

WORSHIP SERVICE JUNE 14, 2020 CAMP SUNDAY

A PRAYER OF LAMENT – JERRELL WILLIAMS

A prayer of lament
By Jerrell Williams

When will they listen God? When will they hear the voices of the oppressed? When will the excuses end? God, we your people are now in pain and no one seems to care. They want to focus on what we do, but they do not want to acknowledge what they have done. They refuse to turn away from their sin. They have sullied the table. Their ignorance has taken the lives of George Floyd, Antwon Rose Jr., Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Philando Castile, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, and many more.

God, we turn to you now in prayer for our black and brown siblings. Guide us! Protect us with your mighty hand! God we are so tired. Our spirits have become weary from the gaslighting, the justifying, the minimizing, and the silencing of our voices. God let your spirit reenergize us. Let the fires of our rage never be quenched by the manipulative tears of our oppressors. Let the fires of our ancestors bring forth a new Pentecost. One that ignites the hearts of all of humanity and calls us to learn a new language. The language of the oppressed. May the master's tools be broken. May our rage be louder than ever! May our outcry for justice disrupt and dismantle the systems of oppression. God, we pray for your peace in our world, knowing that the only way for it to come is by justice being done for your children. Amen!

PASTORAL PRAYER – CALEB YODER

Lord of creation,

We are under the shade of trees beneath blue sky, with the warm breeze reminding us of your presence and constancy.

The outdoors is your first sanctuary, and your second sanctuary, if we allow it, is our hearts.

The cycle of the seasons, and the approach of the wheat harvest reminds us that you are one and the same, always faithful in bringing new life and beauty out of what has died and decayed.

We thank you for this opportunity to worship together outdoors this morning, even while we are social distancing. Let us feel our connection to you, to each other, and to this place.

We thank you for the presence of Michael Unruh with us this morning. Many of us have had significant spiritual experiences at camp, and we know we have an important partnership with Camp Mennoscah.

We are thankful for the ministry of Camp Mennoscah, and the impact camp has in foster friendship and inviting children and youth to faith in Jesus.

We pray for Camp Mennoscah in an unusual year without children and youth summer camp.

We pray for your love to shine through Camp in a Box, and we pray for the camp in their leadership transition.

We pray for families finding a summer routine without the same activities as most years, including summer camp.

God, we bring to you our confession of our sin, our self-centeredness, and of the places we still need healing.

We all struggle with sin as we fail to find wholeness in our relationship to You, with others, with ourselves, and with creation.

Camp convicts us of the need to lessen our harm and exploitation of this earth, to learn to live more simply and lightly.

We need the refreshment of the summer breeze over against our negative thought patterns and preoccupations that prevent us from having genuine openness toward others.

As our country continues with turmoil, movement, conversation, and change to combat racial injustice – we in the church look at our own record of how well we have done of unbinding ourselves from the systemic sin of racism and working toward racial reconciliation.

Convict us to learn more in order to see the opportunities to be a part of the healing rather than the perpetuation of this sin.

We know are works in progress, as every living thing that experiences growth, death, decomposition, and new birth.

Open your wells of grace and salvation so that we can respond to the Spirit's invitation toward both our individual and our congregational transformation and healing.

We bring other concerns to you, knowing you are always faithful in hearing our prayers.

We remember two families who are saying good-bye and grieving with the loss of important elders.

We pray for Steve Banman, his father, Jim, and their family at the passing of Jim's wife, Judy.

We also pray for the family of Glen and Mary Lou Unrau, and Glen's sister Shirley with the passing of Shirley's husband Virgil.

Let each one find a spirit of comfort, remembering, and reconnection at this time.

Help us to go about the remainder of this worship and our sabbath day with joy and receptivity to your Spirit.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.

