

# HOW LONELY STANDS THE PREACHER

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*I am one who has seen affliction under the rod of God's wrath;  
he has driven and brought me into darkness without any light;  
against me alone he turns his hand, again and again, all day long.  
He has made my flesh and my skin waste away, and broken my bones;  
he has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation;  
he has made me sit in darkness like the dead of long ago.  
He has walled me about so that I cannot escape; he has put heavy chains on me;  
though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer;  
he has blocked my ways with hewn stones, he has made my paths crooked.*

Lamentations 3:1–9

“This is the Word of the Lord.”—Really?

“Thanks be to God”—Really?

Just where or when or how is this word a “Word of the Lord?”

Is the church a safe place to share anger, loss, pain, and despair? If liturgies or lectionaries provide answers, the conclusion is no.<sup>1</sup> The church is not a safe place for such words. For example, the lectionary does not often turn to Lamentations to find words to express the realities of life. In Year C, during the season of Pentecost, Lam 1 is read once. The words above are from Lam 3 for Holy Saturday. Even here, reading for Holy Saturday adds quickly other verses

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<sup>1</sup> See the analysis of various liturgies in the Christian tradition by Kathleen D. Billman and Daniel L. Migliore, *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 13. *Rachel's Cry* significantly influenced my thinking for the first section of this paper.

For insightful discussions on Lamentations, see Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002); Paul Ricoeur, “Lamentation as Prayer,” in *Thinking Biblically: Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, eds. Andre LaCocque and Paul Ricoeur, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 211–32; Walter Brueggemann, “The Costly Loss of Lament,” in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith: Walter Brueggemann*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); and “The Book of Lamentations,” *Int* 67 (April 2013): 121–93.

from Lam 3 concerning the steadfast love of the Lord, you see, because lectionaries are uncomfortable, as we are, uttering these words, dwelling with these words, and experiencing these words alone. Yet these words find their way into the lectionary on Holy Saturday in all three cycles. The lament of Saturday allows us to spend time in the loss and grief of Friday, thus giving active voice to the experience of loss and enabling us to move through the depths of pain, death, and anguish. Holy Saturday is dreadful territory that is unspeakable. Reading the text aloud lets us express those moments in our lives, the dark places that do not offer escape. *Though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer.* Places that feel like being lost in a cave, fastened in a prison, or cut off in a grave. Places where there is no light, no exit, and no way out.

C. Satterlee notes, “Most striking of all, the speaker indicts God as the cause of his suffering. All that he experiences is God’s doing. The God revealed in Lamentations is not the God that we expect. This God brings darkness rather than light. This God turns the divine hand against rather than to save. This God wields the shepherd’s rod—which we expect to comfort and lead us to the safety of green pastures and still waters—[wields it] in anger, so that it brings us into imprisonment.”<sup>2</sup> The lamentation on Holy Saturday gives language to the anguish cry, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). Yet this God refuses to hear prayer. We find this God offensive, terrifying, and even unimaginable. The silence of God on Friday, the deeper silence of God on Saturday, brings forth an aching groan in our heart that is unutterable. “This is the Word of the Lord.” “Thanks be to God.”

Scripture knows this silence!

Sometimes in the Bible, there are chronological gaps between two verses. Years can go by, and the biblical writers record silence. One such gap exists between the two verses of Isa 39 and Isa 40. What happened in the gap? We need not speculate here at all. If you remember Isa 39, Hezekiah rekindles God’s ire and Isaiah’s reproach by hosting the Babylonian envoys. Subsequently, a forecast of the coming justice is announced. Isaiah 40 begins decades later, toward the end of Babylonian exile. In this particular context, the gap between two verses is unutterable. We know what happened in the silence, but Isaiah does not verbalize it here. However, we know that the destruction of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the deportation of the citizens all took place in the white space between these two verses.

