

I Cry Aloud to God: **A Service of Lament and Hope** **in the Face of the Climate Crisis**

Bible Study Series on Psalm 77



United
Women
in Faith

I Cry Aloud to God: Lament and Hope in the Face of the Climate Crisis,
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United Women in Faith Mission

United Women in Faith seeks to connect and nurture women through Christian spiritual formation, leadership development, creative fellowship, and education so that they can inspire, influence, and impact local and global communities.

Vision

Turning faith, hope, and love into action on behalf of women, children, and youth around the world.



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Acknowledgements

CONTRIBUTORS:

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- **Video Testimonies:** Cindy Saufferer, Cynthia Taylor, Ilka Vega, Elizabeth Chun Hye Lee
- **Musician:** Latifah Alattas

RESOURCES:

Creation Justice Ministries Earth Day Resources

Church Anew blog

“Abandoned! A Pastoral Word from Walter Brueggemann”

Contents

As a collaborative effort between the Climate Justice and Spiritual Growth Offices, we offer this Service of Lament and Hope as a resource to be used throughout the organization and beyond. Included in this kit are:

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I Cry Aloud to God: A Service of Lament and Hope in the Face of the Climate Crisis

Introduction

This worship service was created in collaboration between the Climate Justice and Spiritual Growth Offices of United Women in Faith for Earth Day 2022. It was written for people involved in the Just Energy for All work. It was created out of the spiritual need to ask questions and reflect on how our faith supports us in our commitment to doing the hard and tiring work of seeking climate justice

This service was written for a virtual setting. Portions can be adjusted or removed for in-person services. In its entirety, the service is approximately 90 minutes long.

Multimedia files found in this kit include a PowerPoint presentation, video testimonies, and music videos. This leader's script was written with those in mind. The PowerPoint can be used as a guide to move the service along as it switches to the next slide. You can also review and add any additional transition lines to the script, as you see fit. You are also welcome to invite other individuals to offer the reflections or music for your service. If you do so, be sure to review the script and PowerPoint with them in mind to ensure clarity and consistency.

Preparation:

1. Review the Land and Indigenous People's Recognition Guide and prepare an appropriate recognition for your service. You could invite someone to research new information or talk about a commitment to an act of repentance and repairing harm in this time.
2. Select and confirm who will be reading each part of the service, as well as people offering testimony and musicians, if needed.
3. Test audio and visual of the device of everyone speaking prior to the service. Test that your PowerPoint and video sharing is working, as well.

Materials (Virtual or In-Person Adaptations):

- Device with audio/visual capability for sharing PowerPoint and/or testimony and music videos
- Pen and paper for individual reflection
- Gathering songs (playlist or live music)

When preparing for your service, be mindful of accessibility and ensuring that video and other presentation materials will be both large and loud enough for all to participate.

Roles:

- Worship leader(s)
- Land and Indigenous People's Recognition
- Scripture reader(s)
- Technology host

Land and Indigenous People's Recognition Guide:

Biblical teaching acknowledges the divinity present in connection with creation and those living in it. In line with our Purpose as United Women in Faith, we acknowledge that we occupy lands that have been inhabited by Indigenous people for thousands of years before us, and were stolen by our predecessors. In seeking to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ, we uplift and acknowledge the historical and ongoing systems that have caused the oppression and suffering of the land, as well the Indigenous people who have long called the land where we live home.

