TRANSFORMATIO

JURNAL TEOLOGI, PENDIDIKAN, DAN MISI INTEGRAL
Vol. 02, No.2
Januari-Juni 2025
pISSN: 3025 – 4841, eISSN: 3031-1217
DOI: 10.61719/Transformatio.A2522.021

Preaching Psalm 137 for Collective Trauma Healing[1]

PENULIS
Linna Gunawan

INSTITUSI
Independent scholar/
Perigi Kasih Ministry

E-MAIL
linna.gunawan@gmail.com

HALAMAN
135-148

ABSTRACT

This article describes the function of preaching Psalm 137 for collective trauma healing. Interpreting the text through the lens of trauma produces the homiletic imagination necessary for preparing the sermon. The words "remembrance" and "forgetting," which appear in Psalm 137, demonstrate the sermon's role in the healing of collective trauma. In the final part of this article, the author shares her experience preaching Psalm 137 with the aim of healing collective trauma.

Keywords: *Psalm 137 – Preaching – Lens of Trauma – Collective Trauma – Homiletic Imagination*

INTRODUCTION

Collective traumas take a variety of forms, including natural disasters, pandemic disasters, gun violence, wars, or other brutal events that happen in our neighborhoods, societies, and nations. These traumas make us feel unsafe in the place where we belong and cause us to mistrust our neighbors or other people whom we knew before.[1] We begin to live out Kai T. Erikson's description of the effect of collective trauma: "'I' continue to exist, though damaged and maybe even permanently changed. 'You' continue to exist, though distant and hard to relate to. But 'we' no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body."[2]

To explain his theory of collective trauma effects, Erikson names three behavioral manifestations of bond damage in the community. The first is demoralization. The traumatized community has a numb feeling about the future. After the tragedy, they lost most of their moral anchors. They feel there is no reason for doing anything because, more or less, the world has come to an end. Furthermore, there is a feeling of suspicion toward one another because the accustomed neighborhood patterns have broken down.[3] Second, there is disorientation. The traumatic event causes the victims' memories to stop at the event. They have a sense of dislocation in the community in which they belong. They are dazed and unable to locate themselves meaningfully in time and space. The third is loss of connection. The traumatic experiences of the tragic event make the victims feel separated from other people. They feel they live in a strange land – nobody cares, and they keep their distance. Their fear of the event haunts them and makes them more isolated.[4] They have lost meaningful connections with themselves. They lose trust in other humans.

The reality of trauma in our lives and society today reminds me of Diana Langberg, who says that our church exists in the context of trauma, and this might be the most significant mission field in the twenty-first century.[5] It is also the reality that reminds us that traumatized people are all around us. They come to and are members of our church. They attend our services, sit in the pews, and listen to our sermons. They could even be us: the ministers, the leaders, the seminarians, and the preachers of our churches and seminaries.

As a response to this reality of trauma around us and a plea to become aware of our calling as a Christian community, where we are one body of Christ and belong to the world society, I propose the article on Preaching on Psalm 137. As Kimberly Wagner says, each preacher has an obligation to extend care to those communities deeply impacted by trauma. Thus, we need to have an honest and sincere conversation about that reality.[6] However, the questions arise when we use this Psalm as a sermon text, i.e., how we interpret and employ this

[1] Kai T. Erikson, "Loss of Communality at Buffalo Creek," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 133, no. 3 (March 1976): 303–5, https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.133.3.302.

[2] Kai T. Erikson, *Everything in Its Path: Deconstruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1976), 154.

[3] Kai T. Erikson, "Loss of Communality at Buffalo Creek," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 133, no. 3 (March 1976): 303, https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.133.3.302.

[4] Erikson, *Everything in Its Path: Deconstruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*, 215 - 6.

[5] Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2015), 8.

[6] Kimberly R. Wagner, "The Work We Can't Ignore: Preaching and Gun Violence," *Interpretation* 76, no. 3 (July 1, 2022): 242, https://doi.org/10.1177/00209643221096132.

Psalm for collective trauma healing. Hence, I offer three parts of this article. I start with one of the elements of preaching, which is interpreting the Psalm using the lens of trauma for the first part. After that, in the next part, I suggest the homiletical framework that inspires the preachers to design a sermon(s) on Psalm 137 for collective trauma healing. The last part is that I give an example to apply this preaching into practice.

