

WELCOME 23rd August 2020 – 12 Pentecost '20 A

Lamentations 3:19-33 & Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

(New Terrain Video) Welcome again this morning! I'm glad you're here AND I pray you experience God's grace in this brief time together. Please check our website for our weekly Zoom Bible Study catch-ups & other important information about our ministry.

We're continuing with our adapted worship...so as usual there are Group Study/Discussion resources available on our website & in your hands. *If you're on-line I trust you'll make your way through the songs we've linked to this morning. We're also in the Guide Hall so you're experiencing here what we're experiencing there. Our aim is to equip you so your home becomes a place of the Spirit working leading you & those you've gathered in your homes into the fullness of God's word & his work in your lives & then out into the city to share what God has done for you.*

Remember all the great things we need to do to keep each other as safe as we can in this unending season of "the virus." Hand sanitizer. Masks if you want them. Sign in. Distance. We'll clean everything afterwards so...thank you but just leave it there...

As we move into this week... (next 3 same slide)

Life on earth is constantly changing. It's true: "the only real constant is change." When things change quickly (Dr hits your knee, someone says "Boo"/unexpected noise, calamity) you don't think about it, you don't plan for it, you can't stop it...just happens...It's called a reflex. When life's challenges hit; you revert to your reflexes. In our current shifting & changed landscape...or when your life-scape is suddenly altered by illness, loss, grief, it can be hard to find your feet & know which way is up. In those circumstances, we out of reflex, do 1 of 3 things...fight the change angrily aggressively, take flight & run from the change or freeze...shut down...curl into a ball...harden ourselves against whatever's next.

In this season when we have lost much...& stand to lose who knows how much more...when we grieve all that is no longer available to us & the future uncertainties/losses loom large & overpowering...What's your reflexive response?

The OT prophet Jeremiah, in the ruin of his nation, when all was lost said *I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies are new every morning. I say to myself, "The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!"*

Living through grief or loss is painful. Wherever you are in that today, & we all are in some way...God promises that his steadfast love, his faithful presence & his unfailing strength make thriving in loss & grief possible. We are able to live fully knowing that the Father in Christ assures us we have a certain & secure hope and life with him beyond the reach of change & decay...and we are given grace sufficient for today.

We'll explore and experience that together... Let's pray...then we'll get stuck into it.

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

Living God, in your presence there is fullness of life and love. Draw us deeper into the life of your Son that the fullness of his love may flow out of our lives to others. Draw us deeper into him and out of the fear that surrounds us or the doubts that crowd in. Draw us deeper into Christ and freedom in his life. Lead us out of our self-imposed shackles or the bondage imposed by the world. Use us as agents of your Kingdom of grace through Jesus Christ who gave his life so all could be redeemed. Amen.

Let's hear God's Word then we'll sing...

FAITH CHAT:

1. When life gets hard, what's your reflexive response? Why do you think that is?
2. When you need a minute's peace or a reprieve from life's burdens, what do you do?

BIBLES

12 Pentecost '20 A - NEW TERRAIN: THRIVING IN LIFE'S CHANGES – THRIVING IN GRIEF & LOSS

Maybe you're old enough to remember a day the world changed forever...Pearl Harbor...Kennedy assassinated... Moon landing...911...you might name others... Certainly when SARS-CoV-2 became a worldwide reality...dispersing from a place in China most of us can't find on a map...Our lives were made undeniably different...We have no way of knowing if/when we will regain some way of living we recognize as "normal." We have lost much & stand to lose perhaps much more. The world is forever tainted by this virus; but even more by the *FEAR* accorded to it.

Maybe you're more familiar with the day *YOUR WORLD* changed forever...a sudden death of a loved one, cross-country/continent move, unexpected pregnancy, retirement unforeseen illness/job loss, bushfires 2020...Even surprising *GOOD* turns of events cause our knees to buckle under us; as if we've slipped on a patch of black ice

For a large part of his adult life, Jeremiah warned God's people *THAT DAY* would come; their sin would surely destroy them...their unfaith would be their end... rebellion couldn't go forever unpunished...*THAT DAY* would come & it did. Jerusalem was overrun by Nebuchadnezzar's armies. The slaughter was unrelenting. The destruction complete. Annihilation was mild compared to what really happened. That day when the world changed forever dawned & Jeremiah began to write again: *Jerusalem, once so full of people, is now deserted. She who was once great among the nations now sits alone like a widow. Once the queen of all the earth, she is now a slave. – Lam 1:1* Amidst the smoking ruins of homes & fields & the temple...w/ bodies decaying in the streets & the sobs/screams of those being dragged away into captivity...God's prophet laments...

Jerusalem had been one of the most vibrant places of the ancient near east. Under the father/son dynasty of David & Solomon her wealth was uncountable, her beauty breath taking/stunning. Her powerful armies undefeatable. Temple; beyond compare Nations flocked to Jerusalem for trade & for learning...She was a jewel & served as the place where God's presence dwelt. Now...a ghost town...Jeremiah howls in agony for the catastrophic loss for which there are no adequate words. How do you respond to a loss beyond compare...? How do you speak of dreams hope joy everything you've ever know blown to the winds destroyed decimated...? How do you acknowledge God in the fires of destruction?

OT scholar Delbert Hillers says Lamentations is the negative image of Ps 23...From the moment Nebuchadnezzar's armies appeared on the horizon all they knew was want. Famine starvation siege...driven at last to cannibalism. They are led not into green

pastures but driven into utter darkness away from the light of God's presence. God's rod/staff are not protecting/guiding his people but punishing them. It is not God's goodness that pursues his people but his wrath that chases them into exile. All the prophetic warnings had come to pass in one fell swoop...(next 6 randomly around slide)

And if you're like me & I think we all are a bit like Jeremiah at that moment the questions pour out because the questions are all we have left... Has God finally removed his love from us after all we have done? Has God finally reached his breaking point, & we're out of 2nd chances? I can't see God in this anywhere...Has he finally turned away from us forever? Everything is gone...For what do I have left to live? Is there anything on the horizon worth my hope?

Pr JD Greear writes: "Real faith grows out of honestly expressed doubt: What you'll find is that God's grace & love don't cloud over doubt; they go deeper than doubt. Until you have deep questions & deep pain you'll probably not have a deep experience of God. So God lets you have those so you can encounter a God whose love & wisdom & glory are deeper than your pain."

Jeremiah is different from us in 1 way...He never asked "Why?" We often lead w/ Why. Why me? Why this? Why now? He knew why...He knew why they experienced defeat & destruction. They lived in utter rebellion against God. They took advantage of every blessing & tossed 'em away like rubbish. They lived as God for themselves & scoffed at the very idea of being accountable for their sin. He knew why...But you see knowing why doesn't help. Knowing why doesn't make the pain less. Knowing why doesn't rebuild the Temple or bring life back to the slain. Knowing why doesn't dry a single tear. Knowing why doesn't heal a gaping wound on your heart or a rip in your soul. Knowing why this virus blew out onto the world & into our aged-care facilities doesn't make it go away. Knowing why your business collapsed in the middle of the quarantine/lockdown doesn't bring your job back/pay your house note. Knowing why that P-plater hit the tree doesn't...Knowing why doesn't fix/heal/restore.

Just knowing...as Solomon does writing that beautiful poetry in Ecclesiastes...that in a broken world we see our lives tossed back & forth b/t extremes like a boat on the ocean up over a swell & down into the valley behind. Are we just human pendulums swung wildly b/t birth/death planting/harvest killing/healing love/hate war/peace & the others? Are we just victims of time & circumstance that just roll on & roll over us *OR* is there something Some One greater at work in our daily lives? Knowing why doesn't fix...heal...restore...maybe if we knew *Who*... (next 3 same slide)