Setting aside time for a land and Indigenous people's recognition can be a powerful way of showing respect and honoring Indigenous people, especially as an entry point to other Acts of Repentance (Social Principals).¹ A land and Indigenous people's recognition can be verbal or visual, with the goal of uplifting the truth while hopefully accompanying larger efforts to develop relationships and correct harm done. We have moved away from asking a local Native American to welcome us to the land taken from their ancestors to a more appropriate land recognition, which acknowledges the violent dynamics under which the land was taken and the call on settlers to larger acts of repentance that go beyond building relationships to engaging in restoration in substantial and material ways.²

In preparation for creating a land and Indigenous people's recognition, start with prayer. Ask God for guidance and wisdom. This guide may help you create your statement: **[nativegov.org/news/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment](https://www.nativegov.org/news/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment)**. To find local information, you can visit **[native-land.ca](https://www.native-land.ca)** to learn about the land that you are on. The website provides various resources to deepen your education. You can look up:

- People who were indigenous to your area and people who are there now.
- History of the Indigenous peoples on this land and related displacement treaties and where they are today.
- Names of living Indigenous people from the communities.
- Indigenous place names and language.
- Correct pronunciation of the names of individual people, places, and tribes or nations being acknowledged.

By learning and uplifting the history and ongoing state of the Indigenous peoples and land in our locality, we acknowledge that what has happened to Indigenous peoples in the Americas was in direct contradiction to the will of God. This history includes genocide,

dispossession of land, murder of Native people, abuse of children, and additional atrocities involved with settler colonialism.³ For current settlers, there is a mandate to reflect on what repentance and healing could look like. Land and Indigenous people's recognition should be part of intentional action to support and uplift Indigenous communities. This could include work on reparations, giving land back, decolonization, equity, respecting Native sovereignty, or other actions that can yield material benefits and spiritual healing for Native communities.⁴

Possible format for your land and Indigenous people's recognition:

I. Introduction – Why is this important?

Example: The land is a source of deep spirituality and connection with the divine. Throughout much of the Bible we hear stories and metaphors written in reference to the land or nature, because much of the community existed in agrarian contexts. People were in touch with the land.

In the North American context, after centuries of settler colonialism, genocide, slavery, and removal from the land – we acknowledge that historical and ongoing systems of oppression continue to harm and desecrate the land we occupy and continue to oppress the Indigenous people who have lived in connection with this land for thousands of years. We name the people who are indigenous to this land, as part of an effort to stop the erasure of their existence and to repent for this history.

II. Why is it important to you?

III. Name the land and Indigenous tribe(s). Add details about the history of why (if) they no longer reside there.

IV. Close in prayer

Example: Eternal God, we lift up the lands on which we reside and the Indigenous peoples who were here before us. May we honor and remember their history in ongoing ways. We commit ourselves to action towards justice and reparations for the harm that has been done and actively seek to decolonize our spiritual practices, minds, and spaces of power. Amen.

Endnotes

1. "Trail of Repentance and Healing," 3324, *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church*—2016. umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/trail-of-repentance-and-healing-3324.
2. "The goal of settler-colonialization is the removal and erasure of Indigenous peoples in order to take the land for use by settlers in perpetuity. ... Historically, the settler, colonial agenda involved committing genocide by murdering Indigenous peoples... That agenda also meant stealing land through treaties that were later broken or ignored ..." ("What is Settler Colonialism?" *Learning for Justice Magazine*, accessed October 7, 2022, learningforjustice.org/magazine/what-is-settlercolonialism/.)
3. Ibid.
4. "Native People and The United Methodist Church," *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church*—2016. umc.org/en/content/book-of-resolutions-native-people-and-the-united-methodist-church.

Worship Service

Gathering

< PPT Slide 1-2 >

(Italics - not to be read outloud)

Prepare a playlist or a number of gathering songs to set the tone and welcome people to the space as they arrive. Display the PowerPoint presentation, as appropriate. Offer the direction to have pen and paper available for personal reflection throughout the service.

Invocation and Welcome (2 minutes)

<PPT Slide 3>

Worship Leader: Welcome everyone. We are gathered to put our hearts and minds on the earth and the climate crisis that we face today.

Reports from the scientific and environmental justice communities continue to confirm that climate change impacts are escalating faster than earlier predictions. Our earth is warming at a faster than expected rate, pollution is still high, and global commitments to reduce carbon emissions are persistently weak. Climate-related natural disasters such as wildfires, inland floods, heatwaves, droughts, and poor air quality have wreaked havoc on communities worldwide. Those already marginalized in society are disproportionately impacted. The consequences for these communities are magnified because they have fewer political and economic resources to recover from such disasters.

