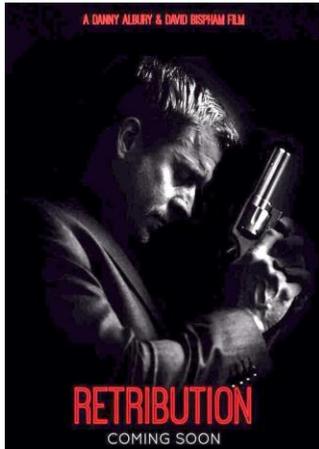


**Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church**

**Sun, Nov 4, 2018**

**Are We Caught Up in a Net of Anger? – Lament/Grieving  
(Psalm 137)**



**O daughter of Babylon, you devastator!  
Happy shall they be who pay you back  
what you have done to us!  
Happy shall they be who take your little ones  
and dash them against the rock!  
(Ps 137:8-9)**

**A lesson from the psalm**

I have no desire to see this movie – it's about a hardened debt-collector who goes on a 24-hour rampage of anger in an attempt to avenge a brutal attack on his teenage daughter – sadly, I suspect that a lot of people will see it – and even more sadly, they will cheer on the anger expressed and the revenge exacted – it's a dynamic that is portrayed and celebrated in far too much of our mass media today – somebody violates you and that legitimates angry revenge - that deeply embedded urge for revenge is an essential part of our psalm this morning – it has to be faced frankly - the people of Israel have been terrorized and traumatized by the invading imperial power, yet again – in the 680s BCE, the Babylonian armies raged through Israel destroying towns, the walls of Jerusalem, and the Temple – interestingly, the accounts talk more about the buildings than the people – but we can barely imagine what happens in terms of rape, torture, and mass murder – for those who lived through it, either as exiles or as survivors, their lives were devastated – revenge filled their souls – that's what gets expressed in this psalm – that's what we need to understand to recognize how important these verses in our text are to grasping what God's people in that time had been through – harsh and unforgiving as they are, they represent an honest reaction to being terrorized and traumatized – but, and here's a central lesson from the psalm, what do we do with those urges, natural as they may be – do we let them run rampant, as in the movie? – or do we work towards a different response, a response more in keeping with our faith in a God of justice, kindness, and humility? – I think you know my answer, hard as it is to accept and apply – in essence, it's let go and let God

**Provocative points to ponder – as always, too many to cram into one sermon**

- Let's first remember some of the key dynamics of lament in the Scriptures – these passages are an outpouring of grief-stricken rage at both the circumstance and at God for letting them happen – they are often accompanied by pleas to exact revenge – but, in the end, they turn the matter over to God – and that's the key dynamic here – laments are an acknowledgement that we don't know enough about the complex convolutions of

good and evil within the human community to sort these things out well on our own – we’re wired for retribution, deeply embedded through generations of practice – so, how do we let go of that natural urge and give that judging over to God – how do we gain the humility to let go and let God – the point this psalm makes is this = remember the covenant God made with you in the first place – remember Zion – you are called to be a blessing, no matter what the circumstances – leave the judging to me and get on with treating everyone with justice and kindness in humility

### **Finding this in God’s living Word, Jesus Christ**

At a deeply symbolic level, this response of turning things over to God to resolve is seen in Jesus’ last days – the days that gave us this table we are about to gather around to be fed by God’s grace – let’s not sugar-coat what happened to Jesus – let’s take his word for it – those he called to account for rebelling against God’s covenant of blessing tried to eliminate the presence of God in their midst – Jesus uses the image of the temple for himself – that space where God encounters us with a covenant grace, reminding us of our true contributions in creation – this presence was terrorized and traumatized to the point of death – and the word from Jesus lips, as he suffocated to death, spoke reconciliation rather than revenge, sought restorative justice rather than retributive justice – “Father, forgive ...”

### **Your Notes**

### **Prayers of the people offering thanks, seeking help, and being awed**

*[The form and flow of thanks, help, and awe is taken from Anne Lamott’s wonderful little book on prayer, **Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers** (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012).]*