Jeremiah lives and testifies in the gap. Lamentations gives voice to the unutterable silence of this gap. Lamentations begins, saying, “no resting place” (1:3), “no pasture” (1:6), “no one to help” (1:7), “none to comfort” (1:9, 16, 17, 21; 2:13), “no rest” (2:18). Lamentations ends with questions for which Israel does not know the answer, questions about being “forgotten” and “abandoned”

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<sup>2</sup> Craig Satterlee, “Lamentations 3:1–9, 19–24,” in *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Lent through Eastertide, eds. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville: WJK, 2010), 2.307.

by an angry God who is perceived as one who has utterly rejected them (5:22). “Why have you forgotten us completely? Why have you forsaken us these many days?” (5:20). The experience of a terrifying God of justice leaves Israel devastated. Lament is Israel’s only way forward because in the gap of Isa 39 and 40 there is no memory of how to sing “The Steadfast Love of the Lord.”

Breaking the silence is a risk for the preacher. We are called to speak even if our attempts are tentative, faltering, and provisional. With fear and trepidation, we move from silence to words, pew to pulpit. Telling the truth is always a risk for the preacher.

In the Jewish liturgical cycle, the entirety of Lamentations is read every year (July–August) as a commemoration of all great tragedies of Israelite and Jewish history. While the names by the rivers of Babylon might change, exiles, suicide bombings, marauding militias, genocides, and refugees are not mere historical memories but current communal devastations. While most of us are like tourists at a Holocaust museum or voyeurs of the nightly news,<sup>3</sup> the pictures we see of Syrian refugees and stories that are told of human trafficking require a language of faith best expressed in liturgy at church.

While communal lament is part of the Jewish expression of faith, can the church say the same? In my experience, other than funerals and possibly lent, few churches have places for communal lament. “We are dominated by a liturgical style that is upbeat, perky, positive, and celebrative. We leave little room for songs that express the misery of life because, for the most part, we are communally disconnected from misery.”<sup>4</sup>

D. Musser wrote, “Confessing that you are speechless will provide no healing balm. If we listen to Lamentations in our pondering silence, we may want to rein in our penchant for eloquent prose, as though a brilliant turn of a phrase will evoke comfort. Consider the form of proclamation in our text. The poet chooses poetry! Emotive poetry! Poetry embedded with vivid, horrible images. The text itself should have a prominent place in the liturgy of this day. Read it with passion. Let the prelude anthem and postlude exude minor keys that mark a dirge or a funeral. Let the ritual suffering expend itself with emotion, as people find their hearts broken together in communal mourning.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, let lament be lament.

Nevertheless, I’ve been asked to say a word about preaching lament.

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<sup>3</sup> O. Benjamin Sparks, “Lamentations 3:1–9, 19–24,” in *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, 2.306.

<sup>4</sup> J. M. Hicks, “Preaching Community Lament,” in *Performing the Psalms*, eds. Dave Bland and David Fleer (St. Louis: Chalice, 2005), 69. See also *Rachel’s Cry*, 109–11, and the emphasis on granting congregants permission to lament.

<sup>5</sup> Donald Musser, “Lamentations 1:1–6,” in *Feasting on the Word*, Year C, Season after Pentecost 2, 4.126.

### Preaching Lament: A Case for Speaking

In the midst of distress and loss, what Ricoeur calls “limit experience,”<sup>6</sup> we struggle to pray and bear witness (“limit expression”) to life at its most desperate and vulnerable places, where people have no resolution. Congregations look to congregational leaders to give voice. I am convinced of the need of lament in liturgy and sermons. Lament takes the context of our embodied life seriously. Psalms of lament are available to us as the most fitting voice for our heart’s ache. In the chaotic place of pain, the ordered language of lament provides safe spaces, holy ground for people. That is the reason Ps 23 is often read at funerals. It is not that the preacher lacks the imagination to find a different Scripture to read but that Ps 23 provides an orientation that comes from its ritual use. Days of disorientation are not the time for new words. The more disoriented the people, the more orienting should be the liturgy and the sermon. When a consistent shape of lament is modeled in liturgy and sermon, the action will impress upon congregational consciousness a shape to our prayers. Prayer in turn shapes our faith. Consequently, with attention to the totality of our embodied lives, such liturgies and sermons will shape our actions and relationships.

