

Dear Friends,

I have been re-reading Psalms of Lament by Ann Weems. It is a favorite of mine which I pull off the shelf from time to time. Those times have become more frequent lately. I listen to the news, sit with friends in the midst of deep grief, and see the growing effects of gun violence – all of which cause me to cry out to God and pray with my tears.

Psalms of Lament was written following the death of the author's son. She needed to express her grief and anger as well as seek a glimmer of hope in God's abiding care for her. Like the ancient psalms, these laments are filled with images and phrases that give voice to that range of emotions.

Here at the beginning of Advent, *Lament Psalm Thirty-one*¹ catches my attention:

How long will you watch, O God,
as your people live huddled in death?
The whole world
is dressed in tears,
and I have joined
the procession of the bereaved
who walk daily in the death places.
We drown in the sea.
We bleed on the battlefield.
We lie stricken on sickbeds.
We are judged in the courtrooms.
We are victims of crime.
We are homeless and hungry.
Is this not enough?

We are tormented by mental illness.
We are abandoned by loved ones.
We wait in unemployment lines.
We grow up on the streets.
We live with disabilities.
We are injured in accidents.
We are plagued by family problems.
We fight alcohol and drug abuse.
Have you not heard enough, O God?
We sit in police stations.
We watch our loved ones endure pain.
We are falsely accused.
We encounter prejudice and hate.
We are humiliated and abused.
We contend with unbearable stress and anxiety.
We weep by the grave.

We are your people, O Creator God!
We are the work of your hands.
Is there no more grace
for your troubled ones?
Will we continue
our unholy procession
around the pit
of living death?

There is no sun, no moon, no star.
We cannot see our way.
Have pity on your world, O God,
have pity on your weeping world!

We remember all the times
you lavished your grace
upon our heads
and into our hearts.
You gave us the gift of light,
and we walked with our heads up
in the procession of life.
Restore us, O God,
to your sanctuary.

Look upon us
and let your heart be moved
to break the bonds of the bereaved.
In this hope is our joy.
In that day we will run
to join the procession of life
and we will sing hymns of praise
forever and ever
and ever
and ever!

This is the longing of Advent – desperately calling on Christ to return and restore all things. This is the hope in which we gather as church during these weeks of December. This is the promise of a gracious God who comes to give us abundant life in the midst of the world's messes.

Together we wait and lament and hope, trusting in the gospel words of Luke 1:78-79: *By the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

Waiting with you,

Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew

¹Psalms of Lament, Ann Weems. Westminster John Knox Press, 1995.