



Sunday, June 7th

Preacher: Pastor Howard-John Wesley

Sermon Title: I'm Mad As...

Scripture: Psalm 137

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land? If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy. Remember, Lord, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. "Tear it down," they cried, "tear it down to its foundations!" Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us. Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.

Sermon Summary:

Pastor Wesley opened this week's message sharing his honest anger with us. Many of us resonate with this anger as we sit with the tragic killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others. This anger led Pastor Wesley to the book of Psalms, which offers us refuge and release in times of hurt. We learned that the most predominant genre in the book of Psalms is lament. These songs speak to trauma and oppression which make them so relatable to our current struggles. Laments Follow a 5-Fold Pattern:

- 1) A Pronouncement of Lordship
- 2) A Portrayal of the Problem
- 3) A Plea for Assistance
- 4) A Profession of Trust
- 5) A Promise to Praise

The most predominant type lament is called an "imprecatory psalm." In an imprecatory psalm the plea is not for God to deliver, the plea is for God to bring down vengeance and evil upon those who are oppressing the righteous. There are 21 imprecatory psalms in the Bible where someone asks God to allow evil to happen to those inflicting evil on them.

Psalm 137 ends with a wish for harm to come upon the children of Babylon who've been oppressing the Israelites. This raw anger reminds us that it's okay to come to worship with our own anger. Anger doesn't keep us from worship, it calls us to worship. Pastor Wesley taught us that, "God would rather have our authentic anger than our pretended praise." In the midst of righteous anger we have to remember the songs of God because music matches the mood of our lives.

The children of Israel were angry like we are for the following reasons. For each area of anger Pastor Wesley offered a Psalm that will allow us to find comfort:

1. They were tired of weeping and remembering. We simultaneously weep over our present while we remember and lament our past. - Find comfort in Psalm 64.
2. Their leaders made a mockery of their faith just as the President of the United States makes a mockery of Christianity. - Find comfort in Psalm 52:1-9.
3. They are in a foreign land that is not their home just as the United States is hostile to our presence and inhibits our ability to call it home. - Find comfort in Psalm 37:1-15.

Life Application Questions:

1. In this sermon we learned that a lament typically follows a five-fold pattern. Which part of the lament are you most comfortable with and likely to offer and which of these are you most uncomfortable offering? What do you believe causes you to neglect or resist some parts of the lament and not others?
 - a. A pronouncement of Lordship
 - b. Portrayal of the Problem
 - c. A Plea for Assistance
 - d. A Profession of Trust
 - e. A Promise to Praise
2. Pastor Wesley said that when we come to worship God would rather have our authentic anger than our pretend praise. What anger have you been carrying that you need to surrender to the Lord in prayer?
3. We learned that a lament is a genre of writing where the writer of the psalm is bringing forth an agony and a pain or anguish. What pain do you find yourself bringing to God in this moment? When you experience pain or anguish in your life, where do you find yourself bringing it most often? What can keep us from bringing our pain to God and what can be more satisfying about bringing our pain elsewhere?
4. What an imprecatory psalm teaches us is that our biblical ancestors knew the importance of expressing and dealing with their anger. In this moment, express your anger by finishing the sentence, "I'm mad because..." What are ways you can deal with that anger?
5. In a quote from William Congreve, Pastor references the power of music "to soothe the savage beast." In a time where people all of the country, particularly black people, are collectively grieving and angry, what soothes your savage beast? What music, activities, or practices will you need more of to address how you're feeling right now?

Spirit Work:

1. This sermon lifted up the presence and importance of an imprecatory psalm. We learned that an imprecatory psalm is one where the plea is not for God to deliver but for the Lord to bring vengeance and evil upon those who are oppressing the righteous. Look up one of the 21 imprecatory psalms or choose one offered in the sermon (Psalm 37: 1-15, Psalm 52:1-9, Psalm 56:7, Psalm 64, Psalm 69:24, and Psalm 109) and highlight the verses that resonate the most with you right now.
2. Write an imprecatory psalm for yourself. Move through the five-fold pattern but in your own way and in your own voice. Use this lament as a way to express your anger and an invitation to not allow your anger to keep you from worship but to call you to it. Find the five-fold pattern below for a guide.
 - a. A pronouncement of Lordship
 - b. Portrayal of the Problem
 - c. A Plea for Assistance
 - d. A Profession of Trust
 - e. A Promise to Praise
 - f. Questions to consider:
 - i. How has God been faithful in the past?
 - ii. How is your soul doing?
 - iii. How is your spirit doing?
 - iv. How is your body doing?
 - v. How are your world, your nation, and your community doing?
 - vi. How do you need God to make all these things better?
 - vii. How do you know God can, desires and will answer your prayer?
 - viii. How will you thank God in advance for an answered prayer?