn't only around us, but we experience it within us...in relationships that have fallen apart, in fear and grief that overwhelm us, in the ways that life feels out of control to us.

God, it is so much. Sometimes it feels like too much.

And you are here. You are here as you have been from the beginning of time, throughout our lives. You are here, companioning with us on this journey, even grieving alongside us.

So, make your presence known to us. Move in ways that remind us that your intention is for wholeness, in ways that spur us and others on to be vessels of healing. Walk beside us as a steady presence. Help us to discover opportunities for change, to be agents of change, to hold onto the hope that you are a source of healing and wholeness.

We know that you are here and that you are listening. We know that you care for your people and all of your creation. So, we praise you, even in the midst of despair. We sing to you, for you are our hope. Amen.