



The lament is raised. How far dare we go to address God? How much can we lament, are we expected to keep our mouths shut? Or are we to find a voice with our neighbours and ask, 'what is really going on here?' We demand an answer...

¹² 'Hear my prayer, O LORD,
and give ear to my cry;
do not hold your peace at my tears.

The complaint is made, the poet has been released, but the struggle continues. Like Jonah, (who we are yet to journey with), like the poet, we are left exhausted, disoriented, in the belly of paradox... Do we even want this God around?;

For I am your passing guest,
an alien, like all my forebears.

¹³ Turn your gaze away from me, that I may smile again,
before I depart and am no more.'

Silence.

Interlude (there can be no conclusion)

Under the weight of our times, in the belly of the whale, buried deep in the soil. It may be easy to think we are alone...

Yet we remain pilgrims together,

Sharing pain, voicing doubt, offering solidarity, becoming hope.

The journey of faith is not about certainty,

It is in stepping out, one foot at a time.

The Holy One hears our cries,
meets us in our tears,

And joins them with God's own.

The seed has fallen, buried under soil

It is in darkness that life begins to grow...

Spiegel im Spiegel by Arvo Part.

An ache, a lament, a space to allow prayers to form.

We depart or remain, in silence.

Morning Prayer for the Pilgrimage Day

We are people of pilgrimage,

One step at a time.

Like the Exodus from Pharaoh,

We step into the unknown.

A pillar of cloud,

will remind us of uncertainty.

A pillar of fire,

will remind us of love.

Although we may be unsure,

the journey must be taken

One step at a time,

not all who wander are lost.

Welcome

We live in uncertain times, times of great fear and anxiety, times of struggle and loss, grief and pain. This may well be the hardest times many of us have ever faced.

In times of uncertainty, we may rail and rant, we may pray and hope.

Like the 'stages of grief' we may encounter denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

All of these are known, and all are understood.

As we feel autumn's creeping chill, see the sunset a little earlier each day. As we see leaves fall to the ground, seeds buried in soil, we too may feel the winter in our hearts. We may hear winter's lament echo inside ourselves and we may wonder how we will carry on.

We are pilgrims on a journey of unknowing.

But we are not alone.

We are pilgrims together, communities looking for hope.

And we are not alone. Many have walked paths of uncertainty before us.

In the very middle of the bible you will find the book of Psalms. Songs and poems raised to

God, sung in the Temple, sung at Feasts and sung in the quiet places of the heart.

The Psalms connect us through history with those who have sung to God before, songs which joined communities together.

But not all songs are easy, for the Psalms sing the breadth of human experience; hopes and fears, praise and laments...

The Psalms help us, this very morning, to think about how we might speak with God, and how to process pain. How open can we be, how daring? Do we dare to speak of our rage, our disappointment. And if we do, do we find others, even God, who will meet us, walk with us, share our disorientation?

Think/Pray

For a moment, think or reflect on the disorientations of our time... the fears and anxiety, the cry for justice, the inequality, the poverty, hunger, racism, sexism, oppressions and bullying of minorities and the oppressed. Some of these are revealed by Covid more starkly – but they are always there. You may think of the ecology, of our children and grandchildren, of the poorest people already affected by climate change.

Hold the ferment of feelings you may experience.. allow yourself to be moved.

Psalm 39

The Poet begins to speak.

But is cautious in what they say... the poet 'holds their tongue', language about God must be polite, (or so they think);

¹ I said, 'I will guard my ways
that I may not sin with my tongue;
I will keep a muzzle on my mouth
as long as the wicked are in my presence.'

² I was silent and still;
I held my peace to no avail;

But such politeness cannot contain the rage.

The poet's heart burns;

my distress grew worse,
³ my heart became hot within me.
While I mused, the fire burned;
then I spoke with my tongue:

And so a question dares to emerge.. (but nothing too challenging, a question about life and meaning.. the deep questions we all ask);

⁴ 'LORD, let me know my end,
and what is the measure of my days;
let me know how fleeting my life is.
⁵ You have made my days a few handbreadths,
and my lifetime is as nothing in your sight.
Surely everyone stands as a mere breath. *Selah*
⁶ Surely everyone goes about like a shadow.
Surely for nothing they are in turmoil;
they heap up, and do not know who will gather.

Words have been spoken, questions have been asked.. and the audacity of poet remains unscathed. no divine wrath has come down... and so the courage rises, (there is more to come);

⁷ 'And now, O Lord, what do I wait for?
My hope is in you.
⁸ Deliver me from all my transgressions.
Do not make me the scorn of the fool.

Still no bolt of lightning, no flash of divine rage... And so the poet grows in courage and dares to make the real complaint known... who is truly responsible for this mess, who looks upon such misery?;

⁹ I am silent; I do not open my mouth,
for it is you who have done it.
¹⁰ Remove your stroke from me;
I am worn down by the blows of your hand.

¹¹ 'You chastise mortals
in punishment for sin,
consuming like a moth what is dear to them;
surely everyone is a mere breath. *Selah*