INTERPRETING PSALM 137 THROUGH THE LENS OF TRAUMA

Determining the exact date of Psalm 137 is not easy. Walter Brueggemann and Bellinger mention that the typical open-ended poetic language makes it difficult to be precise about the setting and date of the psalm. This psalm could have been written when the exiled community was engaged in ritual worship by the river in Babylon, or it could be a remembrance of the trauma of the exile in its aftermath.[7] Some scholars suggest the word "there" in verses 1b and 3a points to the setting of exiles by the river of Babylonia. Daniel Simango decides the dating of the psalm is probably between 537 and 515 BCE, the early years of the return of the Jews from exile. He argues that the psalmist was someone who had returned from exile and whose memories of Babylonia were still fresh in his mind and heart.[8] John Ahn says two distinctive laments, both socially conditioned, determine the dating of the psalm, which is the experience of the first wave of the 597 BCE group (vv.1-6) and the pain and aftermath of the 587 BCE group (vv.7-9).[9] Hyeokil Kwon believes the psalm was written during the painful exilic times and argues the remembrance of Jerusalem in vv. 5-6 would be an appropriate act for those away from the city rather than those who are in the city.[10]

The psalm is more complex because of its unclear genre. Ahn states Psalm 137 is "without uniformity." It is commonly associated with the community lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem. However, scholars also identify a ballad, a song of Zion, a modified Song of Zion, a Song of Ascent, a complaint, and an imprecation.[11] Ahn notes, "Psalm 137's complexity is due to the fact that it begins as a communal lament (vv. 1-3 or 1-4), has elements of a Zion psalm (vv. 4-6), and concludes as a proscription (vv. 7-9)."[12]

---

[7] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms,* 573.

[8] Daniel Simango, "A Comprehensive Reading of Psalm 137," *Old Testament Essays* 31, no. 1 (2018): 232, https://ote-journal.otwsa-otssa.org.za/index.php/journal. Simango introduces the research into the dating of Psalm 137 conducted by Vos and Prinsloo: The options are: (1) the psalm originated between 597 and 587 BCE, which is the period between the first deportation and the final destruction of Jerusalem and exile; (2) the author was in exile before his return, so the psalm was written during the exile following 587 BCE; (3) it was written by the psalmist from the Diaspora, who was neither in Babylon nor Jerusalem; (4) it was composed shortly after the exiles returned, but before the temple was completed in 515 BCE; (5) it originated after the completion of the temple, but before the rebuilding of the city walls, between 515-445 BCE; (6) it was written after the destruction of Babylon in about 300 BCE. This date of origin is based on the passive participative "you devastated one" in vv. 8.

[9] John Ahn, "Psalm 137: Complex Communal Laments," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 2 (2008): 273, www.jstor.org/stable/25610120.

[10] Hyeokil Kwon, "Remembrance, Nonidentity, and Lament: A Reading of Psalm 137 for Liberation from the Unfinished Suffering of Colonization," 한국기독교신학논총 81 (May 2012): 61, http://www.dbpia.co.kr/journal/publicationDetail?publicationId=PLCT00006256#none.

[11] Ahn, "Psalm 137," 271- 272.

[12] Ibid., 272.

Although this psalm is complex in terms of dating, setting, and genre, the Psalm is one of the communal lament genres that comes from the group of Israelites in Babylon after the 587 BCE destruction.[13] They were the people who lived with the collective trauma that showed their resilience. Memory, which is usually connected to trauma, is the focus of Psalm 137. The verbs "remember" and "forget" appear five times. The two verbs are important resources for seeing the healing process and resilience in the community trauma of the psalm.

PSALM 137: REMEMBRANCE AND FORGETTING AS A PROCESS OF HEALING

Bessel van der Kolk affirms memory as a substantial part of the process of healing. He discusses *dissociation* in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) occurring when the traumatic memory is isolated. People with trauma are unable to put the actual event and the source of those memories behind them. "The sensations, thoughts, and emotions of the trauma were stored separately as frozen, barely comprehensible fragments," he explains.[14] Consequently, some have memory loss from traumatic events. Hence, he says *association* is a goal of dissociation treatment. It is a treatment for "integrating the cut-off elements of the trauma into the ongoing narrative of life, so that the brain can recognize that was then, and this is now."[15]

In the case of memory loss in PTSD, van der Kolk introduces recent neuroscience research and the possibility of retrieving those memories:

> As long as a memory is inaccessible, the mind is unable to change it. But as soon as a story start being told, particularly if it is told repeatedly, it changes—the act of telling itself changes the tale. The mind cannot help but make meaning out of what it knows, and the meaning we make of our lives changes how and what we remember.[16]

Reading and interpreting Psalm 137 through the lens of trauma urges us to understand the significance of remembering and forgetting words for the traumatic community. If bringing traumatic memories into a narrative is part of the healing process of trauma, the psalmist tells of the memories in detail. In vv. 1-3, the psalmist clearly describes the location, activities, and situation as expressions of grief and pain because of the traumatic event concerning Jerusalem. He recalls the "Rivers of Babylon" as the traumatic location where they remember the destruction of the city of God and where they nevertheless work for their enemy's welfare.[17] Moreover, the psalmist mentions how they sat and wept when remembering Zion. They also obviously kept in mind how the perpetrators forced them to sing the songs of Zion.

[13] Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 75.

[14] Bessel A. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Scores: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York, NY: Viking, 2014), chap. 11, loc. 332, iBook.