Lamentations is a limit expression of the limit experience of witnessing the fall of Jerusalem. Lament begins with that place in our embodied lives where pain has no language, but only moans, cries, and groans. P. Miller quotes Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain* to describe the “moment when pain causes a reversion to pre-language . . . the destruction of language.”<sup>7</sup> Language is not able to express these experiences. That is also when limit expressions emerge. The eruptions of the unheard, capable of disclosure, take shape. Miller again quotes Scarry, saying, “conversely, to be present when a person moves up out of that pre-language and projects the facts of sentience into speech is almost to have been permitted to be present at the birth of language itself.” The limit expression gives access to the limit experience and therefore opens up the possibility of hearing another way of being and acting in the world. By voicing limit expressions, the silence that emerges from limit experience is broken. Laments give the congregation access to language and testimony of God’s people who have walked this way before.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” *Semeia* 4 (1975): 107–45. See also Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: Essays on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), for another way to think about unutterable limit experiences. Abjection is the state of being cast off, the act of being repulsed by something we would rather keep, something that is outside our symbolic order, thus rejecting that which once was a part of our being. Kristeva is a contemporary voice that tells the truth about that which repulses us at our core.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Miller, “Heaven’s Prisoners: The Lament as Christian Prayer,” in *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square*, eds. Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller (Louisville: WJK, 2005), 17.

<sup>8</sup> As an aside, limit experience is not only in times of great loss but also great joy. The birth of a baby is also a limit experience.

From limit experience to limit expression, there is a movement to a place where groans move to language in prayers, confessions, protests, interrogations, and professions. Thus while we identify with our inability to acknowledge the intense emotions that grief entails, the words of lament free us to make bold expression of grief before God and in the presence of others. Words of lament allow us to rely on God and the community to carry forth hope on our behalf when we ourselves have no hope.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Lamentations models the language of protest similar to how *Black Lives Matter* emerges from Ferguson. Yet the language of protest, while essential, moves to street from church, not the reverse. Finally, Lamentations gives us a language to interrogate God at those times when our faith disintegrates and our framework for life crumbles. Is God who we think God is? Is God faithful, gracious, and ever present? When our experiences contradict our faith, Lamentations gives us permission to mourn, and also to protest, challenge, and question.

The limit experiences that Lamentations voices come forth from the contexts of our lives. To authentically give voice to limit expressions, the speaker must either share the limit experience or be a faithful witness of the limit experience in the lives of others. “Loss of a job, a broken marriage, the end of a lifelong friendship, the death of someone we love, or an act of injustice and violence against us at the hands of another can generate the need to express our frustration, anger, and despair.”<sup>10</sup> Pastoral lament is a faithful witness and testimony of the present experience of loss and embraces the cry of anguish for help. Thus by naming our grief and loss honestly with concrete examples, limit expressions inspired by laments stir bold acts of faith that enable us to look at the world and our lives realistically and not through pious words. Therefore, serious illness, deep isolation from God, imprisonments, deportations, and all such experiences and disorder are brought to God.

The destruction of Jerusalem seems far away. Excerpts from W. E. B. DuBois, in “A Litany of Atlanta” (1906), gives a glimpse of a modern lament that emerges from America’s limit experience.<sup>11</sup>

*O Silent God, Thou whose voice afar in mist and mystery  
hath left our ears an-hungered in these fearful days—  
Hear us, good Lord!  
Listen to us, Thy children: our faces dark with doubt are made a mockery in  
Thy Sanctuary.  
With uplifted hands we front Thy Heavens, O God, crying:  
We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord!*

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<sup>9</sup> Nancy J. Duff, “Recovering Lamentation as a Practice in the Church,” in *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> W. E. B. DuBois, “A Litany of Atlanta,” in *Conversations with God: Two Centuries of Prayers by African Americans*, ed. James Washington (San Francisco: Amistad, 2014), 91–95.

