



## **Glasgow Gathering**

**Oct 2019**

**Thank you etc...**

### **Lament.**

'There has been widespread slaughter of innocent people. There have been streams of tears, innocent tears. There have been rivers of blood, innocent blood. Death in the morning, people going to find their livelihood, death in the noon time on the highways and streets... Innocent blood will always cry to God Almighty for reparation. How much blood must be spilled? How many tears shall we cry? How many mothers hearts must be maintained? My heart is maimed. I pray I will see my son, Anthony. ... I am proud of him, I am still very proud of him but I need to know where he is, I need to know what happened to him. I agree, I am sad, I am distraught, I am destroyed... Where is he, someone tell me, where is he?'

This was spoken in front of the TV cameras by Marie Fatayi – Williams – mother of a son killed in the London bombings, July 2015.

Lament – raw, dramatic, petitioning. When disaster strikes we need to be able to lament in order to live. And the church should have a vital role in this process of mourning and healing, grieving and reconciling, despairing and hoping.

In order to do this we need a definition of lament. The Oxford English dictionary defines lament as a 'passionate expression of Grief'. Walter Brueggeman defines it as "a dramatic rhetorical, liturgical act of speech which is irreversible., Brackets in Akeman, 2000:.06). Westerman makes the point that the lament is always relational – there are always "the others" and they have something to do with lament. Brueggeman furthers this point saying that the lament is risky, and that it calls into question structures of power, pushing the boundaries of our relationships with one another and with God beyond their general defined limits of acceptability. Denise Ackermann describes lament as an existential wail which comes from the depths of the human soul'.

Space for lament is vital and we often don't give it the space or the time it needs...

So, lament is public, it is about the other, it is political. In other words, it is a wailing of the human soul, a barrage of tears, petitions, and praise. Petitions, praise and hopes Which beat against the heart of God. I would argue that lament is a primitive cry which needs to be voiced for the process of healing to at least begin.



We need to address more fully how we can offer a space for lament today. We need to provide a “safe enough space” for this to happen, both for those who lament and for those who may be alarmed by the outpouring of grief and rage. We need to offer a structured, yet not domesticated, space for the working through of these experiences and emotions.

The experience of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa is a good illustration of the possibilities and pitfalls of a public space of lament. It has been seen to both go too far , And not far enough. The litany written for the service of dedication of the TRC combined both confessional and lament. “We repent” was followed by “we mourn”. The act of forgiveness that is asked for by the perpetrators of violence has been given, but at what cost? The ‘structuralising’ Of the much-needed lament has often left the victims and their families feeling that they had not really lamented in public – their anger has not been expressed or heard enough. Clearly, in encouraging the use of lament in prayer and liturgy, we must strike a very careful balance between the wailing of hurt and abandonment, and the restoration and reconciliation of praise and hope. As Ackermann says,

‘Lamenting publicly calls for individual hearts which are weeping and raging, seeking a response from God. The very nature of lament is profoundly spiritual and profoundly political. Remorse, anger, the need for accountability and justice, combine as we contend with God. Ever present in the lament is the hope for a better day’.

I’d like to suggest a ‘way’ that gives space for lament, and its necessary conclusion. If in our lamenting we are honest and authentic, truly vulnerable, then out of this despair we are called to act. And that action, having spent time discerning, waiting, praying, that action is about justice, reconciliation and hope.

There is a poem by the 13C Persian poet, Rumi: He wrote, ‘Out there beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I’ll meet you there.’

What is your field like? Who is in your field with you? Your field might be a place of childhood memories; of playing in a meadow; I remember a field from my childhood in NI when I once spent hours trying to find the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow...I was quite a stubborn child...but maybe that’s useful as a reconciler! Or the field might be a field of gold; or it might be a muddy field, shell pocked, fought over ..or a field of desert in Iraq, Syria, Palestine... or...



Our field could be this desolate, lament filled, wounded space. It could be. It sometimes, it often is. In fact, it needs to be. And our

field could be, often is a space for growth, abundance, peace, reconciliation. These two fields are not at either end of a lane, or on two different farms. They are actually the same field. Because in this field grows suffering, lament and pain, as well as peace, hope and transformation. And whatever is growing there when we go to our field, we need to meet there. To be ready to choose to be vulnerable, to lament, to wait, to...maybe to forgive and be forgiven, to

be with God and others on the way.. Our field is here, it is now. It is where we go on our journey, our pilgrimage. It is the place we meet God..and each other.

As we walk through our field, we hear each others stories. Stories of suffering and joy, of conflict and reconciliation, of wounding and healing.

We know we as Christian communities, as the Church, as peacemakers and reconcilers need to embrace this journey, but can we as people of faith actually speak out to our nations, our communities? Can we

courageously inhabit this liminal, lamenting, reconciling space, and help to tilt ourselves and our

communities toward peace and reconciliation and away from conflict and division?

