

Prayer of Lament and Confession

Introduction

As a church dispersed and a church deployed, we recognize the ways the Spirit gathers us together in prayer and mobilizes us for mission. At this critical hour, faithful disciples of Jesus Christ must respond with humility and action to the injustices facing our siblings. As the Reverend Chris Henry said in worship on May 31, 2020: “Prayer is a practice by which we make our longings and needs known to God, but it is also a time to listen for God’s voice, to tune our ears to hear the breath of the Spirit. This is a voice often heard in the cries of those who suffer unjustly. Listen to those cries.” Then in his sermon on June 7, 2020, he challenged us all to “listen, lament, repent, witness. By God’s grace, with Christ’s abiding presence, through the Holy Spirit who lives within and among us, let us respond to the call of this day.”

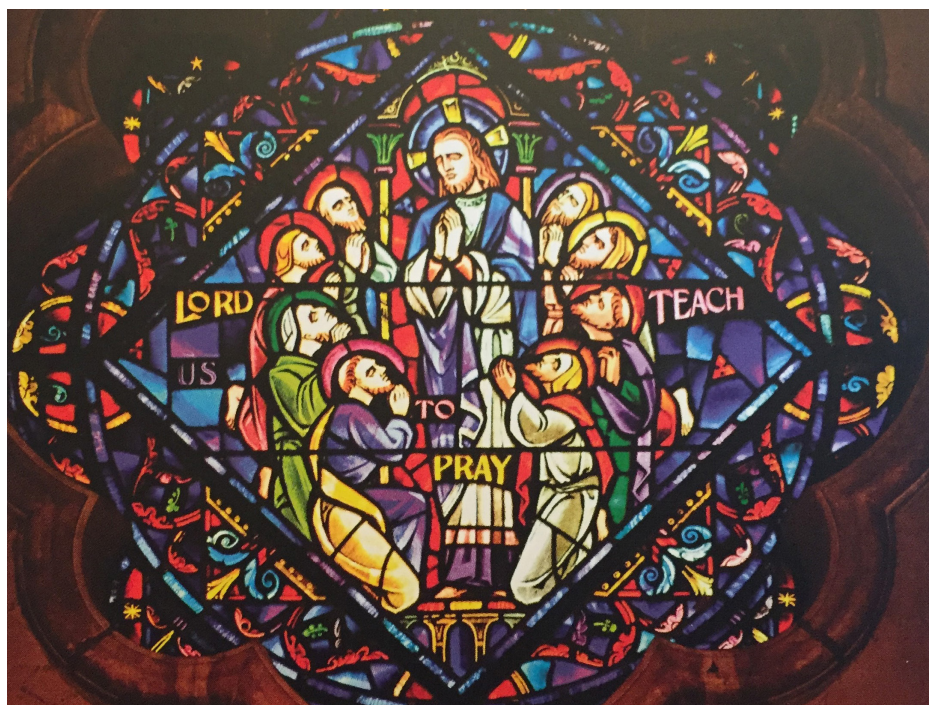
You are invited to use this prayer liturgy as we seek together a better way. We listen, lament, repent, and witness to the convictions found in Scripture and in our Christian tradition:

Racism is the opposite of what God intends for humanity. It is the rejection of the other, which is entirely contrary to the Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ. Racism is a lie about our fellow human beings, for it says that some are less than others. Because of our biblical understanding of who God is and what God intends for humanity, the PC(USA) must stand against, speak against and work against racism.

This liturgy guides each of us through the practices of lament for the lost lives of our Black brothers and sisters and into the practice of confession of the ways the sin and evil of racism hollows out communities and each human heart. Though we, in our discomfort, may want to turn away, holding faith together means crossing this bridge together so we might answer God’s call to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

Praying is a brave and faithful act, so thank you for undertaking this humbling work. Before you begin: Get a candle. If you are praying with others, gather around the candle. You will be invited to light the candle during the liturgy. You are also encouraged to submit your prayer requests online at SecondChurch.org/Care.

Let us be gathered by God to pray, to lament, and to confess.



Centering Moment

Find a space that is comfortable for your being and your body.
Place your hands on your stomach.
Take a deep breath in.
Honor the sacred nature of every breath.
Hold your breath for a moment.
Exhale.

Breathe on us, breath of God.
Fill us with the breath and power of your Spirit.
Breathe on us, breath of God.
Join our hearts, minds, spirits, and bodies to protect the breath of all your sacred children.

Opening Prayer

[Open in silence]

Be present with us, Lord,
Though we are scattered we know you are here.
We come carrying the concerns of our daily lives.
We come holding our sorrow.
We come sharing the grief and wounds of others.
We come asking that you meet us here in our brokenness.
We come to lament the ways in which we have failed.
We come to confess our shortcomings and our missteps.
We come seeking you.
Stay with us, Lord.
Guide us continually
as we begin to open ourselves to listen and lament.

Lighting of the Candle (Thanksgiving for Light)

As we light this candle, we recall O Lord, the fire of your Spirit
which you have given to your church as a gift:
A gift of understanding amidst beautiful diversity.
We give thanks that this smoke will rise to you as you hear our prayers.
We ask that you give us now the lamp of love, of mercy, of justice,
that it may burn in us and shed its light on the sin within us and within our world.
By its brightness may we find a new way
The way of the true and never-failing Light, Jesus Christ
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

Affirmation of Faith - Confession of Belhar

[If doing this liturgy in community, have one voice speak the first line and all respond with the bold.]

God has revealed himself as the one who wished to bring justice and true peace among people.
In a world full of injustice and enmity, God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged.

