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Lamentations 5
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Tisha B'Av: When the clocks stop

Over the past few weeks, we've been going through the greatest hits of prophets who are warning their kings about the exile, and I know I left out a lot of prophets that I could have focused on, Micah, eAmos, Zachariah, anaok ud more. But today we are not reaching the climax of our sermon series, the exile is upon us and it is worse than we feared.

Please Pray with me.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Each summer that I was in Seminary I would spend a couple of months interning at a church. These internships were required as part of my degree, but something that my professors told me was that I ought to spend at least a year doing a church internship during the academic year, because then I would get a feel for the Christian Calendar. You know, advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Epiphany, and Pentecost. They told me that part of being a pastor was observing the passage of the seasons. I have grown to appreciate the importance of going through the ritual

of the Christian calendar. Advent teaches us to focus on what you are expecting and I learned how expecting Jesus's reign can be a powerful, subversive thing. Lent teaches us to empty ourselves of frivolous things so we can fill ourselves with Jesus. Then we have the roller coaster of Holy Week, which starts with the surprise of the triumphal entry and then the despair of Good Friday and the victory of Easter.

And this year when I went through the rituals of Holy Week I felt a bit off-kilter when I celebrated Good Friday and then three days later Easter. With all the dark and turbid despair happening in the world, I did not feel like leaving the darkness of Good Friday. I needed more time than three days to process my loss. Honestly, in some ways, I still feel like I am still in the tomb.

But this is the gift and the curse of following a Christian Calendar. Every year, regardless of if we feel it, we must go through the expectation of Advent, the self-emptying of Lent, the Lament of Good Friday, and the victory of Easter. It is important because, like any muscle, it is good to exercise the full expression of human yearning. But sometimes I wish we spent more than a couple weekdays on Lament, it seems like we go from Palm Sunday to Easter, like we are too scared of lament to give a Sunday to it.

So I thought, let's give the book of Lamentations a Sunday. Let's put aside hope and victory, and just sit in dust and ashes.

While I was studying Lamentations I came upon a Jewish Holiday called, Tisha B'av, also known as the saddest day of Judaism where the Book of Lamentations is read in the synagogue. This day is a day about and of tragedy. The holiday is primarily about the destruction of the first and second temples, but it is also a time to remember all the other calamities, some of which ironically happened around the same time as the holiday itself. Tisha B'Av remembers the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and the Holocaust (known to Jewish people as the Shoah). Tisha B'Av has a lot of pain to mourn, Tisha B'Av lays many charges before God, asking why these calamities could not be prevented. These events cannot be mourned in a single year or even a single lifetime, but instead, the Jewish people have decided to hold this immortal pain. Just like we Christians hold the immortal joy and lamentation around Advent and Lent.

Contrasted with the annual and ancient observance of Tisha B'Av, Lamentations is a raw book. Unlike books like the Gospels and the law, scholars believe that the authors wrote the five poems that make up the book Lamentations very soon after the destruction of Jerusalem. Lamentations is a raw pain. A pain of a people who are not yet used to life without a king and a nation of their own. These poets lost so much that they can barely even calculate it, much less understand it. The book is

full of half thought out a theology of why this happened to them. Far from the prophets to lay out the specific sins, allying with Egypt, not caring for the widow, economic injustice, the poets of lamentations say that yes their ancestors sinned, but then try to reason with God saying their ancestors are dead and buried so why should they pay the cost of exile.

These poets were part of the upper crust of society, they were used to getting whatever they wanted, but now they have to find jobs just like everyone else. They have to buy wood and water, when before it was free because they owned the land. And it's difficult to read this book because all the things named in this chapter were already happening, it's just that the poets did not realize how hard it was to be poor or enslaved. Don't get me wrong, the pain of exile is real, it's overwhelmingly horrible. But the tragedy of the exile... the point the prophets were trying to make from the beginning was that for the poor and the widow the horror of the exile was already happening.

And maybe that is another reason to keep the memory of the lamentation of the exile alive. Because of all of the lamentations that keep happening throughout the centuries. The lamentations of the Jewish people during the crusades, Spanish Inquisition, and the shoah. The American lamentations of Indian genocide, slavery, and internment camps. The Lamentations of today.

Tisha B'Av stops all clocks. It recognizes the fundamental truth of trauma, which is trauma is and always will be felt in the present. Trauma and calamity never leave us. Neither on a personal or national level. The time to lament is always the present because people of the present are always lamenting the past.

And so let us join in the lament that has been happening every year for the past two thousand five hundred years. Even if you don't feel particularly sad, it is still good to lament. It is still good to sit shiva in solidarity with our spiritual ancestors' lamentation. Because the Lamentation never ended. It is still felt today.