"Cry Out"

Jeremiah 9:10, Isaiah 24:4-5, 64:1,6,8, Psalm 80: Select Phrases, & Romans 8:20-26

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Prayer for Understanding Gracious God, for generations, we have cried out to you and you have listened. So as we turn to hear your Word read and proclaimed, give us the ears and the heart to hear your words. In hope we pray. Amen.

Isaiah cries out in lament: *Isaiah 64:1 adapted* "Please, God, tear open the heavens. End the wars. Protect those in fear. Stop the suffering. Save us!"

A challenging job on the farm was mowing bales of hay. Ideally, it involves three people: two in the mow and one on the wagon. The person on the wagon sets the bale weighing fifty to seventy pounds on an elevator that carries the bale up and drops it in the mow. In the mow, a person grabs the bale and stacks it on edge to help it cure and breathe. Our elevator only reached to the edge of the mow, so you had to hustle to get the bales to the back. The bales needed to be stacked tight or you would posthole on the next level up. The mower needed to be aware of when the next bale will drop. It is no fun to have a seventy pound bale fall on your head, scratching your skin, and covering you with itchy chaff. Typically, we only had the people resources to have one person in the mow which meant that the person on the wagon had to slow the pace of sending bales up to not bury the person in the mow. It was crucial for the mower to "cry out" to the bale sender to get the proper speed. Life sometimes sends a variety of challenges in overwhelming speed. In those moments, it is critical to cry out to others and God for help. Every year we mowed approximately 150 tons, three hundred thousand pounds, of hay. Looking at the empty mow and acres of hay, the task was daunting until one broke it down to one wagon at a time, one bale at a time. This feat was accomplished every year over a summer with flurries of work followed by rest. When rain loomed, we "cried out" to family and friends and they helped. If a farm fell behind, they "cried out" to the farms that were finished and they helped.

Pastor Lisle Gwynn Garrity wrote: "In a war-torn world filled with dappled beauty, we cry out for God to come down and radically transform us into a new creation. May it be so." Pastor Lauren Wright Pittman writes: "In my daily life, I can get so overwhelmed that it feels impossible to get through my to-do list, much less participate meaningfully in the in-breaking of God's realm in the world. The weight of the world often leaves me immobilized and disheartened to the point that I begin to believe there is nothing I can do. And yet, what I have found helpful is learning to set small, incremental tasks, ways of continuing to move toward the big picture, one faithful step at a time. In Advent we are called to keep moving toward the promised reality where mourning, crying, pain, and death will be no more. We will make progress bit by bit, crying out to God in lament, finding our footing and starting somewhere, daring to speak the truth, taking courage in our call, recognizing the voices of angels among us, building up the beloved community, and resisting despair as we choose joy. We will do all of this together as we find our way toward the breaking dawn."

The first Sunday of Advent gives voice to the desperation we feel for God to restore what is broken. "Crying out" may not feel productive, however "crying out" is often necessary. Your "crying out" matters. Often the first step to healing is naming our weariness, hopelessness, anger, and grief. The psalms, and the prophets, teach us how to put our pain into words, remembering that for generations people with raw emotion have "cried out" to God for relief and restoration. In our lamentations and grievances, there is deep faith that God hears us, God cares for us, God has designed us to heal, God has placed hope in our souls that is dreaming of abundant life for all, God is loving to make all glorious, God is inviting us to join in caring for the cosmos for all will flourish, God is calling us to love everyone for everyone will live in harmony forever.

Often in the struggles of life, we are unable to perceive that God hears us, knows us, and is always with us. We hear this loss of perception in the agony of the psalmist. The Psalmist cries out: **Psalm 80, Various Translations, Select Phrases "Listen to us, O Shepherd, hear us, leader of your flock. Reveal yourself. Throw beams of light from your dazzling throne. Display your radiant glory. Show us your strength. Come and save us! Rescue us! Bring us back, O God! Show us your mercy, and we will be saved! How much longer? We are eating sorrow and drinking large cups of tears. Look down from heaven and see our plight. Take care of us, this grapevine that you yourself have planted, for we are chopped up and burned. Revive us. Breathe life into our lungs so we can shout your name! Give us life! Restore us again**

and cause Your face to shine and we shall be delivered. God smile your blessing smile, that will be our salvation."

The psalmist pleads fervently for God to restore everyone. In the midst of suffering, oppression, and loss, God is moving and shaping the world for good. In response, we will focus on the actions we can take to join God in the work of Advent. A step is to lament all that is wrong with the cosmos and our life. Lament helps us to acknowledge, name, and release, the grief we hold individually and collectively. Lament enables us to move toward productive actions that can be beneficial and generative. Unprocessed grief can lead us toward destructive behaviors and patterns. Since trauma lives in the body, find ways to process and express your pain, through movement, music, friends, art and ritual. Have courage to "cry out" with raw honest emotion like the psalmist. Lament is a way to refuse despair and find the authentic hope buried deep inside us. Get specific with your prayers of lament. Complete these prayers. God please restore _____. God shine on _____. God save ____. God throw beams of light on _____. God rescue ____. God take care of_____. God revive _____. God plant ____. God breathe life into_____. God deliver ____. God restore _____. God smile your blessing smile on ____.

