

I'm not sure whether the recent announcement of an extended lockdown caught you off guard or not. But regardless of what we anticipated, for a lot of us, it was just one more let down after a year *full* of disappointments. From missed vacations, to graduations moved online, to holidays celebrated without family, to mourning the death of loved ones, to the loss of employment, the strain of relationships, the online hate and vitriol, the deprivation of human contact and connection, the postponed life plans, the milestones that went uncelebrated, the feeling of being forgotten or cast aside, the absolute devastating impact that has been unleashed on mental health, this has been for so many of us, the worst year of our lives.

What I wish that I could say to you in this moment is that this has all been a bad dream and that you'll wake up tomorrow and every horrible thing that has occurred since the start of 2020 will simply be undone and we can return to life as it was before - but we all know that would be an empty promise. As followers of Jesus, we are encouraged to take heart because he has already won and conquered death, yet we still have to live in the present reality where pain and suffering and are realities we are continually faced with.

The thing with lament is that it isn't simply complaining. And it also isn't a cathartic release into the void. It's actually aimed directly at a patient and compassionate heavenly parent who sits with you in the deepest parts your pain. And so, in this moment I want to invite us all to engage in the discipline of lamenting, because even if you aren't currently grieving something, I can guarantee that someone you know is.

While our hope in Christ will one day be fully realized when every year under the thorn, every wrong that we have known, and every valley will be raised and we will experience perfect peace, the truth is that perhaps now more than ever, our current reality doesn't look this way. Yet, our comfort lies not just in the promise of a future where pain and suffering are absent, but here and now in the loving embrace of a God who is with us.

And so, in the next couple moments of silence, I want to invite you to name one or two things that you need to lament. Perhaps it's something right off the list I rattled off earlier, or maybe it's on behalf of someone you know who is currently experiencing deep pain. Take the next minute to simply name that in your head and bring it before God.

[60 seconds: name what you are lamenting and then close with communally read prayer before singing drive out the darkness]

Let's Pray:

God who sees us

God who feels our pain

God who suffers with us

How can you just sit back and watch the world burn?

Have you not seen the virus that has torn apart our lives?

Do you not hear the cries of loneliness, heartache, suffering and desperation?

We ask for your mercy.

We pray for an end to this sickness.

We plead for you to take this burden from us.

For we know that you are faithful

Your ways are higher than our ways

And we can trust in you. Amen.