*We are not better than our fellows, Lord; we are but weak and human men. When our devils do devilry, curse Thou the doer and the deed,—curse them as we curse them, do to them all and more than ever they have done to innocence and weakness, to womanhood and home!*

*Have mercy upon us, miserable sinners!*

*And yet, whose is the deeper guilt? Who made these devils? Who nursed them in crime and fed them on injustice? Who ravished and debauched their mothers and their grandmothers? Who bought and sold their crime and waxed fat and rich on public iniquity?*

*Thou knowest, good God!*

*Is this Thy Justice, O Father? That guile be easier than innocence and the innocent be crucified for the guilt of the untouched guilty?*

...

*Turn again, O Lord; leave us not to perish in our sin!*

*From lust of body and lust of blood,—*

*Great God, deliver us!*

*From lust of power and lust of gold,—*

*Great God, deliver us!*

*From the leagued lying of despot and of brute,—*

*Great God, deliver us!*

*A city lay in travail, God our Lord, and from her loins sprang twin Murder and Black Hate.*

...

*Doth not this justice of hell stink in Thy nostrils, O God? How long shall the mounting flood of innocent blood roar in Thine ears and pound in our hearts for vengeance? Pile the pale frenzy of blood-crazed brutes, who do such deeds, high on Thine altar, Jehovah Jireh, and burn it in hell forever and forever!*

*Forgive us, good Lord; we know not what to say!*

*Bewildered we are and passion-tossed, mad with the madness of a mobbed and mocked and murdered people; straining at the armposts of Thy throne, we raise our shackled hands and charge Thee God, by the bones of our stolen fathers, by the tears of our dead mothers, by the very blood of Thy crucified Christ:*

*What meaneth this? Tell us plain; give us the sign!*

*Keep not Thou silent, O God!*

*Sit not longer blind, Lord God, deaf to our prayers and dumb to our dumb suffering. Surely Thou too, are not white, O Lord, a pale, bloodless, heartless thin!*

...

*We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord!*

*We bow our heads and hearken soft to the sobbing of women and little children.*

*We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord!*

*Our voices sink in silence and in night.*

*Hear us, good Lord!*

*In night, O God of a godless land!*

*Amen!*

*In silence, O Silent God.  
Selah!*

In this spirit, let's talk about some homiletical mechanics.

#### Preaching Mechanics: Bringing Order to Disorder

All sermons move from beginning to ending, introduction to conclusion. We preach, always we preach, with the *telos* of the sermon in mind. However, while your destination is discerned first during the exegetical process, you do not begin the sermon on Sunday at the ending. The sermon will begin at the beginning. The sermon is not static like a painting but flows moment by moment through time. The metaphor is not the score of notes on a page but the live performance of the music.<sup>12</sup> The movement of the words through time is plotted sequence that moves from here to there—beginning to end. In the homiletical journey, do not leave the listeners behind. Aristotle, identifies the plot as moving from conflict (tension) to complication to climax to dénouement. Or as Eugene Lowry often says, “from itch to scratch.”<sup>13</sup> Before you script your sermon, name your *telos*, the itch, by writing your focus and function statements. What are you going to say? What do you want your words to do? Then, with end in mind, begin at the beginning.

Now that you know where you are going, how will you travel? Once you have determined your point of entry into the sermon, you will also want to maintain a consistent point of view throughout the sermon. All sermons have structures (episodes) that are determined by sequence and selection of content. The sequencing of the episodes from a consistent point of view will create a coherent plot. While text form (genre) influences the sermon's form (plot), it is not a prison but an inspiration to the imagination. Buttrick calls each episode in the storyboard a “move.”<sup>14</sup> Moves are internally developed primarily through the use of arguments, stories, and images. The storyboard depends upon understanding sermon form as plotted narrative.<sup>15</sup> Buttrick sees plot in three modes: the mode of immediacy, the mode of reflection, and the mode of praxis.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Henry Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958), 163–64. Davis's text moves away from the idea of outline when conceiving of a sermon. The classic text is often cited as the beginning of a movement called the new homiletic. See Sensing, “After the Craddock Revolution: A Bibliographic Essay,” *Leaven* 11:4 (2003): 211–19.