Many of you have been sounding the alarm; many of you have been working in your local, state, and federal contexts. I am sure that there might be moments, days, or even months, where you might have felt like things will not change quickly enough or systemically and our “solutions” will still be at the cost of others. That is why we have this space today. You are invited to bring your authentic self to this space to be in community to both lament and claim hope.

Opening Prayer (1 minute)

<PPT Slide 4>

Worship Leader: Let us pray.

God of Life, we pray to you today with the same wind in our lungs that drives ocean currents, erodes rock, and disperses seeds.

Sustaining God, we pray to you today with feet grounded on the same earth that nourishes forests and crops, filters water, and helps regulate the planet's temperature.

God of Hope, we pray to you with tears made from the same water that grows our plants, houses our ocean life, and provides nutrients to sustain our lives.

God of Love, we ask you to draw near that we may find space for our sorrow, solidarity in our community, and hope for the work to be done.

Amen.

Land and Indigenous People's Recognition (3 minutes)

<PPT Slide 5>

Use the Land and Indigenous People's Recognition Guide to write a recognition that is unique to your location and context.

Scriptural Grounding (1 minute)

<PPT Slide 6>

Worship Leader: Today we are going to walk through Psalm 77. The work for climate justice often feels like too little is happening too late. In recognition of Earth Day this year, we will follow Psalm 77 through four movements. In these movements you will hear the psalmist cry out to God in lament, seek God with questions, remember the redemptive acts of God and of communities of faith, and dare to hope through our faith in the resurrection. At each stage, you will hear from a different United Women in Faith leader in the climate justice work sharing how they connect with the movements in the text.

The word *selah* is used throughout Psalm 77. It is a Hebrew word indicating a pause; we are to stop and listen. After each story, you are invited to write down or sketch what resonates with you about a practice of each lamenting, questioning, remembering, and hoping, and we will be able to share with one another in our final breakout group.

Now, let us welcome musical artist Latifah Alattas, musician for our last Changemakers Soul Care Retreat, to open us in song.

Song (5 minutes)

<PPT Slide 7>

"Daughter of Zion / Wake Up, Jesus" sung by Latifah Alttas (video file)

LAMENTING

Scripture Reading: Psalm 77:1-3 (1 minute)

<PPT Slide 8>

Our Scripture today is from Psalm 77.

I cry aloud to God,
aloud to God, that [God] may hear me.
In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord;
in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;
my soul refuses to be comforted.
I think of God, and I moan;
I meditate, and my spirit faints. *Selah*

Video Testimony (5 minutes)

<PPT Slides 9-10>

Worship Leader: Cindy Saufferer is the United Women in Faith Minnesota Conference president, former secretary to the board of directors, and a deaconess candidate. (See: bit.ly/CryAloudSaufferer.)

Play video testimony.

Selah (1 minute)

<PPT Slide 11>

Worship Leader: Selah. Let us pause for a moment to reflect.

Word Cloud Reflection (3 minutes)

<PPT Slide 12>

*To set up the word cloud, go to **mentimeter.com**. Once you create a free account, you can create a “New Presentation,” select “Word Cloud” under Slide Type, and add the question “What are you lamenting?” For the worship service, click “Share” in the top right corner, and then “Copy link” next to the Voting Link. Paste link in the chat for participants to submit their words.*

Worship Leader: As you finish up your time of reflection, we are going to create a word cloud together composed of answers to the question, “What are you lamenting?”

There is a link in the chat. Click this link, and it will take you to a page where you can enter words that answer what you are lamenting.

Let us take a few minutes to gather the words of lament that are on our hearts.

(As words come in, feel free to read them aloud.)

With these words and others on our hearts, we cry out to God.

We cry out to God.