[15] Ibid., loc. 336.

[16] Ibid., chap. 12, loc. 356.

[17] Ahn, "Psalm 137," 277-278. Ahn suggests the location indicates the first wave of Judeans were forced to work removing salt from irrigation canals. The grief that is voiced by the psalmist in vv. 1- 3 happened because the Judeans, who were formerly the royal officials and the members of the temple, were forced to labor for Babylonian economic gain.

In the next stanza,[18] vv. 4-6, detailed emotions and feelings are depicted by the psalmist as a response to the tormentors' request that they sing the songs. They voice a self-imprecation if they should fulfill the enemy's wish that they sing. They know the wish is actually a mockery of the God of Israel, because usually the Israelite sings the songs of Zion in praise of God. When forced to do it in exile, it is an insult to God. Therefore, they use a strong dialectic between the words "forget" and "remember." If they forget or do not remember Jerusalem, the curses will come upon them. This relates to their belief that Jerusalem is a place where God is. The memory of Jerusalem means they live out their faith in God even in a foreign land.

The psalmist addresses another narrative memory of trauma in the third stanza, vv. 7-9, in remembering the groups of Israel's foes who defeated them. When they remember the Edomites and Babylonians who have ruined their city, they remember God, who was on their side. This part consists of a detailed petition to God to punish them and wreak havoc on them. In this stanza, the psalmist engages in a process of trauma healing, which Judith Hermann calls "the revenge fantasy" as a form of the desire for catharsis. The victim imagines that she dismisses the terror, pain, and shame of trauma by revenging the oppressors. Herman explains, "In her humiliated fury, the victim imagines that revenge is the only way to restore her own sense of power."[19]

PSALM 137: REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING AS RESILIENCE ACTIVITIES

The function of memory in trauma is acknowledged by Robert J. Schreiter as a basis for identity in resilience activity. He agrees with Clemens Sedmak, who notes the importance of remembering. Memory, Sedmak believes, is a bridge between a person's interior and the social reality that helps that person find deeper meaning from the past when it relates to the present life. Therefore, Sedmak refers to "anamnestic resilience" as a significant process of absorbing the frozen traumatic memory into a coherent network, which then has a narrative result. The narrative result helps a person control the traumatic memory by putting it into the chain of causality and meaning.[20]

In other words, Schreiter believes that putting the traumatic memory into words can be an activity of resilience, in that the traumatized person uses those memories to make meaning and find the capacity to resist injustice and to withstand adversity. Resilience activities include the narrative memory found in the Bible, i.e., the formula for recounting God's work for Israel, from the call to Abraham to deliverance from Egypt to entry into the promised land.[21]

Resilience activities can be seen in Psalm 137 also. First, at the beginning of the psalm, vv. 1-4, the psalmist has memories of grief over the ruin of Jerusalem. No-one in the community is rejoicing with harps and songs as they did before the exile. The memory of grief unites all of the Judean community members who had experienced exile. Philip Stern explains this in terms of his interpretation of the transition between the first and second stanzas. The

[18] Simango, "A Comprehensive Reading of Psalm 137," 220. Simango notes Psalm 137 consists of three stanzas: the first stanza is vv. 1 - 4, which uses the first-person plural and focuses on the past; the second stanza is vv. 5-6, which uses the first-person singular and focuses on the present; while the third stanza is vv. 7-9, where the subject is YHWH and the focus on the future.

[19] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, 189.

[20] Robert J. Schreiter, "Reading Biblical Texts through the Lens of Resilience," in *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, ed. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta, Georgia: SBL Publisher, 2016), 200.

[21] Ibid.

characteristic of Hebrew poetry, shown through the switch from speaking in the first-person plural (we sat… we wept) to the first-person singular (if I forget you), has the purpose of describing the communal feeling of grief as the feeling of each Israelite. The grief of Jerusalem calls each person in the community to recite this formula of national memory out loud.[22] The poetry shows the performance of an act of identity that is an affirmation of resilience. This is what Schreiter meant by the manifestation of resilience through the act of affirmation is first of all marked by a focus upon narratives of the group who witness and overcome past painful experiences, as well as on the encounter with the trauma-induced event in the future.[23]

Second, the act of resistance against the perpetrators is a resilient activity in Psalm 137. The dialectic of remembering and forgetting in vv. 5-6 reveals the opposition of the community to their oppressors, who ask them to sing the songs of Zion. Hyeokil Kwon acknowledges that for the exiles, the request to sing the songs means forgetting their identity as people of God. Hence, the words "if I forget" and "if I do not remember" addressed to Jerusalem represent the attempt to resist the oppressors. They refuse to sing the songs or to play harps and choose to remember the city of God in the form of a self-curse.[24] When they refuse to sing the song, they are fighting the Babylonian exploiters. "Forget" and "remember" in those verses show that while the perpetrators can capture the Israelites, they cannot control the life of memory. Hence, "memory means hope in the face of despair, and hope can be sustained for a long time," Bellinger writes. He adds, "Memory turns to hope, and it is the hope that already brings to reality for the speaker the power of Zion and its song of worship and joy."[25]