The Apostle Paul cries out: **Romans 8:20-26 NLT "With eager hope, creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as God's adopted children, including the new bodies God has promised us. We were given this hope when we were saved. And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness."** The prophet Isaiah cries out: **Isaiah 24:4-5 NLT "The earth mourns and dries up and the land wastes away and withers. Even the greatest people on earth waste away. The earth suffers for the sins of its people, for we have twisted God's instructions."** In Jeremiah, God declares, **Jeremiah 9:10 "I will weep for the mountains and wail for the wilderness pastures."** God is with us, "crying out", weeping, and grieving our suffering and our abuse of the cosmos. God's visceral picture of grief for even a mere speck of dust reveals God's transformative love. God laments every imperfection. Since God is loving to save a speck of dust try to imagine how much more God is loving to save you. Join God in "crying out" for yourself and all that is hurting. Join God in lamenting so we can remain open, resist indifference, reconnect, and recover every loss. Theologian Kat Armas wrote: "Grief has a way of clearing our vision. Grief breaks through the illusion that everything is fine. Grief refuses to let beauty distract us from what is being harmed. The unraveling of the natural world is not happening somewhere outside of us; it mirrors the violence we have learned to live with, both within ourselves and toward one another. In that light, lament becomes an honest response. To move too quickly past sorrow is to quiet the voice of the earth and, with it, something essential within us. God's own tears remind us of this. If God mourns creation, then grief is not failure or lack of faith; grief is fidelity. Grief is the refusal to normalize devastation, the willingness to feel what exploitation costs. Only by offering our weariness, anger and heartbreak to God can we discern the next faithful step and in doing so, find that we are not the first to pray this way." The Psalmist "cries out", "**Restore us, O God; make your face shine**" (Psalm 80), and the prophet pleads, "**O that you would tear open the heavens and come down**" (Isaiah 64). These are not polished prayers. They are the language of people who have run out of explanations but not out of longing. And maybe that is what lament does. Lament refuses to let despair have the final word. Lament holds the tension between what is and what should be and lament dares to believe that God is still listening in the middle of it. Restoration does not begin with pretending things are fine. Restoration begins with telling the truth about what is broken and discovering, even there, that we are not alone."

The Prophet Isaiah cries out: **Isaiah 64:1, 6, 8 NLT "Oh, that you would tear open the heavens and come down! Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall and our sins sweep us away like the wind. And yet, O Lord, you are our Parent. We are the clay, and you are the potter. We all are formed by your hand."** Biblical scholar Anathea Portier-Young notes that the Hebrew verb translated as "tear open" is a shared community action, a visible expression of grief and lament. What are you grieving? Isaiah knows God is with him and yet he prays for God to "come down" for when we are grieving, we often feel alone. The "tearing open" of heaven is enhanced when we join God in grieving. How can we grieve together as a community?

There are at least five categories of grief: grief for self, grief for loss, relational grief, collective grief, and ecological grief.

Pastor Lisle Gwynn Garrity reflecting on the "tearing open" of the heavens wrote: "I contemplated on what grief does to the body. In my experience grief begs to be metabolized. I must find ways to acknowledge, release and transform grief; otherwise, grief steeps in my body like a poison. Therefore, I came to realize that Isaiah is calling for God to dramatically transform the earth." How do you "metabolize" your grief? What happens when grief remains unnamed, unprocessed, or misunderstood?

Isaiah moves to possibility, restoration, and promise. We are like fading autumn leaves. We will fall, decompose, seemingly disappear and then become clay in God hands, the potter's hands, that reforms us into glorious masterpieces.

Sociologist Tressie McMillan explains that we can find renewal in the midst of pervasive exhaustion caused by the onslaught of negative news through our actions, "crying out" with civil engagement. "Crying out" counters fatigue, helplessness, and despair. Amanda Benckhuysen writes: "Lament is the means by which we give voice to the way oppressive systems and abuses of power break shalom and bring harm. In our lamenting, we contend that things need not be this way and that we will not settle for such a world." Sara Bareilles sings: "What is broken cannot heal until it is known and loved by name."

Every Advent, we light candles and speak of hope. We wait for the good news of great joy for all people to be born again. Yet, in the midst of our busy waiting, we know all too well that the world is not as it should be. Wars rage on, violence persists, new tragedies unfold. God's promises are real and God's promised day has not yet come. This tension keeps us yearning, for the coming new ways, a cosmos glorified, and every person made whole and fully good.

The preparation for Christmas, the work of Advent, begins by "crying out", naming all that is wrong with our lives, naming the damage to the cosmos, and naming our pain, so we can cry out for help, grieve, and lament. "Crying out" helps us resist despair, puts our prayers into motion, and opens us to healing. "Crying out" enables us to give God the burdens of our body, mind, and soul. Perhaps our "crying out" expands our capacity to receive the coming glory of Christmas. Our "crying out" propels us closer to the glorious realm God is bringing. Amen