

Shiloh United Methodist Church

[James 3:17](#)

Rev. Tyler Amundson

April 15, 2018

[Lamentations 3:13-15, 31-34](#)

Broken: Infant Loss and Miscarriage

Worship Intro:

Today we begin our series “Broken” by looking at some of the most challenging situations facing people in our world, ourselves, and the people we love. Throughout this series, we will be looking to see where hope shines through the broken places in people’s lives, in our lives.

We won’t be doing this in a way that says, “It is ok that bad happened, because this good came.”

Instead we will be looking at these challenges and the hope people found, to remind us that in the midst of deep challenge and pain a signpost of hope in the forest all loss and confusion be of great comfort. It can remind us that there is a way out of dark places to something other and outward.

As Christian’s we believe this is love, God and the grace of knowing God is with us even in the dark places in our lives. Not that Christianity makes our lives easier, but that it allows us to find God’s hope for us, even when we endure the impossible and the unbearable.

Today’s sermon is on infant loss and miscarriage, and the challenges families go through to become families with children.

As we begin worship today I want to ask you to consider a time you belonged, when you were embraced by a loving family or community, and the love you were shown. This is the same love many of us experience when we find God for the first time. This understanding of

love will help us as we explore this first challenge that leaves people feeling broken.

Sermon:

This new series we begin today is on “broken” places in our lives. Our worship design team sat down with a list of broken places and the list was long. We then narrowed those down through conversation and prayer to a list of ones that would fit our timeframe. The ones that got left on the table were done out of messy practicality. The ones we have were prayed over and are being carefully considered, worked on and prayed over.

This series will be challenging, and if one of these places is too painful to listen about in person. I am going to do something pastors aren’t supposed to do, take a Sunday away from church. Just promise me you will pray and see where God shows up for you when you are not here. If something feels painful I also want to mention that these and all sermons are meant to start conversation, offer hope, and help us understand ourselves and God more deeply. If you need to step out of the sanctuary for a minute, or want to set up a time to talk with me or other leaders in the church for support please let me or others know.

The books in scripture we will use, were chosen through prayer and suggestions from some colleagues and friends. Lamentations is a book of deep pain, written to mourn and display agony over the loss of a way of life. City laments is what most of them are and they reflect the pain of authors who foreseen or have seen the destruction of their entire way of life. Their cities have failed or been overrun by their enemy and in turn they right to ask where God was, how God was, and how we might find God in the chaos of loss and destruction.

James is a wisdom book that is dropped into the letters of the New Testament. Attributed by tradition to the Apostle James, it is full of practical advice on how to live a Christian life. Like all “how to” living

guides, it is sometimes too pithy and simple. However, between the pithy lines there are lines of great depth about how to find God in the challenges of life.

We will be using these two scriptures to converse and traverse the brokenness we see through the different topics we face together these next 7 weeks.

Today our broken place is “miscarriage and infant loss.”

Lamentations 3:13-15 Common English Bible (CEB)

¹³ He shot the arrows of his quiver into my inside parts.

¹⁴ I have become a joke to all my people, the object of their song of ridicule all day long.

¹⁵ He saturated me with grief, made me choke on bitterness.

Miscarriage and even the loss of an infant before birth carry with it a deep inward pain for parents and mothers. Both of these challenges carry with them a deep inward pain of losing out on a life of bearing a child and caring for a family that is as old as our understanding of humanity. Even those of us who have not experienced children, can understand loss of something hoped for and abruptly ended.

A scriptural story in the bible that best describes the emotional energy that goes into families who are seeking to become parents can be found in Genesis. It is the story of Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael, Isaac, and Abraham. The story goes that Abraham and Sarah couldn't have any children, and they weren't getting any younger. So, Sarah encouraged Abraham to have a child with one of his servant's Hagar, well then Sarah got jealous and banished Hagar, violently. Hagar is then offered great protection from God and God's angels appear to her, supporting her when she is confused about how to move ahead. Sarah then later has another first-born Isaac and the challenge continues about who is the true first born.

I share this story of infertility and passionate rejection, because it is a scripture that demonstrates the kind of emotions that go into becoming a family. They are emotions that are ancient and run deep in who we are as humans, but also they have the potential to make us angry enough to banish people from our lives. Beginning a family is filled with a primal instinct to bear children and an emotional energy that can make it feel like our world can be ripped apart. Becoming a family with children is a fierce thing, a deeply emotional thing, and is laced with strange human expectations.

To share about miscarriage and infant loss I put out a request to friends and people I knew to hear from them. For most of today's sermons you will hear from real people who have experienced this loss and in the broken have somehow found the possibility of hope again.