The third resilient activity in Psalm 137 is an imprecation against the enemies. In v. 7, the psalmist calls God to remember the cruelty of their opponents. Brueggemann and Bellinger indicate that the honest cry for vengeance in the midst of immense loss, given over to the judge of all things, becomes an act of hope in YHWH.[26] The imprecation against the Edomites and Babylon, in vv. 8-9, which is wrapped by the word "beatitude," is a bold act of faith on the part of the psalmist and his community. The beatitude, according to Bellinger, is "hope for God's control of history."[27] This hope enables the traumatized community to endure their suffering. Moreover, I agree with Kwon, who interprets the activity of remembering the historical atrocities of the enemies as a way of forgetting the pain through the memory of suffering.[28] He explains beautifully the activity of remembering: "True forgiveness cannot arise without such remembering. In this sense, an imprecation in a lament as a form of song or prayer is a proper exit from suffering and enmity. Therefore, in the psalm, hope—not despair—is resilient and persuasive."[29]

HOMILETIC IMAGINATION IN PSALM 137 FOR COLLECTIVE TRAUMA HEALING

[22] Philip Stern, "Psalm 137: The Babylonian Exile: Pieces of the Puzzle," *Religion and History* Midstream (August 2007): 33–36, https://0-link-galegroup-com.grace.gtu.edu/apps/doc/A166933958/PPRP?sid=lms.

[23] Schreiter, "Reading Biblical Texts through the Lens of Resilience," 201.

[24] Kwon, "Remembrance, Nonidentity, and Lament," 63.

[25] William H Jr Bellinger, "Psalm 137: Memory and Poetry," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 27, no. 2 (December 2005): 13, https://doi.org/10.1163/187122005x00077.

[26] Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*, 138.

[27] Bellinger, "Psalm 137," 13.

[28] Kwon, "Remembrance, Nonidentity, and Lament," 67.

[29] Ibid.

Preaching about trauma is difficult since the task involves sharing the gospel in the midst of a complex and complicated discourse. Sarah Travis reminds us, "The primary task of Christian preaching is to express good news, but good news in the face of trauma is neither straightforward nor easily expressed."[30] Nevertheless, preaching in the face of trauma is challenging rather than impossible. It is an opportunity for seminaries and congregations to become healing communities of God's grace in a world that is suffering greatly from trauma through the pulpit ministry.

Hence, preaching for trauma healing needs the homiletic imagination for the sermon's function as an instrument for collective trauma healing. The imagination is more than what the content is, and how to preach the trauma sermon. The homiletic imagination is about the preaching theological framework, the purposes or goals for trauma healing, and the characteristics of trauma preaching. Considering this imagination will help us, as a preacher, to get so many insights, inspirations, and ideas to design our sermons for trauma healing.

The homiletic imagination, first of all, lies in the theological framework of preaching trauma as a preaching in-between. The term 'in-between' comes from the trauma theology theory by Shelly Rambo. An "in-between" position in the reality of trauma means the witness [survivors, families, witnesses, and perpetrators] will be speaking in the difficult space between death and life, past and present, and absence and presence.[31] This is a liminal space that is not one thing or the other—it is a third space between death and resurrection. She continues by saying that bringing the "in-between" theology, which she interprets as the moment of Holy Saturday in the liturgical Christian calendar, into preaching means preaching the reality of hopelessness through the death of God, yet also the reality of a new beginning.[32] A Holy Saturday sermon admits there is no way to reconcile death and life but affirms there is a Spirit who bridges the two and makes it possible to cross between them.[33]

The preaching in-between framework for trauma healing means such preaching takes place when the preacher resists, according to Joni Sancken, preaching giving easy answers.[34] Nevertheless, the preaching admits the messiness of the stories of the traumatized and makes room for irregularities that result from trauma. Sometimes, there is no clear conclusion to a disorderly and incoherent story shared in the sermon. Wagner provides a clear example of preaching in a liminal place that

> Preaching does not shy away from hard emotions, grief, or lament but embraces and even models these hard truths in the preaching event. At the same time, this preaching does not resist the longing for hope or the promises of God that, though not always sensed at the moment, are already present and coming toward us. Such preaching lives in the tension between brokenness

[30] Ibid.
[31] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*, 3.
[32] Ibid., 73.
[33] Ibid., 73-4.
[34] Joni S. Sancken, *Words That Heal: Preaching Hope to Wounded Souls*, The Artistry of Preaching Series (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019), 22.

and hope, between death and resurrection, between loss and redemption.[35]

