

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27
Psalm 130

2 Corinthians 8:7-15
Mark 5:21-43

Once again we have been stunned by another senseless act of violence, one that seems to be the result of racial hatred. A young white man gunned down and killed nine African-Americans at Mother Emmanuel AME Church, in Charleston, South Carolina, while they were in a prayer service. The violence was carried out in a sacred space, in the midst of prayer, by a young man who had been welcomed by the members of this church. As a nation, we need to grieve! We must grieve. Our passage records David's grief upon hearing that King Saul and his son Jonathan were killed in battle and that the Israelites had lost to the Philistines. This passage encourages us to grieve the racism still rampant in our land; that in order to deal with the racism we need to grieve the racism.

We need to grieve racism for racism is alive. In the slavery days, the church of the south declared there was nothing morally wrong with slavery, even declaring that the slavery of these African-Americans were a part of God's will for these people, that they were inferior to whites. The church supported slavery. It is interesting for in that day the supporters of slavery said slavery was none of the church's business. We hear the same complaint today whenever the church gets involved in justice.

Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Declaration on September 22, 1862, the North won the Civil War, and on December 6, 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in the United States. But racism continued with Jim Crow laws, laws that legalized racial segregation. Separate bathrooms, separate drinking fountains, separate seating in restaurants for blacks and whites. Jim Crow laws allowed equal but separate schools for the blacks and the whites. Black schools did not have near the

resources the white schools had. Separate yes, equal, never. Rosa Parks was arrested for simply refusing to move to the colored section of the bus. Despite the Civil Rights movement of the 50's and 60's, despite the federal and state laws making racism illegal and guaranteeing voter rights for African Americans, racism continues. Despite the forced integration of our schools; despite the Supreme Court's Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka decision that declared separate schools for black and white students to be unconstitutional, racism still abounds. African-American men killed by white police officers and the recent event in Charleston indicate racism abounds.

As I said, our passage suggests that we need to grieve our racism. David is grieving because Saul, the first king of Israel, and Saul's son Jonathan were killed in battle. David began as a musician in Saul's court. Saul would have times of madness, and David would be able to calm Saul with his music. One day, in a fit of madness, Saul attempted to kill David by throwing a spear, but Saul missed. Saul became very jealous of David. When David would return from battles, the women would sing, "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Eventually David had to go in hiding. David and Saul's son Jonathan were very close friends. In his grieving, David said of Jonathan, "Greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women."

And now, David has heard the report that both Saul and Jonathan were killed in a battle against the Philistines. The Philistines defeated the Israelites. What we have in this passage is David's lament, his grieving over the death of Saul and Jonathan. David and Saul were not exactly the best of friends. David had a self-interested desire for kingly succession. Is David truly grieving? Is David really sad? How can he not also be

secretly happy? If not for Saul, then David is truly grieving over the death of Saul's son Jonathan

This was not only a personal loss for David, but the defeat of Israel by the Philistines was a reason for the nation of Israel to grieve. This is not just a personal lament, but also a communal lament, communal grieving. David commands, "O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul? Israel needs to grieve their loss to the Philistines.

War is horrible. We all know that. I've seen plenty of war movies. I am sure we all have. When I saw the movie *Saving Private Ryan*, the scenes of the Normandy Landing was much more graphic. And I am sure that is not even close to what it really is like. Some of you here have seen some of the horribleness of war. Racism is horrible. Research indicates that between 3,500 and 4,000 black men, women, and children were lynched between 1877 and 1950. Blacks and whites supporting the Civil Rights Movement were killed. Four black schoolgirls were killed with a bomb at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham in September, 1963. Emmett Till was a fourteen year old African-American murdered after flirting with a white woman. The husband of the woman and his half-brother beat Emmett, gouged out one of his eyes, shot him through the head and disposed his body in the river, weighting it with a 70-pound cotton gin fan tied around his neck with barbed wire. Many of the people involved in these acts of violence against African-Americans never even went to trial!

I apologize if I have offended anyone with the horrors of racism but we need to stop the self-deception, the thinking that everything is OK, that there is no racism in our land. I am not just talking about the violent kind of racism, but the lock the car doors when we see African-Americans on the street, or standing up on a bus before we'll sit

next to an African-American, or wondering why there is an African-American walking through an affluent part of town. I'm guilty of these. Walter Brueggemann, in his commentary, suggests that public grief is a scarce practice in our society, for we are engaged in self-deception, pretending that everything is all right. Underneath all of that propaganda, we are a deeply troubled community with a lot of unprocessed public hurt. We can no longer be silent about racism. By grieving we reveal what troubles us and troubles our society. We need a communal lament. This loss to the Philistines needed to be nobly and honestly grieved. This is why David commanded that Israel grieve, for it was not only a personal lament for David, but a communal lament for Israel. There was to be no cover-up. Where loss and tragedies like those at Mother Emmanuel Church in Charleston, South Carolina, where that kind of loss and tragedy is not grieved, is not lamented, there is no opportunity for newness, for things to change. There can be no healing if we do not grieve. Grieving opens the door to newness, to change. Racism needs to be nobly and honestly grieved.

Eugene Peterson, in his commentary on Samuel wrote:

Lament continues to be a major way by which a people nurtures and maintains its humanity, socially, culturally, politically... All wise ... cultures honor lament. Without lament, a nation is gradually but surely dehumanized into a military force or an economic function. If all a nation does is wave its flag in parade or boast of its standard of living, go to war, and make money, it ends up sooner or later a husk.... Lament keeps us connected with reality, with the actual—with God.

He concludes, "That is why David not only lamented, but ordered that this lament be 'taught to the people of Judah.'" We need to grieve, we need to lament the racism.

All power and glory, wisdom and wonder
be to the Lord our God,
who strengthens us through the word
and blesses us with peace. Amen.