# How Long Will We Have To Cry? A Service of Lament for anti-Black Racism

*This is a service of lament. The tone may be challenging; please feel free to use the pieces that are appropriate for your context. You may also wish beforehand to talk to people in your community who are particularly affected by anti-Black racism and violence.*

*Preparation:* For the Learning Together segment, prepare a large sheet of paper (or if possible of fabric cut into a heart) with the words “When one member suffers all suffer”). If using fabric, you may want to make several slits with the grain of the fabric so it’s easier to tear.

## Call to worship

*[If possible, have the response sung or hummed by the choir; also consider underscoring the scripture reading with this tune. The scripture can be read from another voice.]*

Friends, the God of hope is calling,

Offering refreshment to those who are weary and heavy laden.

*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.* (Matthew 11:28)

*[Moment of Silence]*

**Sung Response hummed:** (the last line of VU 383 “Come, O Holy Spirit, Come”)

Friends, the God of peace is calling,

Offering tender words of comfort to those in distress.

*Come children*, *how often I have longed to gather you together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.* (Matthew 23:37, alt.)

*[Moment of Silence]*

**Sung Response hummed:** (the last line of VU 383)

Friends, the God of love is calling,

Offering friendship and communion to those who feel alone.

*Come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come buy and eat without money and without cost.* (Isaiah 55:1, alt.)

*[Moment of Silence]*

**Sung Response hummed:** (the last line of VU 383)

Friends, come, God is calling us to worship.

It is an offer too irresistible to refuse.

HymnVU 383 “Come, O Holy Spirit, Come”

Opening Prayer (based on A Song of Faith)

Today in our worship,

we lament anti-Black racism and violence in North America.

We pray that the Spirit will reorient us:

 challenging us to live by grace rather than entitlement;

 expecting us to be a blessing to the earth.

We pray that by acknowledging our brokenness, we will be closer to becoming a church where the good news is lived out:

 faith nurtured and hearts comforted,

 gifts shared for the good of all,

 resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize,

 fierce love in the face of violence,

 human dignity defended,

 members of a community held and inspired by God.

Through our tears, may we witness to your love and grace. Amen.

Learning Together: What Is Lamentation?

Lamenting is a certain way of expressing sadness or sorrow. *(Brainstorm some ways people lament today, e.g., wearing black, making memorials, having wakes, song, poetry, dance.)* Lamentations give us an opportunity to be honest and bold about our raw emotions. We can express our deepest pain to God through lament. It is an honest prayer of pain, grief, and sorrow.

In sharing our laments, we join a rich Christian history of lamentations.

We join with the Psalmist who wept,

and also with Jeremiah,

with Hannah,

with Mary and Martha,

and with Jesus.

An old form of lament in the time of the prophets was tearing garments. When we feel torn apart, it can feel very comforting to tear something. Today we are invited to lament with people who are discriminated against, treated differently, and hurt because of the colour of their skin.

We are going to listen to a lament, and while we are listening to it, I am going to ask you to tear a piece of fabric from this cloth and reflect on the words of Paul: “when one member suffers all suffer with them,” that is, if one of us is torn up by racism, we are all torn.

*[Bring out the large sheet of paper or fabric that with the words “When one member suffer all suffer” on it. Invite children to rip off a piece.]*

***Options for music:***

* A choir anthem
* The following YouTube video of Sam Cooke’s “A Change Is Gonna Come”: <https://youtu.be/wEBlaMOmKV4>
* A Taize style piece

*[Remain in silence until everyone has a strip.]*

## Prayer with Children

*[Invite people to hold their strips, or if they wish, to tie them around their wrists]*

God,

with these ripped pieces of fabric,

we name that we are broken, not yet whole.

We ask for your help

in mending our torn heart back together,

with the unbreakable bond of your love. Amen

Hymn: MV 66 “Senzeni Na?”

*[Children leave for church school]*

## Prayer of Lamentation

In many Black traditions, “hush” is a word of comfort, not a word of silencing. It is what a loving parent might say to console a child who has fallen and hurt themselves; it is a word of comfort, reassurance, and love often used when someone is acutely experiencing pain, grief, or suffering. Today, as we celebrate Black History Month, we pause to lament and sing words of comfort to those who are deeply feeling the pain of racism and anti-Black violence…

**Sung refrain:** MV 167 “Hush! Hush!”

God, we lament a world where

the quality of a child’s life can still be accurately predicted by the colour of their skin;

Black and Brown skin tones are perceived as weapons;

White supremacy goes unchallenged;

discrimination is expected and planned for; and

racism is known to be woven into the fabric of society.

Lord, what shall we do?

**Sung refrain:** MV 167 “Hush! Hush!”

*[silence]*

God, we remember our children who have inherited racism overtly through the teaching of hate, and covertly through the lived experience of prejudice. We lament that children have the unfair burden to unlearn the lessons of discrimination that they have been taught. We lament that children are fighting against low expectations placed on them by a biased society. And we lament the children who are angry when chastised for reflecting back the hateful language they have been taught.

Lord, what shall we do?

**Sung refrain:** MV 167 “Hush! Hush!”

*[silence]*

God, we remember our parents and guardians who have experienced friends, loved ones, and children dying from the physical and emotional wounds of anti-Black violence and who have worked thanklessly and prophetically for equality. We lament the protectors who feel helplessly unable to shield their loved ones from harm. We lament that our protestors are tired yet still persevere without signs of rest or progress. We lament that there are people who live in fear of hateful violence because of what they look like.

Lord, what shall we do?

**Sung refrain:** MV 167 “Hush! Hush!”

*[silence]*

God, we remember our elders, who created paths where there were none and sacrificed so that other generations could live in peace and freedom. We lament that they are being forced to relive the violence of racism in both different and familiar forms. We lament that they are not able to live with the peace and dignity that they fought for. We lament that they are forced to watch their children suffer. We lament the elders who are tired, weary, and worn, with no signs of rest.

Lord, what shall we do?

**Sung refrain:** MV 167 “Hush! Hush!”

*[silence]*

God, we remember our Canadian ancestors, who despite great opposition and persecution thrived to become role models. We remember Lincoln Alexander, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Viola Davis Desmond, Elijah McCoy, Portia White, Carrie Best, Fergie Arthur Jenkins, Wilbur Howard, and the Black leaders that we name now… [*allow space for other names to be shared*]. We lament the stories that we do not know, the histories that we have failed to share and the names that we have forgotten.

Lord, what shall we do?

**Sung refrain:** MV 167 “Hush! Hush!”

*[silence]*

God, we remember…

we lament…

and we wait, trusting that you will comfort us,

while providing us direction.

Amen

## Preparation for Scripture

We join with the prophet Habakkuk, who lamented that justice never prevailed and that things were not as they could be. There was still violence, famine, and destruction in his community. There were better possibilities for being together... Habakkuk wondered out loud, “What shall I do?” Habakkuk’s laments started the movement toward the revelation of God’s vision.

Scripture Reading**:** Habakkuk 1:1–4; 2:1–4 (a paraphrase)

The problem as God gave the church to see it:

God, how long will we have to cry “how long?”

How long do we have to sing, pray, and act

before we experience your promised commonwealth of love, peace, and justice?

When will these days of longing be over?

How long will we cry without laughter?

For how long will our hypocrisy go unchallenged?

We seek to be the community that you call us to be,

but our best intentions still lead to acts of exclusion.

We seek to be open, caring, and whole,

but our best intentions still lead to brokenness and judgment.

We seek to be hospitable, but our welcome is blocked by our prejudices.

Our dreams remain thwarted by our actions.

We fearfully and hungrily await your vision.

You respond with a taste of the kin-dom to come.

And now that we have tasted your vision, it consumes us, we constantly hunger for it, and we cannot be satisfied.

Why did you give us this unrelenting hunger?

It haunts us.

You respond with a commandment: write the vision, live the vision, be the vision, own the vision even while we wait for it to come.

Be patient and forgiving with ourselves and with one another,

for even when we falter God’s vision will not die.

Be clear and plain about the vision so that the people around us,

our friends and neighbours,

can read it plainly in our words and actions.

Be encouraged, you say,

for a change is going to come.

Second Reading: *Choose a reading of your choice or the lectionary reading for the day. You may consider a Psalm such as 13, 36, 56, or 102.*

Reflection: Signs of Hope

*You are encouraged to move from lamentations to signs of hope within your reflection time. For more information on anti-Black racism as well as sermon ideas and starters, visit* [*www.ucc.org/justice\_racism*](http://www.ucc.org/justice_racism)*. At the end of your sermon, consider lighting the Christ Candle as a visible sign of hope.*

Lighting of Christ Candle*(text from a Traditional Spiritual)***:**

We heard the voice of Jesus say,

“come unto me and rest.

Lay down thou weary one,

Lay down thy head upon my breast.”

With pitying eyes the Prince of Peace

Beheld our helpless grief;

He saw, and O amazing love!

He came to our relief.

And the light from the light-house, shone on us.

*[Christ Candle is lit]*

**Sung Response:** “Shine on Me” (Traditional Spiritual)

## Offering and Prayers of Dedication

## Prayers of the People

Hush! Hush! My soul be calm and still.

Come, blessed Savior, enter in.

Forgive our sins… *[silence]*,

Heal all our ills… *[silence]*,

Give strength for tasks… *[silence]*,

Give peace of mind… *[silence]*,

And make our spirits wholly Thine.

And we shall praise thee ever more.

Amen, Amen, Amen.

(Rev. S.S. Morris as printed in the *African American Heritage Hymnal* 450)

*[After reciting the prayer, consider singing it. The tune can be found here:* [*www.hymnary.org/hymn/AAHH2001/page/696*](http://www.hymnary.org/hymn/AAHH2001/page/696)*]*

## The Lord’s Prayer

Closing HymnMV 140 “As Long As We Follow” or VU 646 “Siyahamba”

## Commissioning and Benediction

Although the road is long and the journey is hard

Although the mountains are too high and the valleys are too low

By your grace, give us hope

By your power, give us strength

By your mercy, give us wisdom

So that we may continue to go where you lead us

Until all your children are safe from harm.

May we go with your light shining in us. Amen.

*—Alydia Smith*