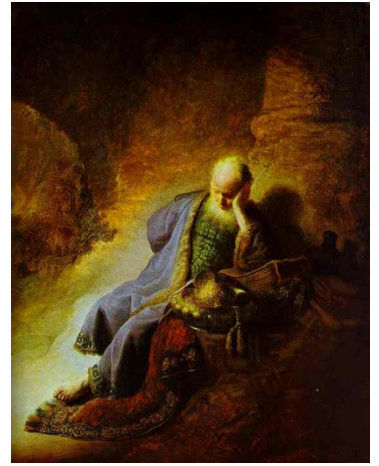


St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Pentecost 6 July 12, 2009
Lamentations 3:22-33



Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust – there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to the one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace. For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

I have a friend named Gerta. When she was little girl she lived in Germany during World War II. She lived in a big city – that was bombed by the Allies. Terrible sirens would go off – kind of like the ones you hear in Watertown – the tornado warning. When those sirens would go off – Gerta and her family would run for their basement – down into the cellar – reinforced – kind of like an igloo – all the walls rounded – to bear the load – if the whole house collapsed on it. Gerta and her family would huddle in their basement bomb shelter – while the bombs rained down – reducing everything to absolute rubble – and then more bombs would fall – making the rubble bounce. When the pounding finally stopped – those who survived would take their shovels – to try and dig out their neighbors – quite literally buried alive in their basements! Then came the search for puddles of rainwater – for water to drink and wash off sweat and blood and tears and dirt. On a good day you could throw a brick or a chunk of cement or a stone and hit a rodent. Then you would have meat. Weeds were the closest to salad and vegetables. If fruit trees didn't die from their branches being blown off – if their trunks didn't split from the bombs – then maybe you would find a piece of fruit. At night – children would go to sleep crying – because their tummy hurt – because they were so hungry. Mommies who were expecting were worried that something would happen to their baby before it was born. Mommies worried about when it would be time to give birth – that something might go terribly wrong! Can you imagine how terrible that must have been? It's times of trouble like that – that make even the most difficult times today – pale in comparison. Today as we consider God's Word – God's people back in the days of the prophet Jeremiah we will be reminded:

The LORD's Compassion Never Fails!

1. *The LORD is faithful every day*
2. *Wait patiently for the LORD's rescue*

The book – the scroll we are concentrating on today – was first called *How* – from the first Hebrew word *how* – as in v.1 **How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave.** During the 400 years between Malachi – and the birth of

baby Jesus – God’s people translated the Old Testament into Greek – they called this book The Tears of Jeremiah! How sad is that? When the Greek was translated into Latin – it was called The Lamentations of Jeremiah That’s what is often called today – Lamentations. Sometimes – when the Holy Spirit breathed into the minds and hearts of the writers of Scripture – he used some very beautiful literary styles – to make it possible for people to memorize – to remember God’s Word. That’s what he did here. The first four chapters of The Tears of Jeremiah are acrostics. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Chapters 1,2 and 4 are acrostics – each line begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet – aleph, beth, gimmel, dalet. Chapter 3 is a triple acrostic---AAA, BBB, GGG, DDD. Pretty cool!

Times were exceedingly painful in the days of Jeremiah. The Babylonian army – famous for their bloody, violent cruelty had completely run over Jerusalem. Jeremiah wrote, **“Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer. He has barred my way with blocks of stone; he has made my paths crooked. Like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in hiding, he dragged me from the path and mangled me and left me without help. He drew his bow and made me the target for his arrows. He pierced my heart with arrows from his quiver. I became the laughingstock of all my people; they mock me in song all day long. He has filled me with bitter herbs and sated me with gall. He has broken my teeth with gravel, he has trampled me in the dust.”** Lamentations 3:8-16 It is always sad when God’s Word says the animals in God’s creation better understand their Heavenly Father’s will and better serve their Heavenly Father. How sad when the LORD can say, **“Even jackals offer their breasts to nurse their young, but my people have become heartless like ostriches in the desert.”** Lamentations 3:3 **“The punishment of my people is greater than that of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment without a hand turned to help her.”** Lamentations 3:6 **This is what the LORD says: “Your wound is incurable, your injury beyond healing. There is no one to plead your cause, no remedy for your sore, no healing for you.”** Jeremiah 30:12. Do you get a sense of the white hot anger of God against sins of pride and arrogance and materialism and self-righteousness? The sins that we must see in our nation and in our homes and in our very own lives? Still – there is hope for God’s people. Remember the passage Pastor Schneider recalled last Sunday – from Jeremiah? **“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you, not to harm you, plans to give you hope and future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”** Jeremiah 29:11-3 and again Jeremiah wrote, **“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”** Jeremiah 31:3b God is love! This is his essence – to love and forgive for Jesus’ sake!

Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed... Sometimes when we have troubles and painful problems – it is tempting to feel sorry for our self – to even grumble and complain bitterly against the LORD. To say, “This isn’t fair! I don’t deserve this!” The fact is – it is only because of the LORD’s great love that we aren’t consumed – quite literally burned forever in the flaming lake of fire in hell! The attitude we need is that of the tax collector who went by the Temple to pray. He didn’t even look up to heaven – but pounded his own heart with his fist and prayed, **“God be merciful to me a sinner!”** We deserve only God’s wrath and punishment. What we receive is his grace and forgiveness – for Jesus’ sake!

Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Every morning – every day – each fresh beginning Jesus is with us! Every morning – when you wake up – in that moment before you get up out of bed – with those little eye krispies – with your bed-head – the little dents in your cheek from your pillow and your sheets – know that Jesus’ forgiving love is

there – to forgive whatever goes wrong today. Jesus’ forgiveness is there to sustain you – new every day!

Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust – there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to the one who would strike him... Did you hear that? **Let him offer his cheek to the one who would strike him...** Do you know how strong you have to be – to have someone hit you – and not immediately – instinctively – hit them back even harder? Is this some goofy idea that Jeremiah had? No – this is an idea that comes from God himself. Remember what Jesus himself said in the Sermon on the Mount? Jesus said, **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you... Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...”** Matthew 5:38f The Apostle Paul wrote about this too! Paul told Romans – **Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink, in doing this you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** Romans 12:19-21 It would be exceedingly easy – to sit back in a padded pew – with stained glass beside you and a bigger than life cross in front of you to think with a cynical heart – that might sound good here in “big people Sunday School” – but out there – in the real world – where you have to scratch out a living – from sun up – past sundown – you might as well paint doormat on your forehead as turn the other cheek. Why – in the real world – somebody takes a poke at me – and I will make them so sorry – they will never make that mistake again! Such cynicism is just that – cynicism. It is only when Jesus’ love and Jesus’ power *overflows* your heart – that the day can come when you take a hurt – physical or mental or emotional – with a fist or with a word – and to the glory of God – you *do not strike back*. Jesus never asks you to do anything he didn’t already do himself! And Jesus never asks you to do anything without giving you the strength to do it. Think what a different world this would be – if people – for Jesus’ sake – turned the other cheek!

Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust – there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to the one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace. For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. The LORD makes us strong to endure troubles without complaining. Remember the powerful word of the LORD – **“Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth.”** Psalms 46:10 I used to visit a little grandpa who had skin cancer. He had Lupus. He had a bad heart. He had diabetes. He was old. But other than that – he would say – he was really doing pretty good! My friend had a good attitude – a heart filled with Jesus’ forgiving love. When he was in World War I – fighting in the woods of Germany – what with the barbed wire – the trenches – the poisoned gas – the death and destruction – there were children suffering. There were little German children who would stand by the garbage cans where the American soldiers would scrape their mess kits. These little children – some of them literal orphans had no food. My friend Alfred would give them – not just some – but most of his food – so they would not starve. If people – sinful as we are – can have compassion on the children of our enemies – then will not our Heavenly Father have compassion on us?

Though he brings grief he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men. Sometimes – even little

children have troubles. We were up at the cottages by Eagle River. My grandson fell – he fell off the pier into the lake. I ran and picked him up – all wet. I said *you slipped – the wood planks are old and wet and slippery!* He said, *“No – I wasn’t watching where I was going!”* Jacob had a very nasty scrap on his side and it hurt – it burned! But he just fell into the water. Just a few inches closer to the shore and he could have hit his head on the huge rock – the huge stones at the edge of the lake. He could have literally cracked his head. He could literally have been killed. By the time we could have loaded him up and found a hospital – it could easily have been too late! There are all sorts of painful accidents – cuts and burns – bruises and even broken bones. There are sicknesses and diseases – heart attacks and strokes – blood where it isn’t supposed to be – tumors and masses – the pain that comes with radiation burns in the most tender places – the painful side effects that come with chemo-therapy. Life isn’t easy. But let there be no doubt. Jesus does not enjoy the afflictions – the grief – the pain and troubles that his people suffer. Jesus makes us strong to persevere. And in the end – in the very end – there will be a happy ending. On vacation this year – I finished reading a book I started a long time ago. The story of a lady who felt like a gnat – a little bug flying around her family – unneeded, unloved, unappreciated – so she simply walked away. She walked away from her husband and children and simply started over! I started that story over 3 years ago. I lost the book and replaced it – and started reading it all over. This vacation – I finished it – all 406 pages. And it had a happy ending – the circle of life! Our life will have a happy ending – for Jesus’ sake. We will come home to heaven where we will be safe forever! Safe because we are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. Amen!

To God alone all glory!

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