QUESTIONING

Scripture Reading: Psalm 77:4–10 (1 minute)

<PPT Slides 13–14>

Our Scripture continues in Psalm 77:

You keep my eyelids from closing;
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.
I consider the days of old,
and remember the years of long ago.
I commune with my heart in the night;
I meditate and search my spirit:
“Will the Lord spurn forever,
and never again be favorable?
Has his steadfast love ceased forever?
Are his promises at an end for all time?
Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has he in anger shut up his compassion?” *Selah*
And I say, “It is my grief
that the right hand of the Most High has changed.”

Video Testimony (5 minutes)

<PPT Slides 15–16>

Worship Leader: Ika Vega will speak on questioning. Ika Vega is originally from the Texas/Mexico borderlands. She is the executive for Economic and Environmental Justice with United Women in Faith and former member of the Charter for Racial Justice support team. (See: bit.ly/CryAloudVega.)

Play video testimony.

Selah (1 minute)

<PPT Slide 17>

Worship Leader: Selah. Let us pause for a moment to reflect.

Prayers of the People (2 minutes)

<PPT Slides 18–20>

Leader: For all those around the world who have lost their homes, livelihoods, or communities to the climate crisis.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: For our nonhuman siblings whose habitats are destroyed by the effects of greed and accumulation.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: For decision-makers, that their choices might create a more beautiful, whole, resilient world.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

Leader: For our own church, that we might be bearers of hope and resilience in our community, a place of refuge in the midst of crisis and disaster.

People: Lord, hear our prayer.

All: Amen.

REMEMBERING

Scripture Reading: Psalm 77:11–15 (1 minute)

<PPT Slide 21>

I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD;
I will remember your wonders of old.
I will meditate on all your work,
and muse on your mighty deeds.
Your way, O God, is holy.
What god is so great as our God?
You are the God who works wonders;
you have displayed your might among the peoples.
With your strong arm you redeemed your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah*

Video Testimony (5 minutes)

<PPT Slide 22–23>

Worship Leader: Cynthia Taylor will speak on remembering. Cynthia Taylor, a United Women in Faith member, is a lay leader at Mount Olive United Methodist Church in Randallstown, Maryland, and a member of the Baltimore-Washington Conference Creation Care Team. (See: bit.ly/CryAloudTaylor.)

Play video testimony.

Selah (1 minute)

<PPT Slide 24>

Worship Leader: Selah. Let us pause for a moment to reflect.

Discussion Breakout Rooms (15 minutes)

<PPT Slide 25>

Worship Leader: We will now move into a time of sharing in breakout rooms. We'll be in groups of 3-4 sharing around when you have felt the Spirit of God in the movement for justice, and how is the Spirit calling you now to move forward in the work for climate justice?

We'll have about 8 minutes to discuss, so make sure everyone who wants to share gets a chance.

Set up breakout rooms for online discussion with three to four people in each room. Copy the questions below and place in the chat:

- Share about when you have felt the Spirit of God in the movement for justice.
- How is the Spirit calling you now to move forward in the work for climate justice?

Large Group Discussion (8 mins)

Invite two to three volunteers to share highlights from their discussions.

HOPING

Scripture Reading: Psalm 77:16–20 (1 minute)

<PPT Slides 26–27>

When the waters saw you, O God,
when the waters saw you, they were afraid;
the very deep trembled.
The clouds poured out water;
the skies thundered;
your arrows flashed on every side.
The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind;
your lightnings lit up the world;
the earth trembled and shook.
Your way was through the sea,
your path, through the mighty waters;
yet your footprints were unseen.
You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Video Testimony (5 minutes)

<PPT Slides 28–29>

Elizabeth Chun Hye Lee is the director for Mobilization and Advocacy at United Women in Faith. Previously, she was the executive for Economic and Environmental Justice and Climate Justice lead. (See: bit.ly/CryAloudLee.)

Play video testimony.

Selah (1 minute)

<PPT Slide 30>

Worship Leader: Selah. Let us pause for a moment to reflect.

