

## APPENDIX K

### LAMENT SAMPLE SERMON

Sermon Title: *There's a Grief That Can't Be Spoken*

Sermon Text: *Psalm 13*

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The song *Empty Chairs at Empty Tables* is one of the truly haunting songs in all of Les Misérables. Marius returns to the place where he and his companions had talked and laughed and sang and planned and debated and dreamed. He is the only survivor of the band of brothers following the devastating slaughter that takes place on the barricade. A gripping phrase begins his song, "There's a grief that can't be spoken. There's a pain goes on and on." Marius is experiencing traumatic loss, sorrow, both grief and guilt. He faces unimaginable loss. He asks unanswerable questions:

- Why am I alive and my friends are dead?
- What was their sacrifice for?
- Did any of it even matter?
- What do I do now?

Marius is singing a song of lament. A lament is a cry of sorrow and grief, but it also includes our questions and confusion. Lament is a language of complaint. We ask questions like, "Why did this happen?" "How long will this go on?" Lament is a common language of the Bible. It is central to the Book of Psalms where a conservative estimate places the number of lament psalms at fifty-seven, or thirty-eight percent, of the Psalter. When you add in other psalms that, while they are praise oriented, derive from a clear experience of suffering and lament, the total increases to 118 psalms, or eighty percent of all psalms. Lament is also critical to other of the Wisdom Literature, including Job.

It is also central in the Prophets, most notably in the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations. Lament is a theme in the life of Jesus and in the entire essence of the

Christological event. It is present throughout the narrative of Scripture and yet it still remains a virtual foreign language to the narrative of the lives of most Christians. We have lost sight of how to lament, in the biblical tradition of lament. We have certainly forgotten how to lament in community. Lament has become, in the words of Michael Card, “a lost language.” Too often we fail to speak the words of lament, the words of sorrow, grief, and loss. Our Scripture passage today is one example of a Psalm of Lament. Hear the Word of the Lord from Psalm Thirteen:

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long?  
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?  
Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!  
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,  
and my enemy will say, “I have prevailed;”  
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.*

*But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.  
I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.*

Psalm 13 (New Revised Standard Version)

### ***The Message of Psalm 13***

Psalm Thirteen begins as most Psalms of lament do, with a complaint. Complaint is central to lament. Lament not only expresses sorrow, but also our questions, doubts, and even anger. Only the God of the Bible allows, and even invites us to bring anything and everything that we feel to the very presence of God. In Psalm Thirteen the complaint has a number of elements. The psalmist cries out to God with a series of statements: It seems like you have forgotten me (verse one). It seems like my troubles will never end (verse two). It seems like everyone is against me (verse two). Implicit in the complaint is the

feeling of being totally alone. The Psalmist feels like Marius does, “There’s a grief that can’t be spoken. There’s a pain goes on and on.”

Psalm Thirteen continues with the psalmist crying out to God with specific requests. The call includes three primary requests:

1. Turn to me and answer me. (verse 3)
2. Give light to my eyes, a request for direction and life and joy. (verse 3)
3. Deliver me. (verse 4)

The Psalm ends as most biblical laments do, with a turn, a commitment to praise God for the answer that is still to come. The psalmist says it this way: I will trust in your unfailing love, I will rejoice because you have rescued me” (verse 5). He also commits to sing to the God who has been good to him. Even in the midst of the sorrow, there is an assurance that God stands with us and cares about our suffering.

### ***We Need to Remember . . .***

We can be honest with God. God can handle anything we need to say. God welcomes our full honesty -- to share our pain, sorrow, anger, hurt; God already knows all about it. We must always take our lament to God. One of the most important features of biblical lament is that even though the Psalmist expresses anger, he expresses it to God. True lament is a form of prayer and trust. When we are dealing with sorrow, pain, loss, grief, anger, disappointment, etc., the one place that we CAN take all of that emotion is to God. This is the nature of biblical lament. We must also realize that we do not see the whole picture. When we are facing times of darkness and pain, we often can only see the storm. Certainly, at the moment of singing this song, Marius was only able to see the loss and sorrow that he had experienced due to the tragic death of his friends. All of that is real,

and we should not ignore or deny it, but it is not the whole picture; it is not the end of the story!

The sorrow and pain will not go on forever. While it often feels like the hard things we face will never end, the Gospel proclaims that there is coming a day when all the pain and sorrow and loss of this world will be swallowed up into the final victory of God.

We must carry our lament into trust and praise. In the Psalms of lament there is always that “turn.” The psalmist expresses his complaint and makes his request, but then he makes a confession of present trust and future praise. Psalm 13 ends with these amazing words, “But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.”

There will be times in life, where we, too, have cause to lament. Like Marius, we will, experience “a grief that can’t be spoken” or “a pain goes on and on.” We may feel remorse, guilt, sorrow, anger, fear, regret, and even despair. The things that cause us to lament may continue to be realities that must be faced and endured, but it is never the end of the story. In this fallen world, we will know grief. Jesus told his disciples that sorrow and trouble would be a part of this life; we can count on it. But we can also be assured that Jesus has overcome the world and that the last word has not been spoken.

Marius would soon find hope and love and a brand new start to his life. While I am sure that the sorrow and loss he experienced at the barricade never fully left him, he did find joy again. But before he moved forward into that new reality, he needed to express the full depth of his loss and sorrow. He needed to lament. He needed to express his heart and the depth of the emotions that he had experienced. It is that bridge from the depth of loss to new hope and life that is often the gift of lament.

There will be times in all of our lives when we experience sorrow, loss, anger, doubt, or grief. We will often feel like it is something that we cannot talk about, not to God and not to others. May we remember that this grief can and must be spoken. We need to speak it to the Everlasting God and we must speak it to the community of faith that God has given to be the physical expression of divine presence and support. When the “pain goes on and on,” call out from the depths to the God who hears, who cares, who understands, and who walks with us through the darkest night. And as we will soon be reminded, “Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise!”