She continues her homiletical approach to the trauma-aware preaching framework through a proposal of eschatological hope as the good news communicated in preaching. A message about Christ's resurrection as a form of God's mercy and grace offers future hope, redemption, and comfort to all creation.[36] She argues that such eschatological hope is based on the cross of Christ, which shows that God takes upon Godself the path of suffering and abandonment and then transforms it into new life. The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ show the redeeming and life-giving character of God, who does not ignore or erase pain and suffering. He instead takes that suffering, redeems it, overcomes it, and transforms it.[37]

Wagner encourages preachers to commit to holding an eschatological tension that takes seriously "both the horrid reality of the traumatic experience and the promise of God."[38] In fact, there is a tendency to preach more about hope and God's promises and ignore the pain, hurt, disorientation, and suffering. The fear of re-traumatizing listeners by mentioning traumatic events can undermine the tension of eschatological hope, with sermons offering instead cheap grace. Preaching only hope can create an unsafe space for traumatized people.[39] At the other extreme, there is a tendency to glorify pain and suffering in preaching. Fearful of giving false assurance and cheap grace, preachers ignore the message of redemption that God has affected and, as a result, allow trauma to steal the message of hope and anticipation of the future.[40] The solution is preaching in tension: "holding the reality of brokenness, pain, and traumatic loss on one side and hope, resurrection, and redemption on the other."[41]

Preaching on Psalm 137 is a great example of an eschatological hope sermon that holds the tension in-between. As a communal lament genre, the Psalm defines what the trauma preaching scholars agree with: lamentation is a language of faith that reveals the paradoxical reality of brokenness and hope that is part of life. In the Bible, the genre of lament, including Psalm 137, shows the fragility of human beings, their response to suffering, and their courage to bring that suffering to God.[42] In the terms of Bruggemann, the genre shows "the act of bold faith."[43] The faith that pictures the expression of freedom to speak everything to God. The psalmists learn to speak freely and honestly to God about everything they don't understand that has happened in life.[44] Moreover, the lament genre reflects a life of faith that shows the vulnerability of human beings as well as the intimate relationship with the holiness of God.[45]

---

[35] Kimberly R. Wagner, *Fractured Ground: Preaching in the Wake of Mass Trauma*, Kindle (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2023), 96.

[36] Wagner, *Fractured Ground: Preaching in the Wake of Mass Trauma*, 62.

[37] Ibid., 63.

[38] Ibid., 65.

[39] Ibid., 66-7.

[40] Ibid., 68.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Joni S. Sancken, *All Our Griefs to Bear: Responding with Resilience after Collective Trauma* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2022), 60.

[43] Brueggemann, *The Message of Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, 52.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Lament: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2014), chap. 1, loc. 447, Kindle.

Therefore, lament gives voice to those who are voiceless because of trauma, provides healing when individuals and communities of lamenters have space to bring their plea, becomes a form of protest against injustice that is brought before God and the public, and presents people's faith to a God who can heal the world in its broken condition.[46]

From the Psalm 137 interpretation above, this Psalm gives an example to create a space for traumatized individuals and communities through name the painful reality and to tell the truth of what has happened and what has been broken or lost because of traumatic events by remembering and forgetting the place, the emotions, activities, and situations. Naming and truth-telling are part of the process of trauma healing. Wagner believes that "naming grief, guilt, and gratitude (among other feelings) invites people to bring what they are carrying into the preaching space before God and one another."[47] Travis says the same, suggesting, "Perhaps preaching is also an opportunity to give a name to the nameless, unspeakable reality of trauma."[48] When a preacher names events or tragedies as trauma, sermons give language or vocabulary to the very real emotions and experiences that shape the individual and community's lives.[49]

Another function of lamentation is to address the relationship between the lamenters, others, God, and the community. When sin and systemic evil cause the breakdown of relationships, lament functions to bring about social change through community reconciliation. Lamenters crying out against those who have oppressed them is what Sancken calls constructive anger because it offers a radical critique of injustice, a call for change, and the desire to transform reality. The Psalm 137 exegesis above shows the act of resistance against the perpetrators through remembering and asking for condemnation against the enemies as a process of trauma healing and resilience. In fact, this act of resistance in preaching in-between summons preachers to be aware of and open up to the existence and nature of the sin and evil that cause violence, injustice, hate, destruction, loss, and hurt in the world. Preachers seek to identify sin and evil mindfully, invite the community to practice confession, and tell them about God's grace and love, thus making it possible to defeat evil in the world. This sort of preaching creates a safe place for people to bring their brokenness, as well as to promote justice and peace.[50]

In addition, lament preaching demonstrates solidarity between the preacher, the audience, and the wounded community. Psalm 137:1-4 shows the transition of speaking from a first-person plural to the first-person singular as a process of resilience in trauma healing. It reminds us of what Sancken points out, "Lament in preaching uses 'we' language to include the preacher in solidarity with the suffering and to acknowledge our own complicity in the cause of lament." [51] The 'we' in lament suggests an inseparable relationship between preachers and the wounded

[46] Kimberly R. Wagner, "What Do We Preach? Trauma, Lament, and Social Action," *Call to Worship* 52, no. 3 (2018):12, https://www.preachingandtrauma.com/post/what-do-we-preach-trauma-lament-and-social-action; Wagner, *Fractured Ground: Preaching in the Wake of Mass Trauma*, 53, 180-1.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Travis, *Unspeakable: Preaching and Trauma-Informed Theology*, ch. 3, loc. 1674.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Wagner, *Fractured Ground: Preaching in the Wake of Mass Trauma*, 61.