Jen shares that in 2006 she married her best friend, Joe. She was so excited to become pregnant and start a family. In 2009 she miscarried for the first time. She trusted God was still with them and she again miscarried in 2010. Disheartened, but still willing to try they found out in August 2011 they were 4 weeks along, they told family and friends, only to find out the following week through pain and a doctor's visit they were miscarrying their newest child.

Jen says that someone said, "God is just doing this because he doesn't want to give you more than you can handle."

I want to stop for a minute before I go on with Jen's story and share some of the challenges I have heard from families who are at this point.

1. For the woman, there is a physical toll to miscarriage. The pain of beginning a pregnancy and losing it part way through can be an awful and exhausting process. And in our culture the women are not often given time away from work or normal activities when this happens.

2. For both parents this time can be isolating. There is a certain shame in not being able to get pregnant and stay pregnant. Couples ask questions of worth, “Is there something wrong with me?” The traditional stigma was miscarriage, especially, was something not to share, but to just move beyond. This time can also be isolating because of the expectation from outside family members to get pregnant and the desire they too have to see the family have children. These expectations create isolation by laying out expectations sometimes hidden until the couple announces they are having children.
3. Couples marriages and relationships are tested during this time and without proper support can be lost in this challenge, many times due to isolation created by the stigma surrounding miscarriage and infertility.
4. A life was started, dreams began to be formed when the pregnancy was learned of, and sometimes the resources on how to grieve this kind of loss can seem few and far between. They are out there and there are people willing to support others, but being willing to reach out for help when you are hurting is vulnerable and hard.

Jen and her husband after miscarrying and discussions with fertility doctors decided to look at adoption. I am not delving into the loss and process of fertility treatments today, but I want to share briefly that is a deeply challenging part of this process for families too. Jen and her husband were considering adoption and went through the lengthy sign up process, and began the process of waiting. After learning her sister was pregnant, and while still waiting to hear on the adoption, she went to a routine doctor’s appointment. To learn she was pregnant. The pregnancy went to term and she was blessed with a beautiful boy, Josh. When they discovered they were pregnant she did call the adoption agency, and the woman on the phone said, “I think God has other plans for you.”

Jen shares that she trusts God was with her through the process, and was working in their lives all along.

We got to an amazingly powerful conclusion for Jen and her family, but I want to pause for a minute and consider that even when things turn out for the better in families, there is incredibly long amounts of waiting and loss in the times infertility and miscarriage.

One friend of mine who grappled with miscarriage wrote a journal entry she shared with me, about a time just after miscarriage and the process of healing. To remind us of the slowness of this process:

“Bob” is a reference to the movie “What About Bob,” which is a humorous take on a man overcoming debilitating anxiety. This entry shows how difficult grief makes the everyday things of live.

This morning, Bob is my motivation. Baby steps. See the baby steps I am making.

Baby steps, I was out of the house for several hours.

Baby steps, I wore not workout or pajama pants for most of the day.

Baby steps, I interacted with people other than spouse or best friend.

Baby steps, I went for a walk, with a friend.

Baby steps, I went to work for a little while.

Baby steps, I did laundry.

Baby steps, I went for a walk by myself.

Baby steps, I went to work for a few hours

Baby steps, I made an appt. for a massage.

Baby steps, I helped make a big decision.

Baby steps, I laughed.¹

¹ Thanks to Rev. Amy Strader for sharing this.

My friend Amy and her husband made baby step after baby step, until they then worked with a pastor friend of ours to have a memorial for their miscarriage. They organized a sanctuary space and held a service to remember their child who they had lost. Sharing the life of the child they would never know, and in turn telling the story of a life they had lost the chance to experience with their unborn child.

Lamentations 3:31-34 Common English Bible (CEB)

³¹ My Lord definitely won't reject forever.

³² Although he has caused grief, he will show compassion in measure with his covenant loyalty.

³³ He definitely doesn't enjoy affliction, making humans suffer.

³⁴ Now crushing underfoot all the earth's prisoners,

A friend of mine locally is part of the team for the county who collects information from parents, and healthcare on fetal and infant deaths for the county. She shared with me there is a team call FICMMR team and it stands for Fetal, Infant, Child and Maternal Mortality Review. It is a multi-disciplinary team, with members from the medical community, law enforcement, public health, social services and the coroner's office. There are like teams that cover every county in the state, as well as nationwide. Our team reviews every infant (birth to age one) and child (up to age 18) death that occurs within our County; and fetal (not born alive) deaths that meet a certain weight requirement. The intent of the team is never to place blame, but rather reduce the number of preventable deaths. While we know, many deaths are not preventable, some are. Our goal is to educate and influence the community on best practices when it comes to caring for ourselves and our families. Some campaigns that have evolved out of the FICMMR work are safe sleep, suicide prevention, proper car seat installation, proper seat belt use and more.