<sup>13</sup> Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001), 15–21. See *Poetics* (<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html>).

<sup>14</sup> David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). Much of my homiletical advice is a modified Buttrick homiletic.

<sup>15</sup> Of the various ways narrative is used in the literature, I am delimiting the definition to narrational logic or the plotting of thought and action. See Ronald Allen, “Theology Undergirding Narrative Preaching,” in *What's the Shape of Narrative Preaching?* eds. Mike Graves and David J. Schlafer (St. Louis: Chalice, 2008), 27–28.

<sup>16</sup> Mode of praxis: I handle the mode of praxis by incorporating action throughout the sermon. It looks exactly like how I handle the Mode of Reflection. I do not make

Discovering the rhetorical pattern of lament is the first step in scripting a sermon in the mode of immediacy.

#### Common Pattern

1. Address to God for it matters to God
2. Complaint—name names. Lament is the language of complaint, anger, grief, despair, interrogations, and protest to God.
3. Petition
4. Confession of trust
5. Words of Assurance
6. Vow of praise<sup>17</sup>

The sections (moves, stanzas, units, episodes) are discerned through exegesis. The mode of immediacy follows the rhetorical pattern, but not in a rigid fashion. Each text will have its own character. Poetically, stanzas may help identify the flow of the text, and some exegetes prefer the use of stanzas to that of rhetorical units. If all six rhetorical units of the pattern are present, the movement can be sketched or plotted as follows (most texts will modify the traditional pattern. Some units are expanded or missing in actual texts):

ADDRESS→	COMPLAINT→	PETITION→	CONFESSION→	ASSURANCE→	PRAISE
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Next, the parallel episodes of the sermon are lined up so that the rhetorical pattern coheres. Buttrick calls this the mode of immediacy.

↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
EPISODE 1→	EPISODE 2→	EPISODE 3→	EPISODE 4→	EPISODE 5→	EPISODE 6

Or if the exegesis leads to three literary units or stanzas, then:

STANZA 1→	STANZA 2→	STANZA 3
↓	↓	↓
EPISODE 1→	EPISODE 2→	EPISODE 3

The mode of immediacy, according to Buttrick, primarily works with narrative texts. With my emphasis on the rhetorical and narrational structures, I can

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this a separate category or mode at all. Function statements have strong verbs with behavioral and affective ends. Belief and action in concrete situations are bound and cannot be separated. How one lives in the world as a Christian and how the text/reflected theology is connecting to our world is the same to me. Here is where Buttrick is the most abiblical. He does not need a text but only a theological field of meaning. Theological fields of meaning bear witness on situations that affect Christian behavior. He is right. We do this all the time. He is making it overt. However, for me, I want to make the connection to the text and the text's witness to theology overt. In the Mode of Praxis, plot comes from the situation of our lives and how a field of meaning addresses that situation.

<sup>17</sup> For an example see the structure of Psalm 22 in Billman and Migliore *Rachel's Cry*, 27.



incorporate this mode easily to all literary genres. I do this by emphasizing the present tense. The text presses upon consciousness in the present time. It makes connections as it is being preached to my lived experiences. As the sermon progresses through the episodes of the plotline, the links to live experiences continue through time. We hear and are formed by the performative movement of the text.