Today, in 2019, what can we as Christian people, as people of any faith in fact, as people who are citizens in communities, do, what should we do, to respond and act for justice, for hope, for reconciliation? To inhabit the field of lament? Of conflict? Of hope? In today's world where white gated communities trump cardboard shacks. Where Europe is again being torn apart. Where the colour of your skin, or your gender, or your ethnicity or your sexuality can deny you justice. Where your fields have been appropriated, or taken away like those of indigenous peoples and countless others around the world.

In November 2015 in Coventry we held the first 'Rising, Global Peace Forum.' Hilary Benn, the then shadow foreign secretary was one of the speakers, and he talked movingly of his grandfather's experiences in the two world wars of losing members of his family. His grandfather said, 'Peril shared knits hearts together, yes, even between enemies – folk the world over desire peace'. Hilary Benn then asked the question, and it is very pertinent for us today, 'What are the consequences of acting or not?' What are the consequences of doing nothing? Of not seeking peace? Of not trying to knit hearts together?

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote



If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?’

This is a vital question for us here today as we face the continuing confusions and conflicts of our world.

Loving our friends, those who are like us, those we are comfortable with, is usually, relatively easy. But living with, relating to those who are different from us, those we may not like, those we feel uncomfortable with, how do we do that? How do we journey with those with whom we fundamentally disagree? We are in a time of political, national and international uncertainty, even crisis. I am not particularly interested in which ‘side’ of the current Brexit debate you are on. It matters, of course it matters. If nothing else, whatever the outcome will be, much of our civil service will remain tied up in Brexit knots for years to come. The new ‘normal’, whatever that looks like, will be a long time coming. It will take months and years to work out trade agreements, write and agree legislation affecting our fishing, farming, education, health and the rest...But what I am more interested in is the effect, whether we leave the European Union or not, of the growing divisions, animosities, us or them language and behaviours that we are seeing in our political and communal lives together. Actually, saying that, it is becoming hard to even see whether we any longer can say we have a communal life together. In my work, I hear of families unable to even mention the ‘B’ word over the dinner table as tempers run too high. Work colleagues assuming that they know what each other think and feel, and astonishment and scorn when they realise they are on ‘different sides’ of the debate. Not to mention the rise of racist comments at football matches for eg., or the recent burning down of a Polish shop...and the rise of sectarian violence...

On social media we exist in our own bubbles...we ‘like’ those ‘like’ us on facebook; we re tweet and share comments that we agree with. We read ever more inflammatory language in our feeds on line, and we either join in or feel superior that we don’t.

A pretty bleak picture, all in all. So what can we do about all this? How do we live in our field of lament, of waiting and of hope? And how do we move towards action that is essential, considered, and just? When I was working at Coventry Cathedral, the refugee crisis really hit our shores. Do you remember the picture of the little boy on the beach? Well, I suggested to my colleagues that we make a prayer station in the cathedral to enable people to pray for refugees, many of whom were taking to the Mediterranean sea in small boats, some to their peril. So, we brought our sailing dinghy into the new cathedral, and set it up in the middle of the nave. Our boat is about the same size as those boats the refugees were in – about 14 ft long. We strew some lifejackets around it, and set up a prayer station. Many people came and



interacted with it....and the response was really interesting. Most of those who saw it were very moved and thanked us for raising awareness of the refugees' plight. Others, though, were furious. People said things like, 'Why is the cathedral preaching to us?!' 'Why are they getting involved in politics?!' Well fair point, in a way. Clergy are not usually experts in the political field. But, as Christian people, we are called to follow Jesus. The Jesus who continually upset the political order of the day. The Jesus who turned the tables in the temple. The Jesus who ate with sinners, privileged the unclean, who of course was himself a refugee. And the Jesus who listened to everyone, who talked to anyone, who forgave sins, taught his disciples and loved his neighbour. The Jesus who lamented on the cross. The Jesus who prayed to his Father. The Jesus who came to reconcile us to God and to each other.

There is a poem by the Northern Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, a part of which I want to share with you.... It's called, Doubletake, and is part of 'The Cure at Troy'. Here is an extract.

*Human beings suffer.  
They torture one another.  
They get hurt and get hard.  
No poem or play or song  
Can fully right a wrong  
Inflicted and endured.*

*History says, Don't hope  
On this side of the grave  
But then, once in a lifetime  
The longed for tidal wave  
Of justice can rise up  
And hope and history rhyme.*

'That justice can rise up and hope and history rhyme'.

I was very struck recently by a translation by Erasmus I had never come across before of the prologue to John's gospel. Instead of, 'In the beginning was the word', Erasmus translates this as 'In the beginning was the CONVERSATION'...