“God is a Camper”

- Michael Unruh, Camp Mennoscah Executive Director

Before my wife and I got married in August 2015, I engaged in one of the rites of passage many husbands-to-be experience: the bachelor party. The groomsmen, which included my two brothers and three of my best friends, and I headed up to the Kansas City area to catch a Royals game and partake in Kansas City’s world famous barbecue. Our overnight lodging accommodations for the one overnight was a campsite at Clinton Reservoir and an 8-person tent. After we had supper and got the tent set up, evening was approaching, which meant the Kansas wind died down and the mosquitoes began to emerge from their resting places. To escape the pesky insects and get some rest so that we could have energy for the activities the next day, we decided it was time to turn in. It was mid-July, the temperature that day had been in the upper 90’s, and the wind had come to a standstill. Six dudes, laying side-by-side, sweating profusely in a tent just big enough for all of them. It was HOT. Despite this discomfort, looking back on that sweltering overnight, I wouldn’t have changed a thing about it. I was spending time in the presence of my closest friends, maintaining and even developing closer relationships, by camping.

After God created humanity (Adam and Eve), God wanted a close relationship with humanity. The Garden of Eden not only included the animals and plants God had created, but God, too, was present, moving through the garden. In Genesis 3:8, after Adam and Eve have both eaten of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the author tells of the Lord walking through the garden. God’s presence in the garden indicates God’s desire for relationship with humanity and all created beings. This story in Genesis, of the serpent’s deception of Eve and Adam, is the first instance of humanity pulling away from relationship with God. Thus begins a series of stories of humanity’s fall from God’s purpose. Though God’s response to humans in each of these Genesis stories seems to be more like a pushing, it is the people in each case who initiate the distance. God wants to spend time in the presence of creation, maintaining and developing close relationships. The remainder of Genesis includes stories in an ever-growing narrative of people pulling away, and God continuing to reach out. God makes a covenant with Noah that the earth will never again be flooded. God makes a covenant with Abraham that his descendants will be many. Each of these covenants are intended to restore relationship between God and humanity.

Today we look at a part of the Exodus story. A story of enslavement, freedom, and relationship with God. Prior to today’s text, the Israelites had just been led by Moses out of Egypt, successfully crossed the Red Sea, reached Mt. Sinai, and received the Ten Commandments. While at Sinai, Moses continues to go up the mountain, receive words from God, and then share them with the people. We hear today in Exodus 25:8 about God’s plans to dwell among the people in a sanctuary. God then mentions the pattern of the tabernacle and its furniture. This verse indicates that God wants this close relationship with the people. Again! God wants this close relationship. And God wants to have this relationship...by camping? A

tabernacle can mean tent or common dwelling. As God lists of the needed materials to collect, it doesn't take long to get the impression that God likes to camp in style. The tabernacle seems more like "glamping" (high end glamor camping) than camping. I mean, think about the cost of all the elements. Exodus 39 names them in quick succession once the work is complete: the tent and its hooks, frames, bars, pillars, and bases; the covering of rams' skins and fine leather, the curtain for the screen, the ark of the covenant with its poles and mercy seat; the table with its utensils, the bread of the Presence, lampstands, lamps, utensils, oil, the golden altar, the bronze altar, the basin, the hangings, more pillars, cords, more utensils, vestments, vestments, and more vestments! Pretty quickly it would move into the thousands of dollars range or probably even hundreds of thousands of dollars by today's measure. The materials required to build the tabernacle range from valuable to ordinary, yet all are utilized in a specific way to create this holy dwelling for God, and in following chapters in Exodus, it is clear that each item is designed to emphasize the holiness of God. Though the materials of the tabernacle seem extravagant, they're only a sliver compared to the extravagance of God. Specifics of the tabernacle aside, the instructions to build the tabernacle and for God to dwell in this place are designed for a strengthened relationship between God and the people. God's initiative leads to these instructions. Verse 2 identifies a key factor in God's plan for the tabernacle. The Israelites are to take an offering, but God is not talking about going from person-to-person, taking money from each and every one of them. It is "from all whose hearts prompt them to give." While God wants relationship with the people, God does not want a coerced response from the people. God wants it to be mutual. This freedom of will and choice that God offers is emphasized throughout the collection of materials and building of the tabernacle. So, it could be that not everyone contributed to the tabernacle materials or in its building. God offered that choice to the Israelites. And, once the tabernacle is built, this relationship between God and people continues with God dwelling with the people. Wherever God goes, the people also go, and so does the tabernacle. This required a good amount of commitment from the people, because the tabernacle had a complex setup! When the people wander in the wilderness, the tabernacle goes with them. When they cross the Jordan into the land God promises them, the tabernacle goes with them. In this text, we see that God is a camping God, who desires relationship with the people.

