

Sunday Service: June 7, 2020

"A Service of Laments"



As we have witnessed the recent and persistent violence upon black bodies, we are dedicating this service to a collective lament and grief that comes from many voices across Mennonite Church USA.

Biblical lament shows us how to express deep sorrow, name suffering and cry out for God. *"Laments tell the truth of the suffering that is smothering our worthiness, our dreams, our ability to work toward a better tomorrow,"* writes womanist scholar Dr. Emilie M. Townes. *"Naming these horrors in an unrestrained lament helps mold us into a people who respond with an emphatic 'No!' to the ways our nation and our communities of faith are turned into graven images of hatred and despair."*

The laments in our service are written by pastors, leaders, lay people, students — people from different races, cultures, languages. We invite you to pray and lament with them, hoping you will find the words you need to pray deeply in this time.

Link to YouTube Service: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PErd5FFxF7Q&feature=youtu.be>

You can also read [a call to engage in more costly peacemaking](#) from Glen Guyton, MC USA's executive director and [MC USA's statement against racial injustice](#).

1. GATHERING



Prelude: “By the Rivers of Babylon“

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHsH_4MDuqc

How Long?

By Jason Timothy Smith

Following Matthew chapter five
Specifically, the words in red
He turned the other cheek
Just like the Lord Jesus said.
While kneeling on his neck
Until he finally lay dead
An officer peered down
In final judgment, overhead.

How long, Oh Lord?

Following the final five minutes
This Black man lay to sleep
On a bed of black asphalt
Trimmed with white concrete.

Shadowed by the shades of blue
Men that tied tags to his feet.
Seeing the color of judgment
While Blind Justice openly weeps.

How long, Oh Lord?

Will thou forget us forever?
How long, Oh Lord?
Until our bonds are severed?
How long, Oh Lord?

The psalmist’s words we now
remember.

How long, Oh Lord?
May mercy rain amongst burning
embers.

The past five years following
The tragic death of Eric Garner,
The Black resistance that it built
And the attention that it garnered.

Also created a reactionary
Movement of a fully armored
Police force that recoured
To private biases they harbored

How long, Oh Lord?

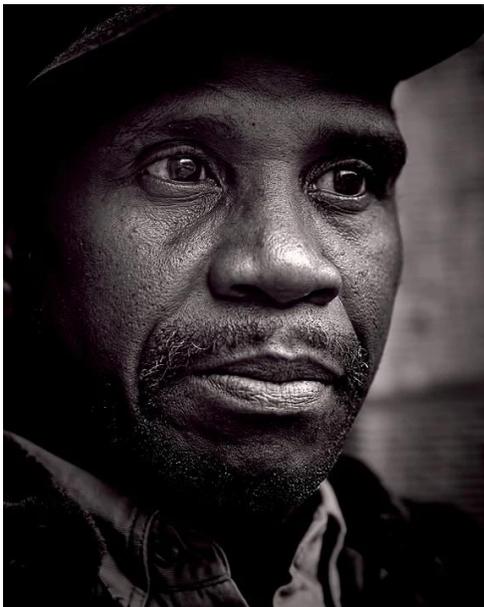
The past five days following
The death of George Floyd,
(Following the pattern of Eric Garner,
Other martyrs and the death of our
Lord)

Cause us to question the leaders
Who wantonly wield the sword,
And long for the redemption
Of victims Christ was crucified for.

Call to Worship (L: leader, P: people)

By Melissa Florer-Bixler

- **L:** “For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.” Isaiah 9:5
- **P:** In Minneapolis at the foot of the cross, your neck pinned under the knee of an officer.
- **L:** We are not as we ought to be, Whiteness whispers into cradles
- **P:** until later, by instinct, we can turn a phone call into a rope around a tree.
- **L:** When did we see you? Your back broken in a police van
- **P:** Your neck broken on the sidewalk? When could you not breathe?
- **L:** When did we see you, shot in your bed? When did we see you, hung in a jail cell?
- **P:** Come grieving mother, weeping child.
- **L:** Come ministers of fire. Come priests of smoke.
- **P:** Come heat, come Spirit, turn gun and badge and night stick to ash.
- **ALL:** Come flame. Burn us away until we must begin again.



“Man’s nature is not essentially evil. Brute nature has been known to yield to the influence of love. You must never despair of human nature.” — Mahatma Gandhi

“From the depth of need and despair, people can work together, can organize themselves to solve their own problems and fill their own needs with dignity and strength.”