My emphasis on a present tense sermon is influenced by Ricoeur’s *The World in Front of the Text*.<sup>18</sup> A present tense analysis refers to what takes place when one reads, between the words on the page and the “real” readers who engage it.<sup>19</sup> Thus consider the widow, the single mother of two brats and one angel, a couple married sixty-five years, the teen who comes alone, the post-master, the insurance broker, and the nurse. What does the text say in their context? What factors influence hearers as they interpret the words? How do texts inspire them? How do different hearers respond to the theology of the text? How has the Bible shaped history and society in the centuries since it first appeared (giving clues how others shaped their lives in response to the word)? In other words, “What is the live wire of theology that still speaks to the people in front of me?” The theology of the text, if we believe, orients our lives and changes who we are and how we live.

Lamentations 3:1–25 as example:<sup>20</sup> Context matters. Not knowing the boundless number of pastoral contexts possible, the following example chooses the liturgical context provided by the lectionary and connected to Holy Saturday.

1a introduction It is “I” that this is happening to.	1b–17a accusations against God; a description of misery. God is responsible.	17b–20 direct complaint; all is lost and nothing is left.	21–25 avowal of confidence; resolve to hope
↓	↓	↓	↓
Holy Saturday extends the lament of Jesus, “My God, My God” of Ps 22. The personal cry of Jesus on	Accusations against God are turned to descriptions of misery in the presence of others. We are the ones who hear Jesus’s misery.	Accusation moves to lamentation. Forgetfulness of God’s hope leads to thoughts of utter rejection. Jesus too is trapped in the	But in the midst of thinking of suffering, memories of trust lead to praise. Somewhere in

<sup>18</sup> Adapted from Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 140–44.

<sup>19</sup> For my understanding of the recontextualization process of hermeneutics, see Tim Sensing, “Wearing Trifocals: Reappropriating the Ancient Pulpit for the Twenty-first Century Pew,” *ResQ* 48:1 (2006): 43–54; and “Reimagining the Future: Past Tense Words in a Present Tense World,” in *Preaching Eighth Century Prophets*, eds. David Fleer and Dave Bland (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2004), 119–33.

<sup>20</sup> Claus Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, trans. Charles Muenchow (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 169–74. See also Kathleen M. O’Connor, *The Book of Lamentations, NIB* (Nashville: Abingdon 2001), 6.1046–1051.

the cross. The shepherd's rod of comfort is instead a rod of anger. Jesus has suffered under the wrath of God. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34).		tomb, "lamenting his fate and complaining to God." <sup>21</sup>	the soul are fragments of songs once sung beforehand. Saturday longs for Sunday. Hope is introduced in the face of contradictory evidence. Hope and horror often stand together.
↓	↓	↓	↓
Holy Saturday reminds us all of the results of dark betrayals. Whether it is Nigerian kidnapped girls or churches that abandon vulnerable neighbors, people experience a rod of anger.	The experience of being abandoned by those who are most depended upon (family, city, church) not only feels as if God too has abandoned, but leaves God open to accusation. For if God . . . ; and will the church bear witness? We find this God "terrifying, and even unimaginable. . . . Still, many in our churches know this God. . . . They are afraid honestly to lament because the church does not speak honestly to their experience." <sup>22</sup>	Therefore, "I give up!" The end of the rope cannot be grasped. Despair reigns. "I had hoped . . ." "I remember when . . ." But now it is gone. Jesus knows and experiences firsthand what we too sometimes encounter. "Jesus becomes one with anyone who has suffered greatly . . . with everyone who feels helplessness, hopelessness, pain, and despair because it seems that God is against them." <sup>23</sup>	But the echoes of a song linger in the back of the mind. Maybe the song is more than a distant memory. While the melody might allude, the words are just there on the tip of the tongue. As the long nights of many Saturdays, the memory of dawn lifts our eyes.

In the mode of immediacy, plot comes from the text.