[51] Sancken, *All Our Griefs to Bear: Responding with Resilience after Collective Trauma*, 67.

community, who share the same experience of violence and bear witness to the suffering caused. Therefore, the community of faith, the place where the sermon is preached, "Contributes to promoting healing by respecting and listening to the life experiences of all, including those who are marginalized, giving them the assurance that the voices of suffering will be heard and accepted."[52]

In her sermon proposal, she encourages the preachers to pay attention "not only to *what* [they] say, but *how* they say it."[53] It means she offers not only the content but also the form of the eschatological hope sermon. She recommends that the sermon form reflect the collective trauma condition through the narrative fracture of traumatic experiences of dislocation and disconnect. The form acknowledges and preserves the narrative fracture. Biblical texts, according to her, demonstrate narrative fracture, sometimes rendering their narrative unclear and incoherent.[54] Ambiguity and confusion often remain unexplained until the end as a part of the faith journey:

> The biblical texts call us to a faith that is formed, not through having all the pieces together in a smooth narrative or unshakeable interlocking tower of theological claims, but through the ongoing negotiation and piecing together of fragments with and alongside the biblical text. The texts themselves can model the kind of narratively fractured forms that may serve well in the wake of mass trauma.[55]

Psalm 137 is an example of the eschatological hope sermon form. Bruggemann demonstrates that one of the seasons in Psalm is disorientation, which shows that the life of human beings is sometimes full of "disequilibrium, incoherence, and unrelieved asymmetry."[56] The psalmists used the linguistic form to show that life was imagined and pretended as good, even though it was not in reality. This form is a type of freedom of expression in the journey of human faith. It shows the disorder of life as well as the courage to recognize God's presence in it.[57] Psalm 137 encounters us with a sense of disorientation. The memory of Jerusalem evoked the psalmists' vision of a hopeful life in their homeland, yet they were actually in exile. Additionally, the psalmists maintain the tension between pain and hope for a better future by expressing anger and curses toward the oppressors (vv. 3-4, 7-8).

PREACHING PSALM 137 IN PRACTICE

I share a bit of the experience of implementing the preaching on Psalm 137 into practice. In March 2022, I created a preaching group from the congregation in Jakarta, Indonesia, the community where I ministered for twenty-five years. The members of the group were involved in the sermon process, from preparation to performing the sermon.[58] We met, through Zoom,

[52] Eliana Ah Rum Ku, "A Call for Practicing Hospitality Based on Lament in Preaching for a Wounded Community," *Homiletic* 47, no. 2 (November 30, 2022): 20, https://www.homiletic.net/index.php/homiletic/article/view/5368.

[53] Wagner, *Fractured Ground: Preaching in the Wake of Mass Trauma*, 79.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Brueggemann, *The Message of Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, 51.

[57] Ibid., 52-3.

[58] The Jakarta May 1998 tragedy is one of the political-economic riots in Indonesia during 1997-2000. The tragedy occurred on 13-15 of May 1998 after several college students killed by the military when they staged

for a month to prepare and present the sermon. We chose and wrestled with Psalm 137 as the material for the sermon. We went through the process of interpreting and reflecting on Psalm 137 in relation to the experience of the traumatic events of May 1998 in Jakarta. We had so many ideas for the sermon. However, for a sermon project, we were determined:

- *Claim of the text*: God is present in human suffering and restores people's lives by remembering their wounds and not forgetting the pain of injustice.
- *Focus*: We are allowed to lament over our disappointment and anger, but simultaneously, we hope in God to recover from our wounds through the process of remembering.
- *Function*: The listeners dare to name their wounds and disappointments and put them into words as part of the process of trauma healing that God is granting them.

Then, we discussed the delivery process: the form, the preachers, the listeners, the framework of the sermon, the manuscript, the technology equipment, and feedback.

Feedback from listeners and group members is an important component in assessing the success of this model for the collective trauma healing process in Indonesia. The listeners' feedback revealed that those present were able to absorb the content in line with the focus and function of the sermon. The listeners became involved in the trauma-healing process through the conversation topics that were deliberately raised in this project. From team members' feedback, they clearly acknowledged having entered the collective trauma-healing process.

