

Pentecost 5-B
6/27/21 CTK

Mark 5:21-45; Lamentations 3:22-33

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

“Lamentation” is defined in the Miriam-Webster dictionary as “a crying out in grief and mourning.”

Today’s reading is from the book of Lamentations, a five chapter poem that is basically one long cry of agony and horror, with the exception of the glimmering of hope that is today’s reading.

Probably written by the prophet Jeremiah in the 6th century BC over the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the whole nation of Israel with all the death and blood and pain that we might associate with a such an event. It reads like description of a horrible car accident or like grief over the collapse of a residential tower like the one we saw last week. The images that fill the Book of Lamentation are of buildings torn down, of cities burning, children starving to death, women being defiled, it goes on and on. It reads like a report from a gruesome war zone as if were addressed to God.

And that is what makes lamentation, a form of prayer and in fact a biblical genre: that it is addressed to God, with the understanding that God is listening. That God hears to our cries of pain and in fact is with us in our suffering; and further, that God cares about human misery and even suffers with us. That faith is at the very center of the Book of Lamentations, and the many psalms that take the form of lament –as in today’s Psalm “I pleaded with the Lord saying ... hear O Lord, and have mercy upon me.” A cry in the midst of suffering we don’t understand. But it’s the faith that God is with us that allows us to face the pain and horror that is part of life for all people.

I spend several months as a chaplain in a large hospital in seminary. As chaplains in training, we were taught that, that when we walked into the room, we represented not only the church, but for people in such great distress, we, like any representative from the church, actually represented God. The person in that room needed an encounter with God in their pain. They want to know that God hears

them. And that is the meaning of incarnation in that kind of ministry, and we can all do that for one another.

Like the young man in his early twenties lying in the intensive care unit in a coma, intubated, because of a head injury. His mother, his wife, his three young children, were all there, all of them devastated and all crying out in lamentation in one way or another “Oh Lord, be my helper...” as the Psalmist says today. The worst thing I or anybody could have done was try to make their suffering better, to say something to console them, try to fix them. But simply to be with them, to listen to their cries, to pray with them in their mourning and share in the faith that God was with them in them. That was what we, and all of us, have to offer.

It’s natural for us to want to take away suffering in others, or to turn away from it in ourselves. What gives us courage to accept and embrace it and lay it before God, in lament, frustration, or even in rage- which is perfectly acceptable if we are to believe the Psalms - is the trust that God can take it. That God accepts our pain, shares in it and even the faith that God will somehow eventually make it better.

The people who came to Jesus for healing in the gospels were broken people, as we all are at times, suffering people. Their lament was “Help me Lord, give me my sight, save my child, let me walk again, let me touch the hem of your garment.” From all points along the social spectrum, different genders, with all different kinds of suffering - possessed by demons - it didn’t matter to them and it didn’t matter to Jesus. He heard the cries of all people, from lepers to Roman centurions, tax collectors to aliens. They were all one for him. In their suffering and in ours, we share one humanity with each other and with God in Christ.

In today’s gospel it’s a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, who might not necessarily have felt too sympathetic toward Jesus the renegade rabbi, always causing trouble. Imagine how desperate Jairus must have been to take his last hope down to the seashore looking for Jesus, push his way through the mob that surrounded him to throw himself at Jesus’ feet in front of everyone, and to beg him for help. His 12 year old daughter lay dying. Would Jesus please lay hands on the girl and make her well?

On his way to the girl, with the crowd still following him and pressing in on him, yet another person stops Jesus, crying out for mercy, another desperate lament. From a woman who had been hemorrhaging for twelve years and had endured much suffering in treatment but just couldn’t get better, who was so desperate that she too pushed her way through the crowd just to reach down and touch the hem of

his robe as he passed by. She would certainly have been an outcast, unclean because of her bloody excretion, but not to Jesus. He took her in, heard her cry of pain, and loved her as he loves all of us, and finally sent her away whole – your faith has saved you, he says.

And then, almost as an afterthought, he returns to the father's cries for help, to the little girl, and in spite of the scorn of the people around her, gives her back her life. Give her something to eat, he tells them.

Of course, not all of us receive miraculous healings when we cry out to God. But the promise for us is that, as with these two, God is with us. That indeed, in Christ God suffers and even dies just like us, and even cries out from the cross his own lament: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." He took the suffering of his humanity on himself, and bore it. Jesus didn't blame others for his suffering, he didn't strike out at others or scapegoat.

And so, right in the middle of the book of Lamentations is our reading today, surrounded by mourning and cries for help, a song of praise to God and of trust in God's faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Therefore I will hope in the Lord."

We share our suffering with God because, at the heart our lament is the faith that God hears us, that God cares about us, finally shares our pain, and that finally, ultimately, not in our time but God's time, God heals us.

Now that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.