

Dear Friends,

Sunday's topic in our series - *Tell the truth and learn to lament* – was a difficult, but significant one.

And it is one which Christian people sometimes try to ignore.

In the book, *Field Notes for the Wilderness*, Sarah Bessey refers to 'spiritual bypassing', a phrase coined by psychologist John Selwood in 1984, and defined as, "*the tendency to try to avoid or prematurely transcend basic human needs, feelings and developmental tasks.*"

As Bessey says about her own experience of ignoring the trauma of her son's birth, "*Like any former evangelical overachiever, I wanted my gold star, my positive and encouraging testimony. So, I decided to be fine about the experience. Just fine. Completely over it, able to laugh about it, no big deal.*"

A few years ago, when I preached on lament, I mentioned the death of my cousin, Alison, while we were both at university.

She was killed, driving into class one morning, in a car accident, and at her funeral, speaker after speaker reframed her death as a victory; that Alison was now with God, that this was part of God's plan, a witness to all of us to know Jesus as our Saviour too. The minister even issued an alter call, "*If you want to see Alison again, come and speak to me now at the left-hand exit. Otherwise, use the right.*"

Looking back, I can understand why people said what they said. They desperately wanted to offer her parents, her family, some consolation, some rationale for what had happened.

But the speaker who stood out to me was Alison's best friend who simply listed all the things she and Alison had hoped to do together – talk about their boyfriends, get engaged, be bridesmaids at each other's weddings, get jobs, have children – and said how terribly sad she was that none of this would happen now.

She was the one, who, for me, voiced a lament for Alison, who honestly acknowledged the enormity of our loss.

Responding to grief and loss, honestly and faithfully, is difficult work. But it is the work of people who seek wholeness and health. And it is the real work of faith.

Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann writes, "*[Lament – rather than being an act of unfaith] is an act of bold faith....because it insists that the world must be experienced as it really is and not in some pretended way.*" But taking the path, wrestling with this incoherence, waiting in the long dark nights of this experience, leads to a transformed faith; a new trust in God who, "*is present in, participating in and attentive to the darkness, weakness and displacement of life.*" A God "*of sorrows and acquainted with grief.*" A God of faithfulness and love.

Be gentle with yourselves as you tell the truth, and as you lament, and know that God is with you.

Grace and peace,

Belinda

PS This Sunday is our 96th Church Anniversary (and our February Quarterly Church Meeting). Between those two things there is morning tea – so please, if you are able, bring a plate to share and stay to celebrate 96 years – and then stay to talk about the future! (I've just been to see Conclave, and I loved the quote, "The church is not the tradition, not the past. The church is what we do next.")