

“To lament is to hold the full truth of yourself before God.”

As I discussed last night’s Service of Lament with my Spiritual Director today, he said this (or something very like it) to me, and it struck a very rich chord in my soul. Last night’s service was a powerful time for me, yet one I didn’t truly take in for myself at the time. But one of the great possibilities open to us in COVIDland is recorded services that allow us to watch and re-watch our worship. I will certainly be re-watching (and re-worshipping?) last night’s service.

Few if any of us truly hold the full truth of ourselves. We learn early in life how to hide, mask, or display ourselves in a way that is not our full selves. I watch my 5 year old son dance with complete abandon, and I rejoice in the pure joy of it. But then his friends come over and tell him his dancing is “kind of weird”, and I see him become self-conscious for the first time. While I’m fighting that message with all my heart – I told him how much I loved his dancing, and soon the other boys were joining him! – I know that soon enough it will set like concrete in his tender young soul. And he will join the rest of us who hold ourselves only partially and display even less lest we be called, “kind of weird”.

It takes a lot of time, humility, honesty, and prayer for us to look at our whole selves, for this partial display of who we are is not just for others. We do the same for ourselves until it takes a professional – a counselor or Spiritual Director – to help us dig through the layers of disguise and walls and see the truth of ourselves. This is why I tell all professional clergy (and frankly anyone else walking the Christian life) that they have to have three people in their life: a mentor, a counselor (at least on call), and a Spiritual Director. With these three we can explore three different aspects of who we really are, aspects we cannot see on our own.

For the few who do know the truth of themselves, even fewer will hold that truth up to God. We are broken, weak, sinful people in a culture that demands perfection of every one of us. Whether as parents, in our workplace, at church, or even with our families, we cannot be broken, weak, sinful people. So even if we can find that true core of who we are, we believe that God could never love, accept, or bless someone “like me”, and so we hide this not only from those around us, and even from ourselves, but also from God. It is just too painful, too humiliating, too terrifying to come to the only true Perfection with all our flaws, for as often as we hear that He knows and treats us with grace and love, we still doubt it.

This is why Lament is so hard for us, especially in the upper-class white culture in which I minister and live. Lament requires us to acknowledge that things aren’t right, that something is broken, and that usually that thing is us. Lament, bringing the truth of who we are to God, requires us to acknowledge our sinfulness, not just our sins, including our violence, our apathy, our lust, our bitterness, our selfishness, and our fault. Lament is the acknowledgement before God that this world is as broken as we are, and that we had and have a part in breaking it.

But God knows all of this. He created us and His Holy Spirit dwells within us, in the depths of our being where the Truth is. And all He wants from us is to bring that Truth to Him willingly. “a broken spirit and a contrite heart You, O God, will never despise,” says Ps. 51:17. And this is Lament. For to bring that truth before God is to cry, to rage, to confess, and to acknowledge that the brokenness in us and our world is beyond our ability to fix. Racism, sex trafficking, gossip, violence, hatred... to bring these to God is easy. To bring the truth of our part in furthering them, in taking part in them, or in doing nothing to stop them is virtually impossible without a God-sized dose of humility and honesty.

So, my call to you today is to begin the process of Lament. Watch the Service of Lament from last night ([you can watch it here](#)). Take time each day to sit quietly with God and ask Him to show you the truth of yourself. Talk to a [Spiritual Director](#), a counselor, and a mentor about your desire to truly know yourself. And then pray this prayer with me each day...

“Search me, Father, and know my heart.
Test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Ps. 139:23-24)