Mode of reflection: Buttrick prefers the mode of reflection for non-narrative texts. Reflection is not interacting with the movement of the text or the occasion of the writing, but on "the field of meaning in consciousness configured by the text" (Buttrick, 323). It resembles a meditation more than a story. The sequences of the text (literary and rhetorical structures) are no longer

<sup>21</sup> Satterlee, "Lamentations," 309.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 309.

used to determine the sequence of the sermon. This mode is most like systematic theology. It is not static. The reflection still has an intending towards. Narrativel logic is still employed. The reflected thought still is flowing towards an end. In the mode of reflection, plot comes from the theological field of meaning and its intending to do something.

Trouble in the World→	Theological Field of Meaning in the Text→	The Hoped for Change
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An example of the mode of reflection useful for the pastoral preaching of Lamentations is mimetic in form. In English mimesis is defined as “imitation” most often. Paul Ricoeur, in French, defines it as “representation.” How does symbol, image, story represent its object? For example, how does a painting represent its subject?<sup>24</sup> How does a limit expression faithfully represent a limit experience? How can we as preachers imitate how Lamentations faithfully represents the communal pain of destruction?

Tom Long offers a helpful suggestion about mimetic employment taken from Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative*.<sup>25</sup> Mimesis<sub>1</sub> is a refiguration of the practical field of prefigured time. It includes the meaningful structures, symbolic resources, and temporal character of the world in action. The congregation’s way of living in the world, discerned through pastoral ministry, ethnography, and cultural analysis is the everydayness of their prefigured lives. Mimesis<sub>1</sub>, when preaching Lamentations, listens and retells the limit experiences of the congregation that people do not have words to speak. In the sermon, with candor, you represent the experience, an imitation of the concrete realities of their pain.<sup>26</sup>

Mimesis<sub>3</sub> is the refiguration of the future. Mimesis<sub>3</sub> is a counter narrative of mimesis<sub>1</sub>. Mimesis<sub>3</sub> is a testimony of God’s transforming work. Mimesis<sub>3</sub> is an imaginative and proleptic telling of hope for tomorrow in the midst of the experience. The congregation’s way of living is slowly transformed into God’s way of being in the world. If the preacher takes seriously the lived experiences of the congregation and the biblical witness of an alternative way of living in

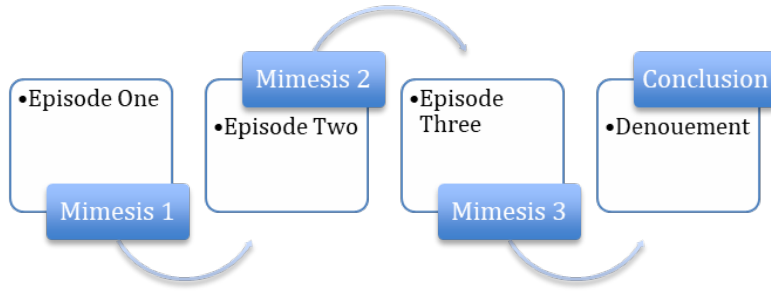
<sup>24</sup> See C. S. Peirce’s semiotics on icons, signs, and symbols. Peirce defined *semiosis* as an irreducibly triadic process wherein something, as an object, logically determines or influences something as a sign to determine or influence something as an interpretation or *interpretant*, itself a sign, thus leading to further interpretants. The process spirals forward and resembles Ricoeur’s prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration. This series is often represented with the words orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. See Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings (1893–1913)* (Bloomington: IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 2.4–10 or <http://www.commens.org/dictionary>. See my own musings on Peirce at <http://blogs.acu.edu/sensing/homiletics-textbook-in-process/>.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Long, *Preaching from Memory to Hope* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2009), 41–53.

<sup>26</sup> See Tim Sensing, “Aristotle’s *Poetics*: Comparative Offerings to Homiletical Theory and Practice,” *Homiletic* 42:1 (2017) <http://www.homiletic.net/index.php/homiletic/article/view/4380>.

the world in light of the hope of the gospel, *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> imagines what that would look like for people.