— Cesar Chavez

“Deep bonds often form during times of crisis, loss and uncertainty; people seek solidarity in human connection. What new communities and associations are being forged right now? How will they grow in the months and years ahead?”

— Richard Rohr

Opening Prayer

By Jerrell Williams

When will they listen God? When will they hear the voices of the oppressed? When will the excuses end?

God, we your people are now in pain and no one seems to care. They want to focus on what we do, but they do not want to acknowledge what they have done. They refuse to turn away from their sin. They have sullied the table.

Their ignorance has taken the lives of George Floyd, Antwon Rose Jr., Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Philando Castile, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, and many more.

God, we turn to you now in prayer for our black and brown siblings. Guide us! Protect us with your mighty hand!

God we are so tired. Our spirits have become weary from the gaslighting,

the justifying, the minimizing, and the silencing of our voices.

God let your spirit reenergize us. Let the fires of our rage never be quenched by the manipulative tears of our oppressors.

Let the fires of our ancestors bring forth a new Pentecost. One that ignites the hearts of all of humanity and calls us to learn a new language. The language of the oppressed.

May the master's tools be broken. May our rage be louder than ever! May our outcry for justice disrupt and dismantle the systems of oppression.

God, we pray for your peace in our world, knowing that the only way for it to come is by justice being done for your children. Amen!



Singing

"Oh Healing River"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7i9WF3GQPI0>

"We draw our strength from the very despair in which we have been forced to live. We shall endure."

— Cesar Chavez



2. HEARING GOD'S WORD FROM ALL

Lament in English and Spanish

By Danilo Sanchez

(English)

God of the Oppressed,
Yet again you have been killed by the
very people that claim to love you
Yet again your innocent blood has been
poured out
How long must your body endure this
suffering?

God of Justice,
Yet again we ask you, when will you
make all things right? When will you
hold accountable the evil doers?
We are tired of waiting! Your people
are still dying!

Make your ears deaf to the prayers of
those who would say these evil acts are
justified
For you are a God who loves justice and
will punish the evil doer.

Reconciling God,
We lament we are not your reconciled
people
We lament that the love of power has
found a place in your church
Forgive us. Heal us. Speak your truth to
us.

Amen.

(Spanish)

Dios de los Oprimidos,
Una vez más, has sido asesinado por las
mismas personas que dicen que te
aman.
Una vez más, tu sangre inocente ha sido
derramada.
¿Hasta cuando debes sufrir?

Dios de la Justicia,
Una vez más te preguntamos, ¿Cuándo
corregirás la injusticia? ¿Cuándo se hará
responsables a los malvados?
¡Estamos cansados de esperar! ¡Tu
gente todavía está muriendo!

Que tus oídos estén sordos a las
oraciones de aquellos que dirían que
estos actos malvados están justificados

Porque eres un Dios que ama la justicia
y castigará al malvado

Dios Reconciliado,
Lamentamos no ser tu pueblo
reconciliado
Lamentamos que el amor al poder haya
encontrado un lugar en tu iglesia.
Perdónanos. Cúranos. Dínos tu verdad.

Amen.

Lament

By Erica Littlewolf

To the African American, Black, people of African descent and African people who call Turtle Island home, from an Indigenous Northern Cheyenne woman of mixed descent residing on a reservation in southeastern Montana.

You and I are intertwined in America's dysfunctional love story
Woven together by white death grip hands

We are actors in our worst nightmare, I'm stolen land and you're stolen labor
Sometimes we are actresses and I'm MMIW and you are death by police brutality

And when religiosity stands aside, we have yet to fully acknowledge the death of trans people, two spirit and queer.

I light the ceremonial sage grown on the land of my people

Remembering how fire came to us as a gift and how the smoke will carry my words to Creator
I pray the way of my grandparents and ancestors
I breathe in the medicine, deeply, remembering the day I was born and breath was given to me



I ask for comfort through grief and grieving
May your mourning bring healing and health
May justice surpass our understanding and live in our spirits
May new people rise to speak & profess so others can rest
May this stolen America find itself anew, a chance to change
May we be reminded that the spirit of life leans toward justice
May the breath we desire so deeply be abundant, that no man can take.

And we let these prayers fall loosely and fiercely from our beings
Knowing we are imperfect, we don't always have the words
But we Can't. Not. Say. Nothing.
Because BLACK LIVES MATTER.