Part of the process of reviewing each death, is to document whether the family was offered bereavement counseling. Often times we never know if the family sought counseling, but the hope is that it's offered to all.

Some data:

- Our local team has reviewed over 30 fetal and infant deaths over the last two years
- Because of our population, Yellowstone County has the highest number of reviews per year
- Statewide, there are 50-60 fetal deaths per year
- Statewide, there are 50-60 infant deaths per year
- Statewide, there are 60-70 child deaths per year and this number is on the rise

The final story we are going to hear today is about Lachlan Duncan Browne. This amazing child was born August 11, 2016. He arrived through an unplanned emergency C-Section.

His parent's say this about Lachlan, "It took us over 24 hours to finalize a name for their little miracle due to his unconventional entrance. His forename, Lachlan, is of Scottish origin, roughly translating to "lord of the lakes." He earned his middle name, Duncan, a Gaelic word for warrior, by overcoming the odds of survival and battling his way into this world.

He surprised his mother and father, with an early birth — entering Earth side two months premature — and labored through its consequences. Befuddling doctors, our Lord of the Lakes' brain and liver thwarted him the opportunity too many of us take for granted: A fair shot at life."

Lachlan lived his 70 days in two NICU units one in a city in Montana and another in an advanced NICU outside of our state. Both his parents

share the incredible life he lived in a statement that so many people in the medical units loved him and cared for him deeply.²

Ashley his mother reached out to me as I began working on this sermon, because she knew her son Lachlan's story was something in telling had provided a chance for other parent's to tell their story of loss, but also the hope they found on the other side.

Before I go any farther though, I want to offer some insight for those of us who might find ourselves offering support to people who have experienced miscarriage, infertility or infant loss.

1. It is awful. Don't seek to have the right answer to offer the person you are with. Just let them know you care for them and will be there for them. If you are still trying to find something to share, pray for or with the person to find peace amidst their chaos.
2. Don't offer silver lining answers. I call these "well at least" answers to the challenges. Well at least you got pregnant, or at least you could adopt. These answers will come to the person as hope and love reach them, but are venom in a wound that needs healing and time.
3. If possible provide places of support to share their stories. Ashley, Lachlan's mother, shared with me that she has formed a group of people to support others who experience this loss, and in return has gained so much back. I had a friend share that they couldn't find in Billings positive support for post-partum depression. If you want

² http://helenair.com/news/local/obituaries/browne-lachlan-duncan/article_23423f5c-d32f-57d0-8cee-a80241ea910c.html

to help by doing we need to seek to create support groups in our town for people experiencing all kinds of loss and challenge.

James 3:17 Common English Bible (CEB)

¹⁷ What of the wisdom from above? First, it is pure, and then peaceful, gentle, obedient, filled with mercy and good actions, fair, and genuine.

Back to what I heard from Ashley, and everyone who shared their stories with me. Storytelling was the way to hope. Ashley shared with me the incredible stories of relationships forged in Lachlan's short life between care staff, friends, and those relationships make life richer for her now. Others that shared stories of infant loss or miscarriage with me you could see or realize hope as they shared their stories of where life went as they were able to share their stories of pain and loss.

Sharing stories of loss is a way each of us take those "baby steps" out of the darkest places in our lives. It is through those steps that we forge hope by being vulnerable to the reality that we are human, we are fragile, and God is with even us fragile human beings.

Video – Showed a video of a friend who experienced miscarriage and the hope she found in the hard moments.

For these parents, for some of us here, and for all of us who experience loss we, we experience the grief of loss. It is the experience of not having the things hoped for, all things reasonably hoped for in life are not misplaced. This quote I found was most helpful in this work this week as I have read some of the most heartbreaking stories. Before I share the quote, I want to say, if you have more questions about this topic, or would like help finding resources please let me know as my friends and supports in this work have access to more information than I could share today.

“Grief, I’ve learned, is really just love. It’s all the love you want to give,

but cannot. All that unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go” ~ Jamie Anderson

This week friends as you go from this place and carry these stories with you, don't go just with sorrow, also hear the hope those who have experienced deep pain have shared. It is a reminder that life is fragile, and God is with us in the vulnerable and painful reminding us we are loved and all us are loved their entire life, no matter how long that life is. That we are called as Christians to walk with all manner of people through this life, and with our God.

Shalom and blessings friends, Amen.