

The fifth Lenten Sunday
March 21, 2021
**A Service of Lament for Anti-black Racism
on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**

Prelude

Welcome:

March 22nd: International Water Day. The United Nations has stated that 2.1 billion people in the world do not have safe drinking water in their homes. In Canada, as of 2018, there were 81 long-term drinking water advisories in 56 First Nation communities affecting 45,000 First Nations citizens who did not have access to safe drinking water. Autumn Peltier said to the General Assembly of United Nations in 2018, “One day, I will be an ancestor, and I want my great-grandchildren to know I tried hard to fight so they could have clean drinking water. Our water deserves to be treated as human, with human rights. We need to acknowledge our waters with personhood, so we can protect our waters.” Water is Life.

March 22nd, 2021 marks the 3rd International Water Day since the UN General Assembly launched the International Decade for Action - Water for Sustainable Development 2018 - 2028. In 2021, there are still 39 Indigenous communities without safe drinking water in Canada.

March 21st: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Every Thursday, The United Church of Canada highlights Thursdays in Black as a day to remember gender violence, with an emphasis on violence against women. As a denomination, we have been highlighting the importance to remember March 21st, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The Atlanta shooting death of seven women bears the weight of sexism and violence against women, and with six of the eight murdered victims being of Asian-descent, racism (specifically, Anti-Asian) is not out of the question.

As a church, short of the concrete actions we have been taking to demonstrate our commitment to gender and racial justice, the spiritual discipline of prayer is our last mode to connect ourselves with these killings. One, to remember the pain and suffering of these women and, two, to bring to our Creator the pain and suffering of their respective families and the communities they walked with and accompanied them. May we find time today to say prayers of comfort and peace in the midst of grieving.

Let us hold prayers as the people of God *for all* — for those who have experienced racism, those who did not act in the face of racism, those who were prophetic against

racism, also those who were complicit in racism. We hold prayers for our human family, so that our souls and hearts are transformed and healed.

Preparation: Please prepare a large sheet of paper (or if possible of fabric cut into a heart) with the words “When one member suffers all suffer”). If using fabric, you may want to make several slits with the grain of the fabric so it’s easier to tear.

Call To Worship:

Friends, the God of hope is calling,
Offering refreshment to those who are weary and heavy laden.
**Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.** (Matthew 11:28)

[Moment of Silence]

VU 383 **Wa Wa Wa Emimimo** (Come, O Holy Spirit, Come)

https://youtu.be/_yn98ri6OBU

Friends, the God of peace is calling,
Offering tender words of comfort to those in distress.
**Come children, how often I have longed to gather you together
as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.** (Matthew 23:37, alt.)

[Moment of Silence]

VU 383 **Wa Wa Wa Emimimo** (Come, O Holy Spirit, Come)

https://youtu.be/_yn98ri6OBU

Friends, the God of love is calling,
Offering friendship and communion to those who feel alone.
**Come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money,
come buy and eat without money and without cost.** (Isaiah 55:1, alt.)

[Moment of Silence]

VU 383 **Wa Wa Wa Emimimo** (Come, O Holy Spirit, Come)

https://youtu.be/_yn98ri6OBU

Friends, come, God is calling us to worship.
It is an offer too irresistible to refuse.

Prayer: (Rev. Paul Walfall)

Hear us Holy One

You created all human beings in your image and likeness.

**You have stamped each human person with a unique specialness,
and all persons bear your image.**

Through that image you call on us to reflect your goodness, justice, and love to all the world.

Remind us that when we speak out for justice, mercy, and compassion we are displaying the

attributes we find in you.

As we come to offer to you what we believe you are worth, show us how to display you in everything we do. Show us how to respect your image in all human beings.

Help us to defend your image that is found in all human beings. Amen.

Hymn: VU 115 **Jesus, Tempted in the Desert**

Learning Together: What Is Lamentation?

Lamenting is a certain way of expressing sadness or sorrow. (*Brainstorm some ways people lament today, e.g., wearing black, making memorials, having wakes, song, poetry, dance.*) Lamentations give us an opportunity to be honest and bold about our raw emotions. We can express our deepest pain to God through lament. It is an honest prayer of pain, grief, and sorrow.

In sharing our laments, we join a rich Christian history of lamentations.

We join with the Psalmist who wept,
and also with Jeremiah,
with Hannah,
with Mary and Martha,
and with Jesus.

An old form of lament in the time of the prophets was tearing garments. When we feel torn apart, it can feel very comforting to tear something. Today we are invited to lament with people who are discriminated against, treated differently, and hurt because of the colour of their skin/race/ethnicity/Indigenuity.

We are going to listen to a lament, and while we are listening to it, I am going to ask you to tear a piece of fabric from this cloth and reflect on the words of Paul: “when one member suffers all suffer with them,” that is, if one of us is torn up by racism, we are all torn.

Bring out the large sheet of paper or fabric that with the words “When one member suffer all suffer” on it. Invite children to rip off a piece.

Remain in silence until everyone has a strip.

Video of Sam Cooke’s *A Change Is Gonna Come* <https://youtu.be/wEBlaMOmKV4>

Prayer with Children:

(Invite people to hold their strips, or if they wish, to tie them around their wrists.)

**God,
with these ripped pieces of fabric,
we name that we are broken, not yet whole.**

**We ask for your help
in mending our torn heart back together,
with the unbreakable bond of your love. Amen**

Choir Anthem: **Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child** *Solo by Debbie Crump*

Prayer of Lamentation:

In many Black traditions, “hush” is a word of comfort, not a word of silencing. It is what a loving parent might say to console a child who has fallen and hurt themselves; it is a word of comfort, reassurance, and love often used when someone is acutely experiencing pain, grief, or suffering. Today, as we celebrate Black History/Heritage, we pause to lament and sing words of comfort to those who are deeply feeling the pain of racism and anti-Black violence. We pray for the elimination of racial discrimination and violence against Indigenous, Black and People of Colour (BIPOC), especially for stopping the anti-Asian hate and all gender-based violences.