*Mimesis*<sub>2</sub> is the pivot between the two; it mediates the witness of Scripture to God’s life through plot, an emplotment of configuration. *Mimesis*<sub>2</sub> comes from exegesis and a faithful retelling, in the present tense, of the narrative of Scripture. If the episodes of the sermons are represented (imitated) by the moves of emplotment of transfiguring *Mimesis*<sub>1</sub> into *Mimesis*<sub>3</sub> by way of configuration, then the following sermon form takes shape:



Episode 1 The concern of the audience discerned by the abductive process of theological reflection Developed by signs in stories, arguments, and images	Episode 2 The theological field of concern that is represented by the focus statement Developed by signs in stories, arguments, and image	Episode 3 The concrete practices and habits that embody the hoped for change Developed by signs in stories, arguments, and images	Denouement Naming the hoped for change the function of the sermon intends
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The fullness of pastoral insight of the immediate context is represented (witnessed) in <i>Mimesis</i> <sub>1</sub>	<i>Mimesis</i> <sub>2</sub>	<i>Mimesis</i> <sub>3</sub>	Conclusion
The acrostic nature of the lament encourages a cataloging of loss in an all-encompassing A-to-Z itemized list. Nothing is left out. “It provides space for a full and honest accounting of the community’s devastation, as well as a way for the community to structure and express tumultuous emotions at a time when people may be inclined to dissolve into	1) Retelling of the biblical narrative of a witness of Jerusalem’s fall in Lam 3:1–20. The witness experiences the suffering personally as though he alone is the recipient of God’s wrath; or 2) The retelling of Holy Saturday using the words of Lam	But the echoes of a song linger in the back of the mind. Maybe the song is more than a distant memory. While the melody might allude to experiences, the words are just there on the tip of the tongue. Can a church sit down beside folk who are living in	Can you imagine a community of God’s people who live out the contradiction of suffering and hope in such a way that they will be a city set on a hill for all in the town to see? It is almost like

<p>chaotic despair.”<sup>27</sup> Every person in the pew knows first hand both individual and communal tragedy. A sermon from Lamentations gives the congregation a time and place to cry together. The sermon gives the preacher the opportunity to bear witness to both the congregation’s collective grief and the pains of individual persons and families.<sup>28</sup></p>	<p>3:1–20 to bring to bear what Jesus experienced. Picture how dark the city of Jerusalem was on Holy Saturday. But there is a dawn rising, almost a Haggai 2 moment as a city emerges from the ashes.</p>	<p>contradictions and peck out a tune of hope that might (through months or years) become a melody? The community pastorally carries forth hope on behalf of those who are trapped in a tomb they cannot escape.</p>	<p>listening to the slaves singing songs of faith in the fields or mourners crying aloud at Jerusalem’s wailing wall, a wailing of faith and devotion, a wailing alone, yet with others who too are looking for a way forward.</p>
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The sermon can be judged according to its ability to discern rightly and represent the congregation’s narrative prefiguration (mimesis<sub>1</sub>), its willingness to engage deeply and display the narrative world configured by this particular biblical text (mimesis<sub>2</sub>), and its capacity to render seriously the new way of being in the world made available through an encounter with this textual world (mimesis<sub>3</sub>).<sup>29</sup>

“Lament for the lamenter is not a “downer,” but a necessary expression of faith. It sustains hope. Yet if we use communal laments as a means to wallow in the sorrow of the human predicament so that it amounts to no more than self-pity, then we misunderstand the function of lament. Lament transforms. Lament enables perseverance. Lament empowers. Lament gives hope because embedded in the lament is an appeal that arises out of trust in the God whose love is forever. Lament is the mode by which hope is reborn.”<sup>30</sup> For after Holy Saturday is Sunday.

<sup>27</sup> Raymond R. Roberts, “Lamentations 3,” *Int* 67 (April 2013): 196.

<sup>28</sup> Catherine Cavazos Renken, “Lamentations 1,” *Int* 67 (April 2013): 194.

<sup>29</sup> Lance Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 124.

<sup>30</sup> Hicks, 79.