In the beginning was the conversation. Exactly. Because how can we live in isolation? How can we live without dialogue? How can we live out the message of reconciliation if we do not listen to each other?



The reality of the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> and now the 21<sup>st</sup> century does not seem at first sight to be hopeful. Conflicts abound and new political eras here in Europe, and in America, the middle east and the global south are being levied.

Seamus Heaney acknowledges the pain of our world... 'human beings suffer...'...yes, we do. 'We do torture one another and get hurt and hard'. The point of lament though is not to stay in the place of woundedness. It is to acknowledge it, rail against it, and even against God who has let it happen (we have precedence in the 60 psalms of lament in the Bible to call on!) . In lamenting, we move towards justice. We move towards healing. We move towards better understanding of ourselves and the other. As Walter Bruggeman says, lament pushes the boundaries of our relationships with the other. Looking to psychoanalytic theory, Melanie Klein describes two 'positions' and how we move towards healing and transformation from one to the other. The first is the 'schizoid' position, where we see, feel and experience our life and relationships as all good or all bad. As all marvellous or all terrible. As binary extremes. But as we better understand our selves, we move towards the 'depressive' position. This does not mean that we are depressed...rather, that on our journey toward healing we are better able to integrate good and bad, right and wrong, joy and suffering. This is what lament enables in our journey towards wholeness. In fact, I would say that this is what lament calls us towards...calls us , urges us, moves us, to act against the injustice we are lamenting, calls us towards acting for reconciliation and justice.

Going back to Seamus Heaney's poem, can hope and history rhyme? I wonder whether now is the Kairos moment, the time for that great tidal wave of justice to rise up. That now is the time to decide whether hope and history can rhyme. Do we stick with the world's answers, or do we believe that the God who is always with us, who makes his covenant with us, who calls us to be reconcilers, changes everything? And as we know, this is not an easy calling. It involves lament, justice, truth. As well as love, grace and hope. This calling must be at the heart of our relationships. This calling is something we may hear differently. How I hear it is not necessarily the same as how you hear it. That is not the point. The point is, do we hear this calling this invitation, rising up out of our lamenting? And then, how do we respond? And as our listening, our hearing, our understanding of this invitation from Jesus will not be exactly the same, nor will our response be. Can we provide a different response to the current worldview of the binary treatment of difference? A space in the field for the conversation to happen?

As an aside, I'd like to say that the concept of safe space is not what this is about. No space is or can be entirely safe. We have seen that in the attacks in Manchester, and London, and Syria, and all over the world. But in our response to these events, we can respond with a space which is faith filled, faith ful, just. A space, a field, to hear and to listen.



So where does lament call us to today? And how do we get there? Well, we start with sharing our stories, our suffering and pain and anger and lament, our selves, our vulnerabilities, our lives, our hopes and dreams. How do we share our own story with our enemy, so that they can tell us our story and we can tell them theirs, in a way that makes sense? Well, firstly, we have to know what our own story is –who we are and where we come from...and how we relate to each other.

And so I would like us to share something of our own story now. With our neighbour...just for a couple of minutes. Maybe start with what your field is like? What is in your field? And who is there with you? And then we'll come back together and share something of our fields. And then I'll share something of a story I was part of.

The story I want to share with you is of a peace walk. Two years ago I spent part of Holy Week and Easter on a peace walk , a pilgrimage, in Northern Iraq, in Kurdistan. Ad lib re counter terrorism police etc...

About 20 of us from Europe and others walked with local Christians, Muslims and Yazidis. A quarter of people living in Northern Iraq live in Refugee camps, people internally displaced from their own country due to ISIS attacks .Many refugees and aliens in their own land.

We walked for peace, to proclaim the possibility of peace in that fought over land. That field was indeed bleak. Full of lament. Why, O Lord? How long, O Lord?

On Good

Friday we visited a village about 30km from Mosul – Mosul, incidentally is the ancient city of Nineveh - a village that had been destroyed by ISIS, the villagers having all fled or worse. It was a place of destruction, completely devoid of life. Houses were rubble, shops damaged, and the church though still standing had been desecrated, the altar broken and lying in rubble. We could hear Mosul being shelled. So I held a Good Friday service in the desecrated church. A service of lament. Any good priest...!! We

laid candles that we had brought with us in the shape of a cross in front of the destroyed altar and prayed the prayers of Good Friday, the pain and lament for Jesus, and for healing, for the end to that conflict, for peace.

