



good shepherd  
presbyterian church

## **Those Who Mourn**

Matthew 5:1-2,4; Isaiah 61:1-3; Psalm 116:1-2

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There is so much to mourn right now: the needless death of Breonna Taylor and all that represents, the death of Justice Ginsberg, the divisions in our country, COVID-19, uncertainty about the future, not really knowing who to trust about news or truth or justice. Many here have personal losses or fears as well: deaths of loved ones, lost jobs, lost income, broken relationships, broken promises, health issues, emotional issues, spiritual issues. I could go on and on. And if you were willing, you could too.

And Jesus says, “Blessed are those who mourn.”

How? Why? ... “for they shall be comforted.”

I want to focus on two things with you this morning: what it means to mourn and what it means to be truly comforted.

### **To Mourn**

This past week I listened to a speaker who said that one of the things that prevents moving forward individually or collectively is lack or inability to process our grief or anger. Actually, the word she chose was ‘lament’ – which is another word for mourning and a very biblical concept. And I recognized my own limitations in that area. How interesting that it happened the same week as this sermon topic!

Let me clarify: grief and anger are basic emotions which we all have to deal with in some way. Mourning or lament is a way – and a biblical one at that – to process those emotions. It is a means of dealing with the emotions. Some people stuff their feelings or eat/drink their feelings. Some get them out but in

a way that is harmful to others. Biblical lament or mourning processes those emotions and seeks God's help and response with them.

Look on the back of your bulletin under the prayer of confession and assurance of grace. Every week we hear the verses from 1 John that say: "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves..." And we sometimes use the follow-up from 1 John, "If we confess our sin God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from unrighteousness."

I'm not saying grief (or anger) is a sin... the comparison I'm making is that if we say we don't have grief or anger, we are deceiving ourselves. And if we do bring those things to God, God is faithful and just... to comfort us. That's the blessing! And we miss out on it because we don't know how to mourn and lament.

So how do we? Let's just follow that same pattern from 1 John: First we must acknowledge the feelings and the things that are causing them. Acknowledge to ourselves, "This news story, this injustice, this fear, this uncertainty, this loss... it makes me sad or it makes me angry." It is not distracting ourselves, ignoring the world around us, numbing ourselves, or surrounding ourselves with like-minded people. It is certainly bringing those things before God in prayer. That doesn't have to be elegant, or presented in King James English, or in a certain format. God can handle it and God will receive it. In fact, the New Testament says that the Holy Spirit can interpret our prayers to God when they are too deep for words. It can even be, "God, uuuggghhhhhh!"

And it may well be through corporate lament. There are whole Psalms given to lament. The Jewish people and religion are no strangers to lament. Yet strangely, we are. And I need to do a better job of including opportunities for lament in our worship through liturgy, song, and prayer. In our offertory song this morning, we'll take what is normally an upbeat, peppy song about releasing sorrow and we'll consider it in a slower, more thoughtful way. Eric will help introduce that at the right time.

Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn." Let's see why.

## The Comfort of God

In our call to worship we heard the first two verses from Psalm 116. It's also the basis for the beautiful song "I Love the Lord" that Lynda Shuler and the choir sang in the last prelude piece. It offers a template for mourning and for the blessing Jesus describes.

*"I love the Lord because He hears my voice and my supplications." (v. 1) – God hears our cries, our prayers, our laments! Why would we keep them to ourselves or push them down where they eat away at us?*

*"God has inclined His ear to me, therefore I shall call upon Him as long as I live." (v.2) – The Psalmist says it again for those in the back... because it's important. God is listening to YOU and your mourning. So call upon Him!*

And God will comfort those who mourn, those who offer up their grief and anger. Psychologists and doctors will tell you that it is healthier to express your emotions than to squash them. Who better to express them to than God?

Our lament and mourning before God can cleanse our spirit, be a comfort to our emotions, and lead us to mission and action.

*What? What was that last part? I just want some comfort, not a mission from God!* Let's look at those verses from Isaiah 61 before, the ones that form the basis for Jesus' teaching here.

*"The Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted... to comfort all who mourn... a garland instead of ashes, gladness instead of mourning, praise instead of fainting. So **THEY WILL BE CALLED OAKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, THE PLANTING OF THE LORD**, that He may be glorified." (Isaiah 61:1-3)*

God comforts and plants us. God hears us and sends us. God puts us in the world to bless the world with righteousness, what is right, what is just, what is holy. God is on mission, as always!

So first hear the hopeful promise – if you are grieving or angry (and aren't we all right now!), seek ways to bring that to God. That's mourning; that's lament. And don't be surprised to be blessed with God's comfort. And don't be

surprised that what “blessed to be a blessing” then looks like is God planting you in places to do and say good news, justice, mercy, kindness, compassion, and hope. The world needs all of those things right now.

### **Blessing Challenge**

Each Sunday during this series I am challenging you to identify a way God has blessed you. Don't go to sleep tonight without answering that question. Use Isaiah 61 or the Beatitudes here in Matthew 5 if you need help coming up with one. Or start reading the Psalms. And then pray tonight for God to show you an opportunity to share that same blessing with another person during the week. Has God comforted you as you mourned something? Perhaps you can then offer someone a word of comfort or listen to their grief. Or perhaps there is another blessing you see named in scripture.

I'd love to hear from you if you've taken me up on this challenge. Our stories – especially everyday ordinary stories – can encourage one another. I don't have to use your name, but I'd love to share your story. I'd like to hear from you!

May God bless you and keep you this week, and give you peace. Amen.