Discussion (15 minutes)

<PPT Slide 31>

Set up breakout rooms for online discussion with three to four people in each room.

Worship Leader: At this point, we have gone through a practice of lamenting, questioning, remembering, and hoping. We know that this cycle is ongoing, and not linear, as we continue to navigate the waves of fighting for climate justice. Let us return now to our small groups, to share with one another the pieces we have written down—what resonates with us in practicing, returning to, ritualizing lament, questioning, remembering, and hope.

Copy and paste the following prompt into the chat:

What resonates with you in practicing lament, questioning, remembering, and hope?

<Turn off PPT>

Open breakout rooms.

FOR EVERY PRAISE THERE IS A LAMENT (5 MINUTES)

Worship Leader: I hope you had wonderful conversations around these practices of lament, questioning, remembering, and hope. As taught by our text today, these actions are all part of—but not the whole—story. As we seek faithful practice through challenging times, we are equipped together to continue the fight.

Renowned Old Testament scholar and theologian Walter Brueggemann wrote about times of abandonment in his column published in *Church Anew*. In it he states that in seasons of abandonment people of faith tell sustaining stories, they sing defiant songs, they pray without ceasing, and they perform story, song, and prayer.

These acts, he elaborates, “do not permit faithful people to withdraw into a closed or simplistic sense of ‘I-Thou’ or ‘me and Jesus’ but rather push them, through their faith to practice neighborly love – to show kindness and mercy to one another, to not oppress the widow, orphan, immigrant, or poor. These are not remarkable acts, but basic tenets of the faith.”

He writes:

<Resume PPT with Slide 32>

Such actions *refuse despair*, because they constitute an act of both remembering and hoping. At the same time these disciplines *refuse denial* because they look circumstance full in the face. For every praise there is a lament. For every thanks there is voiced need. For every act of neighbor, there is a sense of the legitimacy of self. By such resolved practices faithful people are not overwhelmed by circumstance. They rather redefine circumstance as a venue for a chance to live differently by fidelity that yields energy, courage, and even joy.

For every act of praise, there is a lament. For every loss, there is a hand to hold. For every step closer to justice, there is rest to be had. For every act of solidarity with community, there is a more intimate relationship with Jesus.

This is the calling of Christ—not to walk up a ladder of better and better, but to walk with the work wherever it needs to be done. This is the practice of faith—to embrace lament, to hold on to hope, to refuse despair, and refuse denial.

Litany

<PPT Slides 33–40>

Worship Leader: So as advocates, as activists, as changemakers choosing to carry the burden of seeking climate justice and repentance for our world—we have come together today to practice lament, practice questioning, practice remembering, and practice hoping. Let us join now in a litany together:

Lift one hand and extend your palm towards the screen, towards the community gathered here and say:

As children of God, we refuse despair.
There is hope in the resurrection;
There is strength in our community;
There is faith in the unknown.

Raise your other hand and say:

As followers of Jesus, we refuse denial.
We see the state of climate change;
We acknowledge the destruction that has been going on for too long.
Our work is important.

We offer this blessing to our community, to our work, to ourselves, that we may be steadfast in our dedication to care for one another and the earth. As people of the body of Christ, we are bound together in the Christian commitment to seek healthy, abundant life for all on and of the earth, to dismantle systems that oppress people and the earth, and to choose neighborly love in times of joy and in times of struggle. Amen.

Word Cloud (2 minutes)

<PPT Slide 41>

*Set-up: Go to **mentimeter.com**. Once you create a free account, you can create a "New Presentation," select "Word Cloud" under Slide Type, and add the below question. For the worship service, click "Share" in the top right corner, and then "Copy link" next to the Voting Link. Paste link in the chat for participants to submit their words.*

As we close today, we are going to create one more word cloud together. Follow the link in the chat to submit words that answer the question, what is your vision for climate justice?

Closing Song (4 minutes)

<PPT Slide 42>

"Your Labor Is Not in Vain" sung by Latifah Alattas

<PPT Slides 43–44>