

THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Hi everyone! While we're all trying to practice 'social distancing', many of us are finding that the daytime quietness in our homes, has all but disappeared. The kids are home from school or uni, plus interaction with colleagues, clients, students and classmates is being done by applications such as MS Teams, Webex and Zoom. One colleague, working from a desk in his bedroom, lamented: "my wife is fed up with me being at home and under her feet." On one hand, we are dealing with family members living and working in close proximity, and yet we are also dealing with social isolation. That can feed into things like loneliness and depression. We are all dealing with many emotions due to sudden changes in our world and the uncertainties we all face. These are normal feelings that many people are experiencing. You are not alone.

Last week, one 'sage' in our life group, commented that Judeo and Christian faiths are probably the only belief systems where we can pray honestly to God, expressing our inner-most pain, feelings and frustrations. Scripture records the story of Job, trying to come to terms with massive loss and grief in his life. We read of Jesus, sweating, sobbing and wailing as he prayed alone in the Garden of Gethsemane. About 42 (or 70%) of the Psalms are "laments", 30 of which are individual laments and the rest, are communal. These writings have been part of the worship of both Jews and Christians over the centuries.

"In a lament psalm, a petitioner addresses God directly on the occasion of some calamity. Given God's history with God's people, the psalmist is comfortable charging God with "dereliction of duty" and unabashedly urges a favourable response. In fact, many readers prefer the term *complaint* psalm, since the passive connotations of *lament* do not match the vociferous and active tone common to psalms of this genre. ... the lament psalms ... respond to a crisis that disrupts the life of an individual or community. In laments, a critical event calls into question the conviction that God reliably protects the speaker from injustice, chaos and death. The lament psalm, then, looks backward at praise (recalling God's saving acts), and it looks forward to thanksgiving and salvation (praising God's inclination to save). Lament gazes unflinchingly at the present reality of pain and at God's apparent slowness to save. ... (the) lament interrogates similar questions (as wisdom literature) around divine justice and God's ways with God's creatures."¹

GETTING STARTED: Check in with each other. How are you feeling at the moment? What has been the dominant emotion that you've experienced this week? Has 'lament' been part of your prayers this week?

READ: MATTHEW 26:36-56

Or watch this passage re-enacted: LUMO PROJECT - GOSPEL OF MATTHEW CHAPTER 26:36-56
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPX7ujiXASo&list=PLcJVluhI8isJJqv2R7PgPTFK5hpZSwcki&index=46>

TEAR APART THE TEXT

- 🗨️ What things stood out for you, from the sermon this week?

- 🗨️ In Matthew, this is set at a place called Gethsemane. What do we learn about this place from Luke 22:39 and John 18:1-2?

- 🗨️ In Matt 26:37-38, we read that Jesus "began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to (Peter, James and John), "I am deeply grieved, even to death." Read these two verses in some other translations. Jesus was clearly overwhelmed by grief. What do you learn about Jesus' humanity in this situation? Why didn't he confide in the other 8 disciples, who were sitting not far away?

- 🗨️ Jesus twice told his three closest disciples to stay awake, be vigilant, be on alert and keep watch. The disciples were clearly exhausted and couldn't stay awake.
 - What did it mean for them, to "stay awake with me"? (Matt 26:38)
 - What did Jesus mean when he said: "Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial"? (Matt 26:41)
 - Why did Jesus tell the disciples to "wake up"? (Matt 26:46)

- 🗨️ In Matt 26:39, we read that Jesus "threw himself on the ground and prayed". What do we learn about Jesus' posture? What do we also learn from Luke 22:44?

- 🗨️ Three times, Jesus prayed: My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." (Matt 26:39,42,44) The cup in the OT often refers to God's judgement. (eg Jer 25:15; 49:12; Matt 20:22). What do you think Jesus feared? Was he afraid of his own death?

¹ <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/related-articles/psalms-of-lament>

Did he fear being rejected by his father? Did he fear carrying the sin of the world and being made sin for us? Or was it all of these things?

❗ In Genesis 32:22-32, we read of Jacob, who, on the day before he was due to meet his long-lost brother, Esau, spent the night wrestling with an angel. Jacob would not let the 'man' go, until he had blessed him. The 'man' blessed him with the words: "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel for you have striven with God and with humans and have prevailed." Just before sunrise, Jacob acknowledged: "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." Jacob had deceived his father, to receive the family blessing that rightly belonged to his older brother. However, it was through a dark night of the soul, wrestling with God, that he received the blessing that he really needed: the blessing of God on his life. Sometimes, prayer is hard work. We can struggle for days, months or even years, to understand what God is doing in our situation and in our world. Job struggled to understand his situation, but ultimately, he said: "I had heard rumours about You, but now my eyes have seen you." (Job 42:5) When we wrestle with God in the mess of life, we will be changed by that process.²

💬 Jesus prayers expressed what he wanted. But he qualified his request with the words: "but not my will but yours be done". What does it mean for you, to unconditionally surrender to God?

💬 Peter made the comment that, sometimes, we think we can respond to God with either a 'right of veto' (where we believe we can tell God that we reject his demands) or with a conditional or negotiated settlement (where we tell God what we are willing to 'give', but will not go any further). What is one time that you have responded to a command with a straight 'no'? What is a time where you've read Scripture or heard Bible teaching, and decided to only obey, in a way that suits you?

PASSION WEEK REFLECTION:

📖 Read and reflect on these two passages. What do they tell us about what it meant for Jesus to surrender to his Father's will? How did his posture of surrender, affect how he faced his suffering?

²¹ For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps. ²² He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. ²³ He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly. ²⁴ He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed. ²⁵ Once you were like sheep who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls. (1 Pet 2:21-25 NLT)

¹³ Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don't worry or be afraid of their threats. ¹⁵ Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. ¹⁶ But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. ¹⁷ Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good, if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong! ¹⁸ Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit. ... ²² Now Christ has gone to heaven. He is seated in the place of honour next to God, and all the angels and authorities and powers accept his authority. (1 Pet 2:13-18, 22 NLT)

❗ In his sermon, Peter highlighted that Jesus knew that he would ultimately be vindicated by his Father and glorified in his Father's kingdom. (Matt 26:29) However, that didn't lessen the pain and grief of his suffering. But that resurrection hope and commitment to God's purpose, kept Jesus focussed.

LISTEN, REFLECT & RESPOND: Below are links to two songs on Youtube from two different centuries. Take time to listen to the words, reflect on what they mean to you and respond to God in prayer.

1896 Classic Hymn <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7x2lpLSfgp8>

All to Jesus I surrender, All to Him I freely give, I will ever love and trust Him, In his presence daily live.
All to Jesus I surrender, Humbly at His feet I bow, Worldly pleasures all forsaken, Take me Jesus, take me now.
All to Jesus, I surrender, Make me Saviour wholly Thine; Let me feel Thy Holy Spirit, Truly know that Thou art mine.
All to Jesus I surrender, Lord I give myself to Thee; Fill me with thy love and power, Let Thy blessing fall on me.

I surrender all, I surrender all. All to Thee, my blessed Saviour, I surrender all.³

Hillsong - I Surrender (1993) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgsqfjRslzA>

² <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/how-wrestling-with-god-will-change-you-forever.html>

³ <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/441>