Confession

By Clara Weybright

God, we lament the damage that our silence in the face of racial violence has done,

for the sins of racism that run through our lives like so many threads in a cloth.



Forgive us for the times we have given in to our discomfort, for the times we have forgotten our own privilege and failed to stand with our black siblings.

Help those of us who experience white privilege every day remember that, with our privilege, we are imbued with the responsibility to challenge and hold one another accountable.

Give us the courage to educate ourselves, to listen well, and to use our voices when it is most needed.

Reading from the Old Testament: Jeremiah 6:10-14

Jeremiah 6:10 To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? See, their ears are closed, they cannot listen. The word of the Lord is to them an object of scorn; they take no pleasure in it. 11 But I am full of the wrath of the Lord; I am weary of holding it in. Pour it out on the children in the street, and on the gatherings of young men as well; both husband and wife shall be taken, the old folk and the very aged. 12 Their houses shall be turned over to others, their fields and wives together; for I will stretch out my hand against the inhabitants of the land, says the Lord. 13 For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. 14 They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace.

Lament

By Kayla Berkey

“They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.” (Jeremiah 6:14)

Oh Holy One, how long will we grieve death,
how many more breaths will these cycles of violence steal from sacred black lives?

Hear our cries.

We grieve for George Floyd.
We grieve for Breonna Taylor.
We grieve for Tony McDade.
We grieve for Ahmaud Arbery.
We grieve for Dion Johnson.
We grieve for Nina Pop.
We grieve for Sean Reed.

We grieve for each sacred person whose name we have come to know through the unspeakable grief and injustice of their death.

We shudder at the inhumanity, at how many precious lives have been taken.

We grieve the ache of every person who bears this pain and holds fear for their lives deeply in their bodies.

We lament the loss of these holy lives.

We lament officers and politicians encouraging, “peace, peace,” when there is no peace.

We lament the absence of justice.

Awaken us to any false declarations of “peace, peace,” that cover over violence.

Awaken us to the violence of this country’s status quo.

Awaken us to the urgency of overturning the tables of injustice. Awaken us who are white women to the reality of our ongoing history of complicity with anti-black racism done in our name.

Expose us where we are most deeply shaped by a racist system so that we can name it in ourselves and never stop working to dismantle it.

Holy Spirit, come with fire that burns away silence and complacency. Move us beyond saying ‘peace, peace.’

Help us shape our words into stones with weight that we use, in community, to build the long path to justice, to peace.



Singing

“There is a Balm in Gilead”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okl2XbTM7xM>



Reading from the New Testament:

John 20:19-23

John 20:19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Breathe on Me

By Leah Wenger

Battered, Broken, Betrayed.
I stand Before you
Between the lines

Breathe on me Breath of God
Because I have Betrayed
My Brother and sister
By my silence

Breathe on me Breath of God
But what is Breath
when it is stolen

Humanity Beyond recognition
Buried in Blood
Bring us transformation
Beauty for Brokenness

Expose me for my blindness

Breathe on me the breath to see

Be Brave and Bold
Beyond what others can see

So when I can't Breathe
God Breathe on me

When I cannot see my Betrayal
Bring me to the light

I Beg for the wisdom to Be Better
Bless me with the strength
to never stop Becoming
Beyond the patience to listen
Bring me into action

I can't Breathe
So God, Breathe through me.



3. RESPONDING TO GOD



Reflections and Responses

“Young people say, ‘What good can one person do? What is the sense of our small effort?’ They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time; we can be responsible only for the one action of the present moment. But we can beg for an increase of love in our hearts that will vitalize and transform all our individual actions, and know that God will take them and multiply them, as Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes.” —Dorthea Day

Joys and Concerns

Please pray for:

- Our nation, that real change will take place after the murder of George Floyd. We know that justice for the poor and for those persons of color who are treated as second class citizens must be part of the solution.
- The many mixed race families in our fellowship during this time when racism becomes quite personal.
- All our front line health workers
- Anyone who is poor, marginalized, scared, alone, or feeling powerless
- Geoff Krall and all those who have lost their employment due to the pandemic.
- Bjorn who was not able to leave for Spain as planned
- Gus as he heals from hernia surgery
- Dan as he gets ready for his colonoscopy.

Closing

Post Service Conversation

Now's let's chat with everyone via Zoom!

“Transformation is a process, and as life happens there are tons of ups and downs. It's a journey of discovery - there are moments on mountaintops and moments in deep valleys of despair.” — Rick Warren

