

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable to you O God, my strength and my joy... Amen.

To each of you here, and to each of you watching online, thank you for being here on this day.

As tonight we journey along our Lenten path, a time to pause, and to embrace the fleetingness of our days...

And to invite us into the fleetingness we heard about a unique day during the Israelites journey through the wilderness, when they thought their own time was fleeting away into nothingness, because they feared they would perish from lack of water.

A day when the Israelites dared to ask a question that might be frowned upon in certain churches and communities of faith...

Is the Lord among us, or not?

A question that is real, honest, and raw.

A question that to me, makes sense, because of their circumstances...

They were thirsty. And there was no water anywhere to be found. Which brought about anger and lament, through which they questioned God's very presence.

And in society today, lamenting is usually thought of as an ancient practice.

If you are not familiar with lamenting or lamentation, it is a prayer that expresses sorrow, anger, pain, or confusion. Which in some cases, brings the lamenter to question God's very presence...

Now this may seem like a strange topic to talk about at church... But if you read through Scripture, those moments are there... Even all the way into the New Testament where Christ himself cries out in distress saying, "my God my God, why have you forsaken me?"

As prayers of lament can provide relief. Because prayers of lament require one to name exactly how they are feeling and to notice what is going on inside of them.

And through the act of naming things and being honest about things, one can find relief. Even if it is rooted in anger, grief, or sorrow.

For example, when I was a chaplain and in clinical pastoral education in seminary, my instructor gave me some homework one weekend.

He asked me to watch the movie *Inside Out*. If you have not seen the movie, it is an animated film that shines light on our emotions, by bringing our emotions to life as animated characters, highlighting throughout the film what takes place inside of us.

For example, some of animated characters that live inside the main character are joy, sadness, fear, disgust, and anger.

And without giving away too many spoilers, the movie highlights the importance of embracing all your emotions, as it is only when you embrace your true authentic self that real growth can happen.

Which goes hand and hand in the lamenting process and in those spaces when we too dare to question... Is God with us?

Because your relationship with God is as intimate as your relationship with yourself and with your emotions.

And when you take the time to be honest, to acknowledge your reality and your emotions, you might just discover a truth that God has been wanting to share with you. And sometimes if the moment is just right, you might even find a blessing in the most unusual of spaces.

In places unexpected, and in places where impossibility is turned on its head.

Like water springing forth from a rock.

Because even in the midst of Israel's anger, of lamenting, of questioning, and when they started to lose faith...

They discovered in a most unexpected way that God is always faithful.

They discovered that God's love is deeper than anything they could ever imagine.

Because God provided for them in an unexpected way.

In fact, God provides in ways that go beyond the unexpected... God provides in ways that question the very laws of physics and reality.

Which, if you think about it, is what God is all about...

For example, out of nothingness God created everything, the vastness of the cosmos and all of life.

God brought forth water from a rock.

God's own son became flesh and dwelled among us.

So that the Spirit of God can dwell in each one of you...

And the most unexpected of all... In death, Christ created everlasting life.

And I have heard from many other people about the times that God has provided for them in unexpected ways...

And when you are on the recipient end of those unexpected moments of love, it is a beautiful and amazing thing.

But when you are not on the recipient end, and when you are the one crying out in pain or frustration... Those are the days that are hard.

And so, God provides us with this passage from Exodus when the Israelites encountered a rock in the wild...

Not to show that God is always going to provide exactly what we want in some miraculous way that defies nature.

Instead this story is meant to give us hope. As this story is an example of God's faithful presence. Giving us an image to cling onto when life is hard.

As this story unveils that even through the tumult and the strife, that God is there...

Inviting you to cry out in your own laments, in the times you are angry, sad, or frustrated...

Because when you cry out you are not alone. Christ meets you there on the cross in his own lament.

In that way Christ becomes the rock that you can always cling to...

Christ becomes your rock in the wild.

Revealing a most glorious truth... That even though your days are fleeting, your days don't float away into nothingness... They flow into Christ.

Until your final day when you make your way to the Eternal Waters of Christ. Where you will join all who have gone before. Uniting with them in an endless song that flows only from God.

But, until then, you have Christ, your rock to cling to. A rock that does more than any rock should.

As this rock provides you both a foundation and God's living water.

And so, it is my prayer tonight, that you can cling to this hope. So that no storm will shake your inmost calm while to that rock you are clinging.

And along your path, may you also find unexpected moments of God's joy, love, and hope flowing from the ever-springing fountain found only in Christ... Amen.