

In the Book of Psalms, laments have certain elements: An address to God; a complaint to God; an ask for help or change; an offer of proof for why God should act; and a show or promise of trust and praise. Using this model, we can live into intimacy with God and complain faithfully about the state of the world. Below are individual laments that people in Richmond have written, following the model of lament psalms. Over the next few weeks, we invite you to pray with these laments as well as with those included in tonight's liturgy. And, if the Spirit moves you, to write one of your own.

I Come

Lord I come before you an emotional wreck, my body is weak from all the tears I have cried.

My vision is cloudy my eyes are puffy and I know not where to turn.

All around me is chaos and confusion. People seem to have forgotten how to love one another. Rain down upon me to refresh my soul. Do not pass by me, leaving me to wallow in my pain and despair.

May my countenance shine brightly as proof that there is a saving grace. Let those who shy from your offered mercy be drawn in.

I will sing the song that you put into my heart. Offering it up like the manna so graciously given to us.

--Karen Franklin, St. Mark's Episcopal Church

*

Are you there God, it's me, Barbara. Your beloved.

There is a hole in my heart, not a whole, but a hole. And it's shaped like a gun. Not *begun* or *gung*-ho, but a literal gun. *Gunmetal*. *Outgun*. *Shotgun*. A gun. G. U. N. The thing that caused the hole, made the hole. A wound. Not like the one Thomas needed to touch, but deeper. Not visible to the naked eye. But sore. And gaping. And gun-shaped.

I am asking, not on my behalf, but on behalf of Caseymae, Sonia, Aniya and Deja. Those girls who used to laugh. Those girls who had dreams. Those girls who were good and loved and worthy. And now they aren't. You told me, no you PROMISED, you loved us so much that if we only returned that love, we would not perish. Perish. Not parish. I can see how one might get confused.

We want to live in peace. As you proclaimed, more than once, "fear not." But we do. Fear. Terror. Please Lord, on behalf of Caseymae, Sonia, Aniya and Deja, bring peace to this world. Look into the hearts, the homes, the holy places of those who think guns are the answer. And be with them. And us.

Because; "trust in the Lord with all your heart." Because; "with God all things are possible." Because; "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and all your might." Because. Because. Because.

It is a pact, Lord. A pact. A pact that is packed. With promise. With love. With trust. And when that pact is fulfilled, then we will be safe. We can love again. We can rejoice, going out into the world and sharing the word with every creature. It will not bring back Caseymae. Or Deja. But maybe it will heal Sonia. Maybe it will heal Aniya. Maybe it will heal me.

--Barbara Haas, St. Thomas Episcopal Church

*

An Early Morning Lament

Lord in your mercy...
We stand and say (or kneel and pray)
“Lord in Your Mercy”
Do you hear our cry?
Are you there?
Our children are dying or grieving a brother, a sister,
a classmate, a friend
Who they’ve seen lying, bleeding at the end
Of their young lives....
Lord In Your Mercy,
Do you see our tears?
Do you know our fears?
We beseech you to listen, to help us....
We praise you in silence and aloud
We offer our blessings and
Ask for yours as our heads are bowed...
and wonder...
Lord In Your Mercy
Are You There?
Do You Care?
Your children are dying
Everywhere!
--Anonymous

*

Lament - a cry for help with what we cannot reconcile

Oh God of this land and all lands, come down and help us. We have lost our way and cannot keep ourselves from doing violence to each other.
In fear we take up the tools of death, and doing so create more fear. We enable death, for we have lost the true vision of your peace. Fathers fear for and seek to protect their families, and their children take up their guns. Mothers grieve without cease, and the profiteers of violence thrive. We rage in helplessness. We do not, cannot stop the killing.
Come down O Lord and help us. Plant seeds of change in our hearts. Reduce our thirst for power. Remove our indifference to suffering. Strengthen our hearts with your love, that comes not through violence and retribution.
Come down, give vision to the leaders of this land who can make change. Strengthen your people to fight for peace, for the courts of man fail us. Come down with both your love and your strength to break this scourge. In joy we will exalt in your victory, praising and thanking you always.
Your love alone can relieve our pain and anger. Come down O Lord and help us.
--Steve Salter, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church

*

O God who gazes down on us with love as we move through our days. O God who wants peace and safety for all people, our country is not at peace. We don't feel safe anywhere. The threat of gun violence is ever present wherever we go.

Once again, this time in Lewiston, Maine, guns are killing your people. At a bowling alley where a 14-year-old child is gone forever. We hear the voice of a 10-year-old saying, "I never thought I'd grow up and get a bullet in my leg." There is an overwhelming ache left behind from Sandy Hook, Parkland, Charleston, and more. Families forever speaking unimaginable words of sorrow. The empty beds, the empty chairs. God of peace, if you do nothing, this will continue. Our leaders do not act to protect your people.

Show us your mercy and save us. Inspire the leaders to act. Let the sound of gunfire turn to the sound of children's voices playing once again. Let parents kiss their children goodbye at the bus stop without fear. Let the cashiers ring up groceries and shoppers stroll through aisles in peace. Let churches and parades and concerts be places of safety, not of terror.

Then your people will praise you. They will say God does not turn away from us. God provides a safe place, a shelter from fear. Your people will say God is love and your love is everlasting.

--Nora Thompson, St. Mark's Episcopal Church

*

A Still-Relevant Lament from 2021

Dear God who makes the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk—

Dear God who changes minds, turns tables, and raises the dead—

Guns are killing the United States.

Atlanta, Boulder, El Paso.

Parkland, Charleston, Sandy Hook.

Our own Virginia Beach, just last week,

And Virginia Tech too.

A flash on the news screen, then gone

Replaced by the latest lone gunman,

Whose family had no clue.

Our leaders claim at our funerals

That death is the cost of freedom.

Because you do not step in, they think that you agree with them!

Hear our groaning, O Lord, and remember

You who hardened the heart of Pharaoh

Can soften the hearts of legislators.

You who emboldened Moses

Can embolden your Church to stand up

To say, "The freedom not to die

At the grocery store

Or spa

Or church

Or school

Outweighs the freedom

To own a weapon of war!"

Selah.

We will praise you for such transformation.

We will praise you for lives not destroyed.

Grateful voices will sing and shout that
God did not look away
Did not agree that weapons are worth it
And lifted this country from its bloody pit:
Allowing the grandmother to go to church
The child to school
The worker to work.
Praise the Lord!
--R. Dale Smith, St. Thomas Episcopal Church

Next in the Beyond Thoughts and Prayers Series:
A Service of Community Healing from Gun Violence
Sunday December 3 at 5:30PM
St. Thomas Episcopal Church

Follow this QR code to sign up for email reminders for events:

