

The characters in our lections today experienced significant loss. They had, in one way or another, experienced death. They also found hope in their loss.

David mourns the death of his best friend and his king. Saul, who was king, had been kind to David and then later, as Saul became mentally unstable, had tried to kill David. Jonathan, Saul's son, had pledged allegiance to David, even lying to his father to spare David's life. David and Jonathan were best friends. Most of us know what losing a friend or family member to death feels like, especially if the one lost is a young person who died because of war or violence. The loss leaves a significant hole in our lives.

We don't have kings in America, but we do have leaders. Good leaders set a vision for our country or world. They excite us, and they set a course. If we are aligned with that course, losing that leader is devastating to us. But losing a leader hurts even if we disagree with them. If you're old enough, you can remember the assassination of JFK and the grief that filled the nation that day. Perhaps that comes closest in our American experience to being what David felt about the loss of Saul.

The woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years also experienced grief. She hadn't enjoyed life for all that time. Under the customs of the day, she also was spiritually

unclean, which meant she couldn't go to Temple or hug her family. She spent all her money looking for a cure. We can identify with her as well if we've had a long-term debilitating illness. Because of COVID, we can identify with not being in the same room with our grandparents, parents, or grandchildren. We feel that we've missed a year and a half of sharing their lives with them; imagine what it would feel like to lose 12 years.

Jairus's daughter is ill. If we've had a very ill child, we can imagine how he felt. He'd do anything to find healing for his daughter. He'd rather be sick himself than have her be sick. Imagine his grief when he hears that she has died.

We all experience grief like these Biblical characters have. We've lost relatives and friends. We've lost leaders. We have been sick ourselves -- either in body or mind. We've all missed opportunities of being with relatives and being in person in a worshipping community.

Let's pause for a moment and think about what we've lost over the past 16 months. We've seen friends and family pass, whether from COVID or other diseases. In some cases, we might have been like Jairus, knowing our loved one was getting sicker and might pass but unable to do much for them. We mourn and grieve over these we have lost.

Although we didn't lose any national leaders to death during the pandemic, many of us may feel a national loss of vision or unsettledness. We mourn and grieve what we have lost as a nation.

Some of us have been sick ourselves during this time. Some of us had COVID. Some had other diseases or ailments. We've all felt isolated from people we love and from our worshipping community. We may have missed seeing our grandchild's first steps or first moments because of the virus. We may have missed seeing our loved ones in person for the last time before they died. We mourn and grieve all that we lost.

Lamenting and mourning, as David did, are essential steps in the grief process. We can't move toward healing until we do that. If we haven't made an opportunity to lament our losses during the past 16 months, I urge us to do so. I encourage us to express that loss -- whether through writing or painting or talking it out -- whatever we have to do to fully say goodbye to what we lost or missed.

After lamenting and mourning, is hope. I invite us to spend some time to wait on the Lord -- to be in God's word -- to talk to God. God's hope is in God's word -- that means the Scripture, and that means the Word made Flesh -- Jesus.

Jesus healed the woman -- restoring her to physical but also spiritual and social health. Jesus raised Jairus's daughter to life, turning that mourning into joy.

On Thursday night, I went to Brownie's in Wilson for the first time in two years. Brownie's is always popular in the summer. But this night, it was especially popular. Kids from at least four different sports teams were there eating their ice cream and running and playing. Families from everywhere were there. Older people were there. A food truck was there. Eating ice cream always seems to make us happy, but this time the experience was joyful. The atmosphere was filled with so much joy because we once again could play sports and then go out to ice cream after. We once more could stop by on our way home from something else. We could eat together and play together and laugh together. Healing was beginning. Hope was everywhere.

We are now worshipping together again. We can sing. We can eat together. We are freer to visit our families. Healing is beginning. Hope is everywhere.

During the last 16 months and throughout our lives, Jesus feels our loss. Jesus hears our laments and mourning. Jesus finds ways to heal us, to cause our hearts to bring forth joy. Just as Jesus restored the woman to health,

Jesus restores us. Just as Jesus brought new life and hope to Jairus's daughter and family, Jesus brings new life and hope and joy to us.

When we take our laments to the Lord and wait, Jesus will heal us. Out of our laments and grief, Jesus brings joy and hope.