We reach vs 18: *I cry out, "My splendor is gone! Everything I had hoped for from the Lord is lost!"* I've heard that feeling expressed quite a bit in the last months...The uncertainty not just of the present day but for the future...For Jeremiah God's judgment has become personal & overwhelming. There exists no minute's peace or interlude of happiness, no respite, no endurance or hope, & the grief of the moment is relentless. When the fear keeps you trapped in your home or behind a mask or in endless hand-cleansings & distances you still don't trust. When the advice fluxuates & "experts" don't agree or directly contradict each other...when the best efforts fail...repeatedly. But then; vs 21ff: *Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, "The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!"*

Jeremiah can only see the exile's beginning. He will not live to see its end. Only for the 2nd time in Lamentations do we read the word hope & only here is it in the positive...How does that happen? Hope does not come from circumstances. Jeremiah can still see the annihilation right before his eyes. Circumstances are what they are. But hope comes from Who you know to be true despite the circumstances around you. In other words, you live through suffering by Who you trust, not by what you see or feel. You thrive through grief & loss not because you change your situation or your circumstances, but by Who you trust despite what your eyes see. Lamentations mourns the "thing" that has happened, but it anchors that grief in the bedrock of God's character & the promise of future restoration. Lament can be one of the most faith-filled things we could ever do. We "call to mind" "remember" what we really believe about God. Only faith can lament. Doubt complains. Only faith can hope. Doubt wallows in cynicism. This is not the only place in the Bible where we see this perspective of trusting "Who" giving up on the "why/when." *Hab 3:17-19 - Though the fig tree does not bud & there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails & the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen & no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.* Habakkuk sees same sort of devastation as Jeremiah & in faith resorts to praise.

Faith is not believing the unbelievable out of sheer blindfolded denial. It is holding on to the gift once given, despite whatever present realities call that gift into question. Jeremiah calls to mind/remembers that God's history of saving & loving & leading his people is now & has always been a one-step-at-a-time way of living. Manna &

quail only came for the day. The pillar of cloud & fire only moved when it was time to move & stopped when it was time to stop. Jesus taught us to pray, *"give us today our daily bread."* Jesus spoke to Paul, *"My grace is sufficient for you..."* Jesus taught the disciples, *"So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today."* And in today's trouble his grace is enough for today...even if tomorrow's uncertainties are still uncertain.

Lam 3:55-58 - I called on your name, Lord, from deep within the pit. You heard me when I cried, "Listen to my pleading! Hear my cry for help!" Yes, you came when I called; you told me, "Do not fear." Lord, you have come to my defense; you have redeemed my life. Faith ultimately leads me to the One who was *pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins...beaten so we could be whole...whipped so we could be healed*, who suffered divine abandonment for our sake, who knew firsthand the terror of feeling "utterly rejected" by God & God's people...but who was raised so we could share his resurrection. (ADD SLIDE HERE)

I still dare to hope when I repeat again & again in my desperate moments – seasons of uncertainty & great distress... Has God finally had enough of us...washed his hands of humankind? No - *The faithful love of the Lord never ends!* Has God finally reached his breaking point, & I've exhausted his patience? No - *His mercies never cease.* I can't see God in this anywhere...Has he finally turned away from us? No - *Great is his faithfulness; his mercies are new every morning.* Everything is gone...For what do I have left to live? *I say to myself, "The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!"* Is there anything on the horizon worth my hope? In every bleak moment, the Father's character stands

I say to myself, "The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!" This is not be a simple "fix" to the issues of our day. It will not raise me to the clouds beyond the troubles of the world; but it reminds me God has plunged himself into the depths of this world to share my terror & unbelief & thus give me, in Christ, a place to stand...a person to trust...a hand to hold & a hope to cling to. God promises his steadfast love, his faithful presence & his unflinching strength make thriving in loss & grief possible. We are able to live fully knowing that the Father in Christ assures us we have a certain & secure hope and life with him beyond the reach of change & decay AND we are given grace sufficient for today.

Let's pray with that in mind: **Father you are good to those who trust in you. Turn our hearts away from the difficulties of the day and toward your mercy which is new every day. Let us be quiet in your presence as a child held by its mother. Give us your strength in each moment, your love in every breath, and the boldness to declare your Name before the world We pray through Jesus Christ... Amen**

