

“What are we waiting for?”
Lamentations 3:19-26
Brentwood First Presbyterian
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Introduction

Lamentations is a collection of 5 poems, possibly written by 5 different authors, but we are not sure. Scholars say it was not written by Jeremiah, despite what is claimed, because the writing style of the book of Jeremiah is very different than the writing style of Lamentations. Scholars feel these poems were written in response to the devastation of Jerusalem by Babylon, present day Iraq, over 500 years before the birth of Jesus. It is a collection of poems weeping over a nation destroyed. And they are poems expressing an inability to see God and to hear God’s voice. It is a brutal book. But in today’s world we ignore Lamentations. We neglect it because of its troubling content of grief and anger, and because of the predominance of denial in our culture. Today’s reading is from the third poem in the quintet. We hear from different speakers in Lamentations. The speakers the first two poems are an omniscient narrator and a personification of Jerusalem known as the Daughter of Zion. But the third poem of Lamentations 3 introduces a third speaker, a strong man. He is another survivor of the destruction of Jerusalem. And he brings a new view of the catastrophe.

Scene 1

The strong man feels bitterness. He is anything but stable. He sinks into being overwhelmed with depression over things spinning out of control.

We read in the news this week of the murderous oppression of monks and protestors by the government of Burma. Our world is made small when we realize that whatever happens to someone on the other side of the world also affects us. How fitting

for us to think about and pray for people of different cultures, and yes, even different religions, on this, World Communion Sunday, and in so doing become one with the whole world. Therese of Calcutta said once that the way to achieve world peace in our time is for each of us to live into ever enlarging and inclusive circles of people.

We heard recently that even Therese of Calcutta had her moments of doubt. Severe distrust in God's promises. She, the cultural icon of closeness to God, is accused of hypocrisy. Of going through the motions without spiritual direction. Some are shocked.

That Therese of Calcutta had moments of distrust in God's promises is not what shocks me. It gives me comfort over those occasions in my past when I had trouble seeing God, when I now know that God is always present. Therese of Calcutta's distrust is not what shocks me. What shocks me is the glibness of her confessor, of the one in whom she confided. This is what shocks me.

All of us feel bitterness. All of us every now and then, sink into depression. But the third poem of Lamentations tells us there is something by which we are transformed.

Scene 2

In a sudden emotional reversal, the strong man of the third poem of Lamentations remembers. Remembers something that lifts him out of his emotional pit. He remembers that God's mercy and love are new every morning. He finds confident faith in the face of adversity. What gives him hope is God's faithfulness and mercy. Hope is his decision based on remembrance of divine mercy.

I am overwhelmed by all the things we need in our church. We need a light bulb changed. The ceiling in what used to be the pastor's study was dripping wet from air

conditioner condensation yesterday. We need new carpet, and new paint on the walls. Our children's playground is not up to snuff. I am overwhelmed.

But I remember that God will provide. And I look and listen for and see God's own face and hear God's own voice in the folks who approved ordering the carpet and playground equipment. Thank you, session members. In the folks who find a less expensive place from which to order our carpet. Thank you, Ed. In the folks who ordered them. Thank you, Kelly. And in the folks who painted the church, laid tile in the north narthex bathroom, who loaned a rototiller, who pulled weeds and spread mulch near the parking lot, and who brought food and ran errands. Thank you Kelly, Michelle, Wanda, Doak, Stella, Mary, and Powell. And thank you who stayed at home allowing others to work.

Prayer, Bible study, and recreation allow us to see God in both the small things and the big things. In the faces of the child, the homeless, the poor, the hungry. It allows us to hear not the devastation but the very voice of God in their cries for justice. We see and hear God in the devastation, and become living sanctuaries, tabernacles for God's Spirit.

We find sanctuary and become sanctuary by reading, listening, and praying on God's Word. In this way we remember God's mercy and love. But why does it not come in the current minute?

Scene 3

The strong man in the third poem of Lamentations waits. He tolerates today's adversity because he knows God is not finished. He waits. But does he wait for God? Does he wait for human help? Or does he wait for God working through humankind?

There is a story that goes like this. A man has a dream. In his dream he asks God a question. He asks: "Is it true that to you a million years is like a second?" God answers, "Yes." Then he asks: "Is it true to you a million dollars is like one penny?" God answers, "Yes." Then the man says: "Good. God, please wire me one million dollars to my bank account." God answers, "Wait a second."

While in Guatemala in June, I was anxious to get the 5 gallon bottle of water on my shoulders so I could carry it the last mile into the city. It was hot and we were all tired, and I think I pushed my desire to grab the water bottle too much. So a friend whose name is Gregg, from 2nd Presbyterian, told me what he says he tells his children. He said, "Mike, there is Gregg pace, and there is Mike pace. Since I am the one getting the water to you, we are going at Gregg pace." We laughed, he handed me the water bottle, and I forgot our conversation until the next day. Another friend of mine, a physician in Guatemala whose name is Kate, was riding in the back of the bus with us. She was thirsty and wanted to fill her personal water bottle, but she was pumping the water handle on the 5 gallon bottle too slowly and no water was coming. I told her she needed to pump it at "Mike pace" if she wanted any water. Though she was not aware of our prior conversation, she knew exactly what Mike pace was. She pumped vigorously and quickly, and the water started coming.

Yes, I have a reputation of thinking things have to happen at Mike pace. But injustice does not always become corrected when we think it should. It does not always occur at Mike pace. But why? What are the obstacles.

Eli Weasel was in a Nazi concentration camp. In front of the assembled detainees two men and one boy were being executed by hanging. The two men died instantly, but

the boy was not heavy enough. So instead of dying instantly from a broken neck, he kicked for 10 minutes while he died of suffocation. During this 10 minutes, which seemed like an eternity for the waiting inmates, the man behind Eli Weasel kept saying, “Where is God? Where is God? Where is God?” Eli did not have at the time an answer. But the more he thought about it, he realized God was up there on the scaffolds in the body of the young boy. That God is always present in the face of those suffering injustice.

How do you answer the question, “What are we waiting for, God, humankind, or God working through us?” What is the obstacle to the relief of injustice?

Conclusion

One final thought about where is God. Therese of Avila, in the thirteen hundreds, was a writer. This is highly unusual, because unfortunately so few women at that time were literate. She wrote an autobiography. In it, she said that Jesus’ body has died and gone to heaven to sit at the right hand of God. His body is no longer on earth. His body is gone to heaven. Jesus has no body on earth. Nobody, except us. You are now Jesus’ body. You are now God’s living sanctuary. The tabernacle of God’s Spirit. You are now God’s voice to speak up about injustice. You are now God’s hands and feet to correct injustice. What are you waiting for? Today in unity of Spirit with Christians all over the world, we celebrate that together we are the living sanctuary and tabernacle of God’s Spirit.

Glory be to God, Hallelujah, and all God’s children say ...

Let us now stand and sing Hymn #435 (We all are one in mission)