

*No Regrets, No Laments*

*For the children:*

How many of you go to school?

Who was your teacher last year?

Will you have the same teacher next year?

You might see your old teacher, but you'll have a new one, won't you?

Well, after today, you'll be getting a new pastor. I won't be here anymore. You might see me if I come to visit, but there will be someone else here. And she will do things differently than I do. She'll probably be better at some things than I am, too.

And here's what I want you to do when you meet her. Introduce yourself. Tell the new pastor your name and welcome her to Hope Church. If you want, you can ask her what to call her. Some pastors like to be called "pastor," some prefer "Mrs." I don't know what she wants to be called, but you can ask and she'll tell you and you will be off to a great start!

And when you see me again, you don't need to call me pastor anymore. You don't even need to call me Reverend Randy. I'll simply be Randy.

I'm going to miss you, but I know you'll do fine!

Let's pray:

*God of love, thank you for teachers and pastors and leaders. When we get new pastors and new teachers, help us help them be the best they can be. Amen.*

After Saul's death, when David had returned from defeating the Amalekites, he stayed in Ziklag two days. Then David sang this funeral song for Saul and his son Jonathan. David ordered everyone in Judah to learn the Song of the Bow. (In fact, it is written in the scroll from Jashar.)

*Oh, no, Israel! Your prince lies dead on your heights.*

*Look how the mighty warriors have fallen!*

*Don't talk about it in Gath;*

*don't bring news of it to Ashkelon's streets,*

*or else the Philistines' daughters will rejoice;*

*the daughters of the uncircumcised will celebrate.*

*You hills of Gilboa!*

*Let there be no dew or rain on you,*

*and no fields yielding grain offerings.*

*Because it was there that the mighty warrior's shield was defiled—*

*the shield of Saul!—never again anointed with oil.*

*Jonathan's bow never wavered from the blood of the slain,*

*from the gore of the warriors.*

*Never did Saul's sword return empty.*

*Saul and Jonathan! So well loved, so dearly cherished!*

*In their lives and in their deaths they were never separated.  
They were faster than eagles,  
stronger than lions!  
Daughters of Israel, weep over Saul!  
He dressed you in crimson with jewels;  
he decorated your clothes with gold jewelry.  
Look how the mighty warriors have fallen in the midst of battle!  
Jonathan lies dead on your heights.  
I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan!  
You were so dear to me!  
Your love was more amazing to me than the love of women.  
Look how the mighty warriors have fallen!  
Look how the weapons of war have been destroyed!*

2 Sam. 1:1, 17-27 (C.E.B.)

King Saul was God's anointed King, the first Messiah. And his son, Jonathon was assumed to be the immediate heir to the throne. Unbeknownst to most of Israel, however, God had already chosen David to replace Saul, leaving Jonathon out of the line of succession. We read about David's anointing two weeks ago (1 Sam. 16:13). Today's text takes place several years after that event. Finally, it seems, David will ascend to the throne.

But it isn't how David wanted it to go down.

In between David's anointing and Saul's death, Saul began to see David as his enemy because he was a threat to the throne. Saul's son, Jonathon, on the other hand, may easily be referred to as David's best friend (2 Sam. 1:26).

And then in battle, both Saul and Jonathon lose their lives and the nation is suddenly without a leader. Israel's first King is dead – and there is a potential crisis in leadership because his son is also dead. Our text is David's response to the news of their deaths; it is his "lament" over their deaths – a lament for both his enemy Saul, and his friend Jonathon – who also happen to be his father-in-law and brother-in-law.

It clearly is not how David envisioned the story unfolding.

Although, I have often wondered how David would have liked it to come about. What if, for example, Jonathon had survived the battle. Would David become his most valued advisor? Or would Jonathon have surrendered the crown to David?

I like to think that Jonathon would have stepped aside, perhaps becoming a key advisor to David as the new King, lending his name and authority to help make a smoother transition to a new era.

Of course, we'll never know if that would have been how Jonathon reacted because that's not how it happened.

But it has made me reflect on the many times I have left a congregation in the hands of another pastor. I always do what I can to help that next pastor be successful – because I care about the people I'm leaving. And that means I need to make room for the new pastor to become the pastor.

It has never been easy, but it's always been important.

When I first realized this was the lectionary text for my last Sunday here, I thought I'd talk about the importance of lamenting. But then I thought, no! My star word for this year is *celebration*. Today is not a day to lament; it is a day to celebrate and to give thanks.

Now, we all know a lament shouldn't be a pity party; but it's hard to keep from going there. Today is not a day to be saying "woe is me" because things haven't gone our way. A true lament is an honest evaluation of the world lifted up before God – with a sense of hope about what God can do. One scholar says it this way:

Lament is not ecclesial whining. Lament is not about religious people gathering to complain about how bad things are or gathering to whine about how much things have changed. Lament is not about the loss of the good old days. [Rather] lament is communal sorrow about the brokenness of life. Lament is communal protest about the presence of evil.<sup>1</sup>

"Lament is communal sorrow about the brokenness of life. Lament is communal protest about the presence of evil."

I don't think today's emotions fit that definition of a lament. My departure is not about the brokenness of life, nor is it about the presence of evil. My arrival may have been, but not my departure.

That is not to say laments are never appropriate. Laments have their place; we know that because so many of the Psalms are laments. There's a whole book in the bible called Lamentations. They have their place.

A lament names events caused by evil and acknowledges the sadness. A lament offers the situation to God in the form of a prayer.

Too often, I'm afraid, we try to avoid the sadness of events rather than lamenting them. We're very much like the little girl in the 2015 movie *Inside Out* (the first movie). I don't know how many of you saw that movie – or remember it if you did. It was the story of Riley's emotions as she is uprooted and tries to navigate the changes created by the move. Different emotions take charge, but they all try to avoid Sadness, making matters worse. When they finally welcome Sadness, Riley's distress is resolved.

Too often, we're like Riley. We don't want to experience sadness.

- We hear about the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, for example, and wring our hands rather than lament. We get angry rather than allow ourselves to experience the sadness of grief.
- Or we hear the stories of unhoused people and wring our hands rather than lament. We might find ways to show compassion, but we try to keep a stiff upper lip as we do so.
- We encounter the broken mental health system and wring our hands rather than joining in a corporate lament.

When we truly lament, however, we acknowledge the evil. We acknowledge the sadness. We name our grief. And we ask God to help us see a way through that can be transformative.

So, yes, there are times when a lament is the right response, just like it was for David when he learns of Saul's death. But today is not a day for lamenting.

There is certainly sadness as my tenure here comes to a close. There is also a profound sense of gratitude. And while the prayers of lament might help us give voice to the grief we are feeling, I am also convinced there is no reason for laments – and no regrets.

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, p. 1

There is sadness. There is grief.  
And there is celebration and thanksgiving.

The story of David has been unfolding over time, and of course we could see the end of Saul's reign coming for quite a while. In the same way, we could see this day coming in the life of Hope Mennonite Church. It is not a surprise.

I had hoped we would have a settled pastor before I left. And I wish I could stay longer, but as I've said at other times, it is time for me to step aside. My time here is complete.

In the words of Paul, I believe I have done my best, I have kept the faith, and it is time for me to step aside (2 Tim. 4:7). In just a few minutes, we will release one another from our responsibilities to each other.

I am glad I was here. I am glad I was available when your time of crisis arrived. I am glad we shared this time together, and I leave with no regrets.

David begins his reign with a few clouds looming over him, clouds that will eventually dissipate. In the story of Hope Mennonite Church, I know of no looming clouds; I only see skies of blue. There are no laments and no regrets.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

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#### Selected Bibliography

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