---

the demonstrations to urge President Suharto, the second President of Indonesia, step down. The demonstrators, a combination of students from various universities and the communities, considered the government failed to overcome the monetary crisis in Indonesia. The deaths of the students sparked public anger and led to an even bigger wave of demonstrations. It is unclear how it happened that the mass of people turned to destroying and torching shops and houses belonging to the ethnic Chinese, including many large shopping malls in

Jakarta. Television stations broadcast scenes of mobs of poor people looting the damaged shops and malls and happily carrying away all the goods they could grab. A tragedy took place in Jakarta, Tangerang, and Depok on May 14. More than ten thousand stores were broken into and looted, thousands of vehicles and houses were destroyed, and some public transportation was damaged. Other shopping malls in East Jakarta and Tangerang were burned on May 15, and thousands of people were killed because the perpetrators locked the mall doors when they were inside

See Ester Indahyani Jusuf et al., *Kerusuhan Mei 1998 Fakta, Data Dan Analisa: Mengungkap Kerusuhan Mei 1998 Sebagai Kejahatan Terhadap Kemanusiaan (Fact, Data, and Analysis on the May 1998 Riots: Reveal the May 1998 Riots as the Humanity Crimes)*, ed. Raymond R. Simanjorang (Jakarta, Indonesia: Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa, The Lawyers and Indonesia Human Right Association, and TIFA Foundation, 2005), 172; Tim Relawan untuk Kemanusiaan, *Sujud Di Hadapan Korban: Tragedi Jakarta Mei 1998 (Bow Down in Front of the Victims: Jakarta May 1998 Tragedy)* (Jakarta, Indonesia: Divisi Data Tim Relawan, 1998), table 5. During the May 1998 tragedy, another drama was the rape of hundreds of ethnic Chinese women. The Team of Volunteers for Humanity mentioned that rape victims and sexual harassment reached 152. See Sandyawan Sumardi, "Rape Is Rape: A New Movement Resists the Terror and Expresses Solidarity with the Chinese Indonesian Women Who Were Raped in Jakarta in May," *Online Inside Indonesia*, September 22, 2007, https://www.insideindonesia.org/rape-is-rape-3.[58] The victims were raped and harassed in front of other family members. Moreover, some victims were raped on the street, witnessed by many people. Some of them have since chosen to kill themselves, and the victims who became pregnant opted for abortions. A few developed mental health conditions. Their families sent them to other cities or countries in the hope of saving them and finding healing for them.

They realized and accepted that they had been traumatized by the Jakarta riots in May 1998. In the past, they didn't understand their fear and anxiety when, for example, they saw crowds gathering and shouting or their anger at witnessing injustice. However, the project exposed the fact that this reaction was symptomatic of the trauma that exists in them because of the violence of May 1998, which they experienced and witnessed. The project also invited them to recognize the trauma of violence as something real in the history of human life, as witnessed in the Bible and by themselves in the present context. Similarly, God, who is present in the suffering of people in the Bible, is also present in their suffering. These experiences in the project become the language of faith that gives them hope as they enter the trauma recovery process, even though they have to remember and accept the wounds that have been covered due to trauma.

CONCLUSION

The book of Psalms is a rare book that is used as a biblical text for preaching. There are several reasons for preachers to avoid preaching the Psalms, such as their characteristic as a prayer rather than preaching, their poetic style requires multiple interpretations for preaching, and the difficulties in transferring their language into the present cultural language. However, the Psalms are a unique book in the Bible that teaches us about the intimate relationship with God as a faith form of human beings. Intimacy with God is seen through the courage of the psalmist in expressing anger, thankfulness, petitions, and accusations to God.

In the goal of preaching trauma healing, the lament genre of psalms functions as a form of catharsis from wounds, pains, and suffering caused by the experience of individual or communal injustice. When the psalmists cry out and reveal their emotions to God, they undergo a healing process from the impact of the catastrophes that they have experienced in life. Furthermore, the function of the lament genre of psalms is to fight for justice, especially when individuals or the community experience trauma because of the oppression of their enemies. The pleas to punish, and the imprecations against the enemies, become a way of resisting unjust situations and represent trust in a God who stands for justice.

Even though the trauma healing process of trauma needs many layers of processes, such as pastoral activities and programs, preaching the Psalms has the possibility to be a healing process and a form of resistance to crimes committed by oppressive tyrants. Preaching the Psalms is not just a preaching tradition carried out by major preachers and theologians in the past. It is the Word of God speaking in history, the present, and in the future of a human being's life. Preaching the Psalms can also help listeners grow their faith in God, not only in good times, but also during conditions of catastrophe.

