

Pastor Roy's Sermon from July 1, 2012

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have memories of being crushed in spirit? I don't need to ask *if* you have ever been crushed. Think about how your hopes and dreams have gotten lost among troubles, frightening experiences, and losses. A sad thing to think about, but this is an important part of our lives. We live with grief and disappointment. If we allow these experiences to negatively determine our identity and the way we relate to our world, then we will be forever defeated. We then live at the edge of despair.

The writer of Lamentations speaks the words of today's first reading in total faith because he has seen little evidence of the faithfulness of the Lord in his community. Yet he, or she, still believes in that faithfulness. The exiles had seen horrible things as Jerusalem was starved and driven to die of thirst by an invading army which surrounded their gates, an effective, absolute embargo. If you are ever having a bad day, read the 5 chapter book of Lamentations and you will be reminded that, short of a holocaust, your life isn't so bad. Lamentations teaches us to dig deep for the foundation of our faith in the God's mercy.

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. Your mercies are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.”

In this verse, the writer is calling for eyes of faith to see the mercy of God even when this mercy is hard to see.

“The Lord is my portion, therefore I will hope in God.” “It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord..” It is good that one should bear the yoke, to sit alone in silence, to put one's mouth to the dust, to give one's cheek to the smitter and be filled with insults.” We probably find ourselves asking, “How is it good to give one's cheek to the smitter and be filled with insults?” I guess this is where we need to start digging deeper for wisdom and discernment beyond our instincts and blind urges.

By nature, are we not constantly trying to save ourselves? We don't patiently wait quietly for much of anything. This teacher of Lamentations is telling us to accept it all-let it roll over us. Then to learn from every difficult experience. Think about it, when we resist, we build up a fortress of our own self righteousness and most importantly, *we stop listening to others*. When we stop listening, community is cut off. Fellowship dies and there is no hope for unity and the peace that comes from it. What the writer is suggesting becomes the foundation for Jesus' language of non-resistance. Non-resistance— not resisting the one who is perceived as our enemy, as evil—from this approach comes hope for friendship and peace.

Also when we don't build for ourselves complex systems of why we are good and our enemy is evil, we can invest our energies much more wisely and justly. Who knows but maybe our enemy holds the answer to whatever problems we face and building a relationship rather than a wall will help us to find solutions.

God knows our hearts—our hopes and our dreams. God also knows and cares about the hearts of our enemies.

“For the Lord will not reject for ever. Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to an abundance of steadfast love, for God does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone.”

Letting go of our need to personally set things straight, to make things right, to take care of ourselves, this letting go is a prayer for God to intervene. It also disarms our enemies. Sometimes there are so many layers of brokenness within ourselves and our enemies that we don't see the effect of love in relationships. Often, not resisting the enemy will more wholeness and self reflection more quickly than resisting. Sometimes we must resist. Jesus' teachings call us to love our enemy—which is not something we do naturally by instinct. Non-resistance is a powerful tool if practiced carefully. Of course there are also times when calling someone directly to accountability for their actions is necessary. Jesus always calls us to use the minds that God has given us.

Back to Lamentations. Our teacher in Lamentations is trusting that God is good.

Keep in mind, that this teacher has not seen much evidence of God's goodness in the dealings of human society, but the teacher nevertheless believes in it, trusts in it. Perhaps Jesus studied Lamentations and learned from the teacher's profound faith in God's unfailing grace.

Listen to the closing words of Lamentations: “Because of this—that is all the trouble that has befallen Israel--our hearts are sick, because of these things our eyes have grown dim: because of Mt. Zion, which lies desolate; jackals prowl over it. But you, O Lord, reign forever; your throne endures to all generations. Why have you forgotten us completely? Why have you forsaken us these many days? Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old—unless you have utterly rejected us, and are angry with us beyond measure.” There the book ends. Cold. A quiet plea for help.

At times we question the very foundations of our faith. That is why we need a community of faith. So that we can encourage one another—sustain one another's faith in the goodness of God in the midst of pain and suffering. Oh, we don't like to talk about things directly sometimes, but we do encourage one another by our very presence and with actions of peace and hope.

The writer of Lamentations is certainly confessing his uncertainty and need when he says, “unless you have utterly rejected us, and are angry with us beyond measure.” Our teacher is courageous enough to ask the questions everyone else was afraid to ask, longs for a new day of healing as Jesus, centuries later brings to the people.

The reign of God has come near in Jesus. The Kingdom of God comes near to us, in us, with us. If the one who is nailed to a cross for his defense of the poor and the marginalized can proclaim that the reign of God has come near in our world, then we can also do so regardless of the circumstances in our lives. Regardless.

Every day we have the chance to grow in our faith by waiting with God, by being still, by trusting that God is at work even when we don't feel it or see it. Perhaps God is at work especially when we don't feel it.

So, the reign of God is at work among us—in the excitement and the dullness of faithfulness and faithful uncertainty. Our hope is not found in our mental processes, but in the steadfast love of the Lord which never ceases. Your mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning and evening, great is your faithfulness. Great is your faithfulness. Great is your faithfulness! Amen.