



18th July 2021

Balerno Parish Church

By Rev Dr André Groenewald
Reading: Lamentations 3: 19-27

Bible Reading: Lamentations 3:19-27

19 I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall.
20 I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. 21 Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: 22 Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. 23 They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
24 I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."
25 The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him;
26 it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.
27 It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young.

Background of the reading

The book of laments is actually called "**ekah**" in the Hebrew text after the first word of the book. It means "**where and how**" setting and describing the atmosphere of the whole book. The Book is compiled by a set of five separate poems that could also be sung! The author, we can either assume it was Jeremiah or someone acting on his behalf, is lamenting on the dreadful situation of the Judean people. The setting is the historical crisis of a destroyed city, Jerusalem. It describes the dreadful days of the Babylonians who came and destroyed the temple and Jerusalem in 587 BC and took most of the survivors into exile.

The speaker is both a **spectator and victim** of the tragedy. The Judean survivors are humiliated and in desperate need of help. The songs are like funeral hymns conveying their intense grief and mourning. The vocabulary and metaphors describing the suffering are graphic and earthy. The once proud city is now like a widow, a queen became a slave. They never ever thought that the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed. They thought of the temple as indestructible. They thought they could just do what they like. God would always be in his temple in Jerusalem.

The good life of joy, feasting, treasures, and prosperity is gone. Once elegant and bedecked with finery, the leaders are now blacker than soot, with their skin shriveled. Women have been ravished. Children cry for food. There is no one to comfort them. The harsh reality is described, not denied. The grief is not muted or misrepresented.

The poet faces God on their behalf with their pain and affliction. He tells them that they have sinned against God. They broke the covenant with God by not obeying his will. But he is also telling them that despite all the pain, suffering, affliction and mourning God still loves them.

The poet is telling them to **hope in God**. They thought they lost their way but God is still in control. The poet is telling them although they might think they are without any direction to continue with their life journeys, God is still the only beacon of hope and love!

The basis for renewed hope is God's "great love." The Hebrew word **gesed**, sometimes translated as "covenant love" or "loyal love," is a word that has the basic meaning of *loyalty* or *faithfulness*, especially as related to the covenant initiated by God; the word involves obligations to family, friends, and the community. Another basis of hope is God's unfailing "compassions" **ragamim**; from a word related to the womb, it describes the tender, caring love of a mother, entertaining to strong feelings of love and affection!

We know now when looking back this hope was not unfounded because in the year 539 BC the exiles to Babylonia were allowed to return to Judea and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple!

Amen

Sermon

Currently we find ourselves living through a period of great uncertainty just like the people of God did a long time ago. But in their circumstances the poet reminds himself and others of the ALMIGHTY presence of the ALMIGHTY GOD who is always faithful. They have the LIVING HOPE to know that He will not desert or leave them. He is also telling them to keep this HOPE alive amid their suffering.

This is a timely message for us living through the pandemic facing political and financial uncertainty. And, of course the uncertainty of the future of the Institutionalized church.

Do we as Christian people still carry God's HOPE with us for others to see? Or have we also lost HOPE in God...

God renewed His covenant with us through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. We have been pardoned, forgiven, and made new. God renewed His compassion by saving us from sin, death, and hell. He promised us all a future to be with HIM always and ever.

We can spread the LIGHT of God like candles everywhere we find ourselves. Each one of us as disciples of Jesus Christ is a **bearer** of light, love and hope. It may not feel like this day in, day out, when our witness appears insignificant in the face of criticism, tribulation and suffering. Yet, like a candle that sheds light

wherever it goes, we too embody and share hope through our actions, attitudes, words and prayers.

We can offer hospitality, welcome, warmth and love through our actions like a FIREPIT does on a winter night. As believers we can share the blanket of God's love with the world – even when they refuse. We can be a haven for the stranger, for all those who are totally different from us, for those whom the world has given a cold shoulder. As believers, we can offer the refuge of Jesus' compassion to all those who have been excluded in the world.

As believers we can guide and steer people in the right direction by sharing God's word with them. We can be a LIGHTHOUSE for people in times of storm and calm – always shedding and sharing the LIGHT of Christ' redemptive love. We can help others to find the justice, joy and peace they need in God's presence. As believers, we know that God is always present but for those who do not know him and seeking HIM it may be a difficult path. But we can be a brother and a sister for them by leading them in our faithful witness of God. We can offer them the hope of GOD when they are lost like the poet did in our BIBLE reading.

As believers, we can be the beacons of old. The original beacons were lit from hill to hill to warn others and carry the message of impending danger. As believers, we know and embrace vulnerability just like Jesus taught us. And because we know what it is like to suffer, we can understand the suffering and struggles of other people. Because we come from a place of great vulnerability, we know that God is our strength. As modern day beacons, we can indeed warn others of the dangers of life without GOD. We can be a voice for all those who are struggling with life and steer them towards the safe arms of GOD. As believers we can offer the right words of Scripture to express in times when people have no words to describe their pain, suffering, anguish, trauma and distress. The words of OUR BIBLE reading is but one example.

But as beacons we can also be the whistle blowers when people are treated unjustly. We can indeed be the ONES calling out the TRUTH. And as a Church of Jesus Christ we have a prophetic calling to speak for truth even when this cuts across our culture. As believers we always have the prophetic calling to challenge the status quo when it betrays the values of God's Kingdom.

If you are listening to this service today and you feel overwhelmed and without hope, remember the words of the poet in our BIBLE reading who said "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail."

Although we will experience suffering and despair we have God as our light when we get lost. He will be available to talk to when everybody else is ignoring us.

He will even be there when we want to jump from the high cliffs of life's failings. He will be there when the wind blows so hard trying to tip our boats over. He will help us in every storm and struggle although at times we might feel he has left us! He will be there for us as long as we trust him.

And how do we know this? God showed us in Jesus Christ the nature of his "gesed" – his love. He went on a road of suffering to pardon our sins. He left his Holy Spirit to be like pebbles on our roads to help us to stay focus on the narrow road to heaven! He gave us His Holy Spirit as the best SAT NAV there is. But unlike a SATNAV that often take us in wrong directions, His Bible tells us exactly how we ought to behave as His followers on this earth. And after all this He invites us often and always to speak to him in prayer, to tell him of our struggles and tribulations!

Amen