On Easter Day we returned to that deserted village and desecrated church. But this time, the bleakness in the Church was transformed. The same rubble was there, the same bullet holes in the walls, the same broken crosses and hacked memorials. But there were people from the surrounding villages, flowers on the altar, children dressed in white, and a packed church there to proclaim the hope of the resurrection, the hope of peace and the possibility of rebuilding. The local Peshmerga, the soldiers came to receive their Easter communion. There were even





painted eggs and chocolate after the service. As an aside, people were rather surprised to see a

female priest- unknown in those parts – I don't think I have been asked to bless as many babies and people in wheelchairs ever! The foundation of a rebuilt community was born that day. A space in between for remembering and for reconciliation. A liminal space.

It was in many ways an extraordinary walk. Risky, at times truly dangerous. But a liminal space – where we existed caught between the past and the future. Our necks straining, trying to look in both directions as we walked. As we left that church in the destroyed village, we had to walk carefully back to the bus for fear of unexploded ordinances just off the path.

Lament to hope, hostility to peace, conflict to reconciliation.

But all of us here in this room know that the journey of rec. is not straightforward. It is really hard. Our field is messy and muddy. But what we do know is that the journey of lament towards reconciliation is worth it. How best then can we communicate that to the world?

I was very heartened one day a few years ago in Coventry. Kiel candle stand story...

I preached at a church in Wuppertal in Germany a couple of years ago where the Barmen Declaration was signed in 1934....The Barmen Declaration was a response from the confessing churches in Germany against the rise of Nazi ideology, and the subordination of the Church to the State. Today, in our local, national and international life, in politics, in communities, in homes and schools and workplaces, we know we are facing conflict, division, anger and mistrust. Is it time now for a second Barmen Declaration? A Declaration of Reconciliation, maybe? Now, I'm not suggesting that we are facing national socialism, or Nazi ideology, or that we are back in the 1930's. But I am suggesting that we as Christian citizens we need to speak out into our world of conflict at so many levels. And I am suggesting that we have something useful to say in terms of a lament, love, peace and reconciliation. That hope and history can rhyme. But I am also suggesting that we can or should share a different way of being. Do we have to argue across the ballot box, or the aisle or the altar? Pointing fingers, 'you're wrong, I'm right'

So I offer to you a first draft of a new Barmen Declaration... A Reconciliation Declaration as we join together to work for peace and towards hope in our world.... I would love us to be able to work on this together here in Glasgow and beyond...so a very first draft to maybe take into our field of meeting...

**A Declaration of Reconciliation, October 2019.**





Jesus asked, commanded us to love God, to love one another, to love our neighbour and to love our enemies.

Through Paul's letter to a divided community we are asked to be ambassadors for Christ, to bear the message and the ministry of reconciliation. Therefore we together discern our calling, our vocation to be reconciled and to reconcile. This is a 'kairos', a timely, moment in our nation when we are called to lament, to listen to Jesus and to respond to him, for God's sake and for ours.

1. We lament the current climate of division, disunity and derision in our national life together.
2. We believe that we are called to be reconcilers, and that this is laid upon all Christians.
3. We believe that this call is a gift. A gift from God and to Him; a gift to ourselves and to the other.
4. As people of reconciliation, we humbly acknowledge that we do not always get it right. Nor do we have all the answers. But our calling as reconcilers is to tilt towards living as those who love one another. As those who forgive and are forgiven. As those who love our enemies. As those who practice hospitality, generosity and justice.
5. We acknowledge that we hear this calling differently. We are all made in the image of God, but we are not all the same. Gay or straight; Jew or Greek; woman or man; powerful or powerless; black or white; slave or free, right or wrong, have or have not, us or them.
6. As reconcilers we can provide a space where hurts and laments can be brought and heard; where responses of love and mercy and forgiveness can be sought and given. We can provide a space which is safe enough for people to gather with and for each other.
7. We acknowledge that reconciliation is hard and it is not fast. That it is cross shaped.
8. We know that reconciliation is costly and often convoluted, but vital.
9. We trust that the reconciling love of God is above all transformative and hopeful.

I want to finish with a story about Steve Biko and his mother Alice. Steve Biko was a well known anti apartheid leader and in 1977 was brutally murdered while being held by the South African police. Steve and his mother Alice were talking shortly before his death, and she was telling him how much she worried about him - she couldn't sleep at night until he was home for fear of him having been arrested and put in gaol. He replied by reminding her that Jesus had come to redeem his people and set them free.

"Are you Jesus?" she had asked impatiently. Steve had gently answered her,

"No, I'm not. But I have the same job to do."



### **A Prayer for those who disagree**

Lord, as we try to disagree well, help us to see that you are in both of us

As we lament our relationship, help us to risk change and be open to be surprised

As we try to talk together, help us to hear each other with understanding and compassion

As we sit at the table, help us to be courageous enough to stay there with honesty

As we disbelieve its possible to change, help us to be generous and hopeful

Lord, as we seek a way forward together, we thank you for walking this journey alongside us

Amen.