Psalm 137 shows both pastoral and prophetic elements for people or communities dealing with trauma. When trauma reduces trust between the members of a community, little by little, the community's laments in Psalms teach the ways in which the bond of community is important for healing such trauma through the exposure of the voicing of wounds, not only of an individual member, but also of the whole community. Moreover, Psalm 137 reflects the power of memory in healing trauma and fighting for justice. Trauma becomes stuck in the traumatic memory of the past, and speaking out loud is a way to elaborate on the "delayed" memories.[59] Preaching Psalm 137 is not only a cathartic approach, but it can transform the

[59] I use Cathy Caruth's term for the condition of people who have experienced trauma, where their

traumatic memory into a narrative memory that offers a recovery. Psalm 137 sermon invites the community to break the silence of injustice from traumatic memories. The sermon calls us to resist oppression and to fight for the oppressed in the name of God. Such resilient activities can help people or communities with trauma endure suffering and persist against injustice.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahn, John. "Psalm 137: Complex Communal Laments." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 2 (2008): 267–89. https://doi.org/10.2307/25610120.

Bellinger, William H Jr. "Psalm 137: Memory and Poetry." *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 27, no. 2 (December 2005): 5–20. https://doi.org/10.1163/187122005x00077.

Brueggemann, Walter. *The Message of Psalms: A Theological Commentary*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984.

Caruth, Cathy. "Introduction." In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth. Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Erikson, Kai T. *Everything in Its Path: Deconstruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1976.

———. "Loss of Communality at Buffalo Creek." *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 133, no. 3 (March 1976): 303–5. https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.133.3.302.

Jusuf, Ester Indahyani, Hotma Timbul Hutapea, Olisias Gultom, and Sondang Frishka. *Kerusuhan Mei 1998 Fakta, Data Dan Analisa: Mengungkap Kerusuhan Mei 1998 Sebagai Kejahatan Terhadap Kemanusiaan (Fact, Data, and Analysis on the May 1998 Riots: Reveal the May 1998 Riots as the Humanity Crimes)*. Edited by Raymond R. Simanjorang. Jakarta, Indonesia: Solidaritas Nusa Bangsa, The Lawyers and Indonesia Human Right Association, and TIFA Foundation, 2005.

Kolk, Bessel A. van der. *The Body Keeps the Scores: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York, NY: Viking, 2014.

Ku, Eliana Ah Rum. "A Call for Practicing Hospitality Based on Lament in Preaching for a Wounded Community." *Homiletic* 47, no. 2 (November 30, 2022): 15–26. https://www.homiletic.net/index.php/homiletic/article/view/5368.

Kwon, Hyeokil. "Remembrance, Nonidentity, and Lament: A Reading of Psalm 137 for Liberation from the Unfinished Suffering of Colonization." 한국기독교신학논총 81 (May 2012): 59–78. http://www.dbpia.co.kr/journal/publicationDetail?publicationId=PLCT00006256#none.

Langberg, Diane. *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2015.

Rambo, Shelly. *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*. Louisville, Kentucky:

memory of the tragedy is unregistered for such long time. See Cathy Caruth, "Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 7.

Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

Sancken, Joni S. *All Our Griefs to Bear: Responding with Resilience after Collective Trauma*. Harrisonburg, Virginia: Herald Press, 2022.

———. *Words That Heal: Preaching Hope to Wounded Souls*. The Artistry of Preaching Series. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2019.

Schreiter, Robert J. "Reading Biblical Texts through the Lens of Resilience." In *Bible through the Lens of Trauma,* edited by Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette. Atlanta, Georgia: SBL Publisher, 2016.

Simango, Daniel. "A Comprehensive Reading of Psalm 137." *Old Testament Essays* 31, no. 1 (2018): 217–42. https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2018/v31n1a11.

Stern, Philip. "Psalm 137: The Babylonian Exile: Pieces of the Puzzle." *Religion and History* Midstream (August 2007): 33–36. https://0-link-galegroup-com.grace.gtu.edu/apps/doc/A166933958/PPRP?sid=lms.

Sumardi, Sandyawan. "Rape Is Rape: A New Movement Resists the Terror and Expresses Solidarity with the Chinese Indonesian Women Who Were Raped in Jakarta in May." *Online Inside Indonesia,* September 22, 2007. https://www.insideindonesia.org/rape-is-rape-3.

Tim Relawan untuk Kemanusiaan. *Sujud Di Hadapan Korban: Tragedi Jakarta Mei 1998 (Bow Down in Front of the Victims: Jakarta May 1998 Tragedy)*. Jakarta, Indonesia: Divisi Data Tim Relawan, 1998.

Travis, Sarah. *Unspeakable: Preaching and Trauma-Informed Theology*. Kindle. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2021.

Wagner, Kimberly R. *Fractured Ground: Preaching in the Wake of Mass Trauma*. Kindle. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2023.

———. "The Work We Can't Ignore: Preaching and Gun Violence." *Interpretation* 76, no. 3 (July 1, 2022): 235–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/00209643221096132.

———. "What Do We Preach? Trauma, Lament, and Social Action." *Call to Worship* 52, no. 3 (2018): 8–15. https://www.preachingandtrauma.com/post/what-do-we-preach-trauma-lament-and-social-action.

Waltke, Bruce K., James M. Houston, and Erika Moore. *The Psalms as Christian Lament: A Historical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2014.