After continual trials and errors in maintaining God's relationship with the people, through judges and kings, prophets' messages of warning, God decides that it's time to go camping again. This time, though, it would be different. This time, the Word, with a capital "W", the Word who has been with God since the beginning, would become flesh and dwelled among us, as one of us! The Greek word for dwell can also be translated as "tabernacle." The Word became flesh and *tabernacled* among us. That has a different feel to it. God camped among us through the Word, through Jesus. This new tabernacle was the embodiment of God. Jesus did what Moses was not able to do. While Moses was a mediator, relaying God's message to the people, Jesus *was* fully God and fully human, essentially eliminating the middle man. By taking the form of a human, God was able to encounter people from their level, from where they were. He moved, spoke, resisted, taught, and demonstrated through his being and teaching, a life of complete faithfulness to God. A new way of being human. In sending Jesus, God was once again reaching out to humanity for relationship, and instead of sending a king, like an earthly king who conquers through force, God sends Jesus to bring about a different kind of kingdom, where humanity has the choice to respond. All those whose hearts prompt them are welcome to follow him. And while some chose to do so and drew closer to God as a result, others pulled away,

again, by opposing the way of faithfulness offered by Jesus and his invitation to join him in God's reconciling work of the kingdom of God. It was from this group of people, this refusal, that the plot to capture Jesus and put him to death was created. This signifies another instance of the people, pulling away from God and God's vision for the relationship. Jesus was put to death, death on a cross.

Thankfully the story doesn't end there, for Jesus was raised! Jesus' resurrection from the dead continues this narrative of this new way of being human. In Ephesians, Paul knows that God likes camping, too. He knows that God camped within Christ Jesus, and that God seeks to be in relationship with humanity through Christ. But, with Christ ascended to heaven by this point, the new way of camping is through Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit. Jesus welcomes all peoples, all foreigners, all aliens, all insiders and outsiders to be part of the household of God. In Ephesians 2: 22, the image of a dwelling place appears again, and this time the dwelling is built spiritually through each person in the community. When we think about accepting Jesus in today's age, it often carries with it an individual implication, but this text reminds us that following Jesus by the Spirit is the calling of the entire community, with each person serving as building material for God's tabernacle. This opens up a whole new understanding of how God relates to us. In Exodus, God's presence was known through the pillar of cloud and fire, which settled on the tabernacle. In Jesus, a human body gave God's presence a form to embody and move and speak to humanity. Now, the Spirit has been given by God. And the Spirit can move, too. The Spirit can move within us, outside of us, among all of us in the community!

I see the Spirit moving at Camp Mennoscah. The Spirit moves in the Ninnescah River, its water rushing by, sustaining life of all different kinds. The Spirit moves at campfire, when all is quiet after an active day, and the fire crackles and burns, its flames reaching up into the night sky, trying to touch the stars which shine in the places where God placed them. The Spirit moves at camp most profoundly within the people and the relationships formed. Each part of the community is slowly being built up, spiritually, into the dwelling place for God. The love that is shown in the camp community is something only God's Holy Spirit could do. It's not the result of my leadership or any of the other year-around staff. It's not because we have really good summer staff (though we definitely do). It's not because of the incredible humans who bring their whole selves into the community, (though they do). It's because through the relationships at camp, the Spirit is working and moving, and the staff and campers respond. When I feel discouraged that in-person summer camps won't be happening this summer, I am reminded that God dwells at camp, but God doesn't *only* dwell there. God camps within each of us and within each of our faith communities.

God wants to go camping with us today. God reaches out to us for relationship, through the Holy Spirit. It is up to us to respond, "from all whose hearts prompt us" to respond. Responding can mean slowing down. Responding can mean being still. Responding can mean listening, individually and as a community. Responding can also mean being moved to action--to resist and protest injustice. How is the Spirit moving at Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church? How is God camping among you? What is your response?