God calls the church to follow him in this, for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry.

As God's own possession, we stand where the Lord stands, against injustice and with the wronged.

In following Christ, we bear witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others,

Until that justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Scripture Reading

Read these words of the prophet Micah calling us all forward:

“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Read Psalm 22, which Christ echoed from the cross:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;

and by night, but find no rest.

Yet you are holy,

enthroned on the praises of Israel.

In you our ancestors trusted;

they trusted, and you delivered them.

To you they cried, and were saved;

in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

Prayers of Lament, Confession, and Intercession

[Pray silently or together]

God of all Creation and each of us,

you tend to the cares of your world and the concerns of each of our hearts.

We praise you for your faithfulness and ask you to continue tending

to the lonely, the sick, the caretakers, the weary, and the grieving.

Compassionate One, you know the many griefs that we carry.

We come to you this night grieving the sin of racism.

Some of us have carried this grief since our earliest days;

some of us are seeing and experiencing this grief for the first time.

Crucified One,

You have called your church to follow you once again to the foot of the cross

– like the women beating their chests and wailing as you climbed to Golgotha,
we cry out against evil.

Like the centurion who had for too long stayed silent,

we cry out, “Surely this man is innocent,” and in so doing we open ourselves to transformation.

We stand in the shadow of the cross on which our Savior died

and in the shadow of the deaths of our Black and Brown siblings

to say with one voice, “No more.”

We are here because all of your Creation groans

against the sinister reality of racism.

How long, O Lord? How long will life be lost to bigotry and racism?

We remember the lives of those slain:

[You are invited to say these names slowly contemplating each one & the many others they represent.]

Oscar Grant
Trayvon Martin
Rekia Boyd
Michael Brown
Laquan McDonald
Tamir Rice
Eric Garner
Sandra Bland
Bettie Jones
Quintonio LeGrier
Walter Scott
Eric Harris
Tony Robinson
Romain Brisbon
Freddie Gray
Rafael Cruz Jr.
Kajuan Raye
Paul O'Neal
Alton Sterling
Philando Castile
Terence Crutcher
Deravis "Caine" Rogers
Stephon Clark
Juan Flores
Chad Robertson
Marco Gomez
Eddie Lee Patterson
Gus Touis
Nathaniel Edwards
Harith Augustus
Botham Jean
Murrietta Golding
Antwon Rose II
O'Shae Terry
Devon Bailey
Atatiana Jefferson
Kenneth French
Michael Dean
William Green
Bruce Carter
Genevive Dawes
Ahmaud Arbery
Breonna Taylor
George Floyd
Dreasjon Reed
Sean Monterrosa

[Following the reading of the names, enter into a time of silence for eight minutes and forty-six seconds.]

God, we cry out with anguish for the lives of your children.

How long, O Lord? How long must your people fight for their right to exist?

We confess the overt and subversive racism that has been a part of the history of the United States from the beginning.

We confess the sin of chattel slavery,

We confess the sin of Jim Crow laws,

We confess the sin of segregation,

We confess the sin of redline laws,

We confess the sin of predatory lending,

We confess the sin of the school to prison pipeline,

We confess the sin of White privilege,

We confess the ways in which White individuals have benefited from the systems that privilege White people,

We confess our own silence in the face of racist policies,

We confess our own complicity in the systems that perpetuate racism,

We confess our own uncertainty in knowing what to do.

God of mercy,

God of justice,

God of love,

Forgive us.

Give us eyes to see your way in the desert.

Give us hearts to feel the pain of your people.

Give us hands to do the necessary work ahead of us.

Create in us a thirst for justice and righteousness that will

drive out hate and drive us forward together - as a truly unified body

where we weep with those who weep and do not turn away.

Create in us a faithfulness and creativity that allows us to utilize this season, as your church dispersed, to engage more deeply in the work of confession,

to listen with openness and curiosity to stories we have too long ignored,

and to serve our neighbors with compassion and deep humility.

Just as your Spirit sustained the early Church for witness and mission across miles of separation, sustain and send us, Lord.

You Lord, alone, are our Savior

and this is the fast you choose:

to loose the bonds of injustice,

to undo the thongs of the yoke,

to let the oppressed go free,

and to break every yoke.

We look toward the one Jesus Christ, who gives us strength and shows us the way,

as we pray the words he taught us:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Meditation

Our worship regularly ends with the benediction from Paul's letter to the Romans, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you might abound with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13). The hope of which Paul speaks is active, powerful, and it is on the side of the suffering. Meditate upon this poem by Pauli Murray, a Black priest and civil rights activist:

Hope is a crushed stalk
Between clenched fingers
Hope is a bird's wing
Broken by a stone.
Hope is a word in a tuneless ditty —
A word whispered with the wind,
A dream of forty acres and a mule
A cabin of one's own and a moment to rest,
A name and place for one's children
And children's children at last . . .
Hope is a song in a weary throat.
Give me a song of hope
And a world where I can sing it.
Give me a song of faith
And a people to believe in it.
Give me a song of kindness
And a country where I can live it.
Give me a song of hope and love
And a brown girl's heart to hear it.

Blessing

For the sake of the names we have held in prayer.
For the sake of the names we will never hear.
For the sake of the lives of the people who were known by these names.
For the sake of all our children and all of us, whose futures are inextricably linked.
For the sake of the necessary work to be done for all your children.
For the sake of the one whose sacrificial love redefines our understanding of divinity and discloses the meaning of our humanity.
We pray, we act, we live. Amen.

Pastors of Second Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis, Indiana
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