Sung refrain: MV 167 “Hush! Hush!”

God, we lament a world where
the quality of a child’s life can still be accurately predicted
by the colour of their skin;
Black and Brown skin tones are perceived as weapons;
White supremacy goes unchallenged;
discrimination is expected and planned for; and
racism is known to be woven into the fabric of society.
Lord, what shall we do?

Sung refrain: MV 167 “Hush! Hush!”

[silence]

God, we remember our children who have inherited racism overtly through the teaching of hate, and covertly through the lived experience of prejudice.

We lament that children have the unfair burden to unlearn the lessons of discrimination that they have been taught.

We lament that children are fighting against low expectations placed on them by a biased society.

And we lament the children who are angry when chastised for reflecting back the hateful language they have been taught.

Lord, what shall we do?

Sung refrain: MV 167 “Hush! Hush!”

[silence]

God, we remember our parents and guardians who have experienced friends, loved ones, and children dying from the physical and emotional wounds of race/ethnicity/Indigeneity and gender-based violence and who have worked thanklessly and prophetically for equality.

We lament the protectors who feel helplessly unable to shield their loved ones from harm.

We lament that our protestors are tired yet still persevere without signs of rest or progress.

We lament that there are people who live in fear of hateful violence because of what they look like.

Lord, what shall we do?

Sung refrain: MV 167 "Hush! Hush!"

[silence]

God, we remember our elders, who created paths where there were none and sacrificed so that other generations could live in peace and freedom.

We lament that they are being forced to relive the violence of racism in both different and familiar forms.

We lament that they are not able to live with the peace and dignity that they fought for.

We lament that they are forced to watch their children suffer.

We lament the elders who are tired, weary, and worn, with no signs of rest.

Lord, what shall we do?

Sung refrain: MV 167 "Hush! Hush!"

[silence]

God, we remember our Canadian ancestors, who despite great opposition and persecution thrived to become role models.

We remember Lincoln Alexander, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Viola Davis Desmond, Elijah McCoy, Portia White, Carrie Best, Fergie Arthur Jenkins, Wilbur Howard, and the Black leaders that we name now...

We lament the stories that we do not know, the histories that we have failed to share and the names that we have forgotten.

Lord, what shall we do?

Sung refrain: MV 167 "Hush! Hush!"

[silence]

God, we remember...

we lament...

and we wait, trusting that you will comfort us,

while providing us direction.

Amen

PREPARATION FOR SCRIPTURE

We join with the prophet Habakkuk, who lamented that justice never prevailed and that things were not as they could be. There was still violence, famine, and destruction in his community. There were better possibilities for being together... Habakkuk wondered out loud, "What shall I do?" Habakkuk's laments started the movement toward the revelation of God's vision.

SCRIPTURE READING: Habakkuk 1:1–4; 2:1–4 (a paraphrase)

The problem as God gave the church to see it:

God, how long will we have to cry "how long?"
How long do we have to sing, pray, and act
before we experience your promised commonwealth of love, peace, and justice?
When will these days of longing be over?
How long will we cry without laughter?
For how long will our hypocrisy go unchallenged?
We seek to be the community that you call us to be,
but our best intentions still lead to acts of exclusion.
We seek to be open, caring, and whole,
but our best intentions still lead to brokenness and judgment.
We seek to be hospitable, but our welcome is blocked by our prejudices.
Our dreams remain thwarted by our actions.
We fearfully and hungrily await your vision.
You respond with a taste of the kin-dom to come.
And now that we have tasted your vision, it consumes us, we constantly hunger for it,
and we cannot be satisfied.
Why did you give us this unrelenting hunger?
It haunts us.

You respond with a commandment: write the vision, live the vision, be the vision,
own the vision even while we wait for it to come.

Be patient and forgiving with ourselves and with one another,
for even when we falter God's vision will not die.
Be clear and plain about the vision so that the people around us,
our friends and neighbours,
can read it plainly in our words and actions.
Be encouraged, you say,
for a change is going to come.

LIGHTING OF CHRIST CANDLE *(text from a Traditional Spiritual):*

We heard the voice of Jesus say,
“come unto me and rest.
Lay down thou weary one,
Lay down thy head upon my breast.”
With pitying eyes the Prince of Peace
Beheld our helpless grief;
He saw, and O amazing love!
He came to our relief.
And the light from the light-house, shone on us.

[Christ Candle is lit]

Sung Response: Ethel Waters, **Stand By Me** <https://youtu.be/QY-hyju12To>

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Hush! Hush! My soul be calm and still.
Come, blessed Savior, enter in.
Forgive our sins... *[silence]*,
Heal all our ills... *[silence]*,
Give strength for tasks... *[silence]*,
Give peace of mind... *[silence]*,
And make our spirits wholly Thine.
And we shall praise thee ever more.
Amen, Amen, Amen.

THE JESUS' PRAYER

Hymn: VU 646 ***Siyahamba***

Commissioning and Benediction:

**Although the road is long and the journey is hard
Although the mountains are too high and the valleys are too low
By your grace, give us hope
By your power, give us strength
By your mercy, give us wisdom
So that we may continue to go where you lead us
Until all your children are safe from harm.
May we go with your light shining in us. Amen.**

The Sojourners, **Oh Freedom** www.youtube.com/embed/Lc8DvicTmQo

—Alydia Smith