

When I heard the news of George Floyd's death and reports of anger bursting through the streets, my heart sank. How long, O God, will some suffer the dehumanising effects of racism? How long will our differences be the target of prejudice, hatred and violence? *How long?* As an advocate of nonviolent resistance and peaceful protest, I do not condone the rioting that erupted in some parts—aggression on all sides. But in my heart, I stand with those who seek to raise awareness and speak out for truth and justice. I am especially moved by the vision of individuals lying prostrate or kneeling on the ground, observing silence for 8 minutes and 43 seconds—the exact time a police officer's knee was pinned on George Floyd's neck.

Here in Australia, footy player Eddie Betts shared something of his own experience:



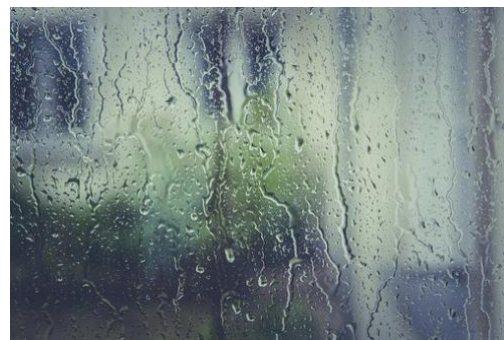
*I was really proud taking a knee for Black Lives Matter and racism in Australia and you know it happens in our backyard as well. We've got 432 deaths in custody here in Australia and that was since 1991. My grandfather Eddie Betts—my dad's Eddie Betts, my grandfather is*

*Eddie Betts—he was sick in Port Lincoln. He went to the doctors, the doctors turned him away. He had chest pain, they thought he was drunk. They rang the police on him, they took him to the cells. He died alone in the cells by himself at age 49, my grandfather Eddie Betts.*

The week of George Floyd's death, was a difficult one for me. Many with whom I interacted were interested in conversing about "the terrible things happening in the US." I was happy to listen to all who wished to express their upset. But the majority seemed intent on criticising—the Black Lives Matter movement, Americans in general, or the US Government. Or they fired off opinions and solutions based on their limited or even non-existent experience of racism (and the US), including the suggestion that "black people need to stop stirring up trouble."

It was impossible for me to know how to respond. I was truly overwhelmed by the scenes coming from the country of my birth. Even more, I was quite appalled by some of the reactions I was hearing and by the apparent unwillingness to listen—overseas and here at home. I felt a pastoral word was needed, but the swirl of emotions paralysed me. In short, I was undone. That week, I did not write a Reflection in Solitude. I felt silence was the best I had to offer.

Since then, and through the example and encouragement of Christian community, I have found myself more often redirected towards a more lifegiving means—lament. When we feel aggrieved, overwhelmed and undone, when it is obvious that not all is right with the world and we long for justice, compassion and peace to come more fully into our midst, the practice of lament is a wellspring for our tears and complaint. We can share the fulness of our experiences with the Source and Keeper of our Lives and, in doing so, find the confusion and weight of our sorrow lifted and the path of love revealed before us.



Lament is different than chatting about a concerning situation in the world or our lives. (i.e. "Did you hear about the COVID outbreak in Victoria?" "Yes, isn't it awful!") In my experience, sharing without the depth prayer can bring—especially lament—often leads to dramatizing and judging. Our chatty exchanges simply bolster our perspectives about certain people or situations rather than opening us toward a wider, more gracious landscape. They often increase our anxiety and shut down the possibility of positive response. This is certainly the case for me when someone tells me about the latest Trump Tweet!

In contrast, lament helps us give voice to our feelings in a way that increases hope, trust and freedom. Lament includes movements such as sharing sorrow and complaint, inviting the presence of the Holy One into our suffering, expressing our hopes and desires, giving ourselves over to what will be in trust, and offerings of praise and gratitude.

As significant as each element might be, the most important thing to bring to our lament is our tears—the pouring out of our helplessness and grief before the God of history and all creation. In her insightful and meditative book, *The Fountain and the Furnace: the Way of Tears and Fire*, Maggie Ross writes:

*The gift of tears is a sign of change, of conversion of heart. The tears that are a gift are a sign of willingness to let go, of desire to let go, and the power of God acting in response to the person's prayer of longing ... The gift of tears is a sign of self-forgetfulness, a willing nakedness, a desire that comes from within to create space for God by letting go of our conscious pursuit of security, power, attachment.*

Lament, then, clarifies and purifies our service and actions for justice. It places our confidence not in what we are able to accomplish or even in the ends which we have in mind. The movement towards trust in what will be and, even more, *trust in the One who holds all creation in love and care*, slowly loosens our grip on firmly held positions and frees us to be and love.



By way of example, I share my honest lament about the moment we are in...

Ground of my Being,  
may your love hold me steady  
in the midst of these changing times.  
Even as I am grateful for the growing confidence  
in South Australia's COVID free days,  
I confess the transition is demanding  
and, in some ways, unwelcome.  
Like the sunny days and warmth of autumn,  
gone is the season of solitude and stillness.  
Again, the cars rush by.  
Again, the expectations press in.  
How long will we experience this transition?  
When will our lives cease to whirl?

Across the screen flash fresh announcements.  
Into my inbox arrive more recommendations.  
Updated charts, revised plans, checklists and steps  
bringing new procedures for implementation.  
How long will we experience this transition?  
When will our lives cease to whirl?

Overwhelmed  
I rise sleepless in the night.  
In the cold I feel you in the serene darkness,  
the warm blanket wrapped around me,  
the confidence that morning will come.  
By day, you delight me  
with birds at the feeder and the gift of rain.  
I encounter you in stories of life  
shared over cups of soup and buttered bread.  
I do not know the future  
but I know you are there, in it, whatever will be.  
I am silent with you  
and come to trust in the grace  
that has already opened so much in me.  
Thank you!  
My Love, my God.

Lift from me the confusion of this whirling.  
Calm and quiet my soul.  
Free me to be fully alive in your world—  
in my small, daily bit of it.  
Amen. May it be so.