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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington  
30 June 2024

Sermon on Lamentations 3:22-26

Worship Theme:

**THE LIVING LORD COMPLETELY CHANGES OUR VIEW OF DEATH**

Most people fear death to some degree—because they assume it is the end, or because they assume there is some sort of reckoning after death. So it is understandable that many people would fear death. But not so for believers in Jesus. The living Lord gives Christians a radically different view of death. We have confidence to face death, knowing that our Lord Jesus will wake us from death just as easily as parents wake their sleeping child from a nap.

Sermon Theme: “Because of the LORD’s Great Love”

1. We Are Not Consumed
2. We Wait Quietly for Salvation

Grace, and mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!

Jerusalem had fallen. Babylon had come and destroyed everything – the walls, the houses, the palace, even the Temple of God. Everything was in shambles and the people were taken away. It almost goes without saying that this was the most difficult and painful thing any of them had ever faced. If I picture myself there, I imagine I would have been absolutely terrified – afraid of how I would take care of myself and my family, afraid of what the Babylonians might do to me, and wondering if I’m even going to survive at all.

If we had the time today, it would be tremendously beneficial to read through the whole book of Lamentations, entering into the thoughts, worries, and fears of the people exiled from the Promised Land they had been given by God. (I do encourage you to read it this week!) For now, here is a portion of chapter 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. <sup>2</sup> Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are on her cheeks. Among all her lovers there is no one to comfort her. All her friends have betrayed her; they have become her enemies. <sup>3</sup> After affliction and harsh labor, Judah has gone into exile. She dwells among the nations; she finds no resting place. All who pursue her have overtaken her in the midst of her distress. <sup>4</sup> The roads to Zion mourn, for no one comes to her appointed festivals. All her gateways are desolate, her priests groan, her young women grieve, and she is in bitter anguish. <sup>6</sup> All the splendor has departed from Daughter Zion. <sup>11</sup> All her people groan as they search for bread; they barter their treasures for food to keep themselves alive. “Look, Lord, and consider, for I am despised.” <sup>12</sup> “Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see. Is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me? <sup>16</sup> “This is why I weep and my eyes overflow with tears. No one is near to*

*comfort me, no one to restore my spirit. My children are destitute because the enemy has prevailed.”*

Maybe now you see why we call this book of the Bible “Lamentations.” The mourning and weeping and wailing and lamenting is tremendous. Fear is at an all-time high, morale at an all-time low. Everything is lost and the people can’t help but wonder, “Why would God do this to us? Why would he allow this to happen?”

As we heard those verses from Lamentations a moment ago, perhaps you felt yourself being pulled in, almost living their grief with them. Or maybe you have plenty of your own grief already. After all, there is no shortage of challenges and pains and losses we experience in life. We know, of course, that this is because we live in a fallen, broken, sin-filled world. This is not the way God designed our world and our lives to be – this is because humanity tried to find something better. We didn’t trust God to give us the best. We didn’t think God loved us the most. We assumed God must have been holding out on us and that if we tried something just a little bit different than what he planned, we would be better off for it. (If you need a refresher on how that went, check out Genesis ch. 3.)

But knowing that these things happen to us because our world is broken and sinful doesn’t make them any easier to swallow. We remain surrounded by grief, and whenever we sin (and we all know we all do), our grief is only made worse by guilt from our arrogant disobedience against God. We often tend to feel grief most sharply when death strikes. Maybe it’s the death of a parent, a spouse, a child, a dear family member or friend. Maybe it’s a dreadful medical diagnosis plaguing your heart and mind each day as you face your own impending death, which seems to be rushing forward to claim you.

These thoughts **consume us** and make it difficult to function in life, if we even want to at all. And we play the “what if” game with ourselves, wondering, “What if they hadn’t gone for the car ride that ended with the accident? What if I hadn’t smoked a pack a day for 35 years? What if he hadn’t hit the bottle so hard? What if the cancer hadn’t come back so aggressively? What if I could have had just a little more time with my loved one? What if I actually could have watched my child grow up? What if I had told this person just one more time how incredibly important they were to me and how much I loved them?”

But because of sin, we don’t get that opportunity. Death is final. It’s the end. People don’t “get better” from death. Once it’s done, it’s done.

Those thoughts **consume** people and drive us mad, filling us with fear of death. After all, it’s the great unknown, isn’t it? We don’t know when or how it will happen. Part of us will always question what happens when we die, because we’ve never experienced it before. We wonder, “Where will I go? Will I be okay? I know how much I sinned – can it really truly be forgiven? Or will I be **consumed** by that eternal fire, getting what I deserve?”

And into the midst of that swirling storm of emotion and pain and grief, God the LORD speaks. When the LORD speaks, Creation must listen. The things that have been made must pay attention to the One who made them and they must hear what he says:

- First, he reminds us who he is, as he does in Exodus 34: *The LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. <sup>6</sup> And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. (Ex. 34:5-7)*
- Then right in the middle of our lamenting and our being **consumed** by fear of death, we are reminded in our reading today about the effect this God has in our lives: *Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. <sup>23</sup> They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lam. 3:22-23)*

In that moment, the storm ceases, and the swirling tangle of emotion and pain and suffering and loss is calmed. The pain may not magically be instantly gone. But we have something we didn’t have before: PEACE. The fears and pains and losses that **consumed us** cannot do so any longer, **because of the LORD’s Great Love.**

Even when life is falling apart and it seems like everything that could go wrong HAS gone wrong, our God is *the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God* (Ex. 34), and the LORD’s *compassions never fail. They are new every morning.* (Lam. 3) Compassion is a hard thing to describe. It’s a love that is put into action, a love that does whatever it must to alleviate the pain of the one receiving it. Compassion is a love we can feel. When God is compassionate to us, we know we did nothing whatsoever to deserve it. Humanity has never once been able to earn the love of the LORD. But he keeps giving it anyway – *his compassions NEVER fail. They are new every morning!* When our eyes open in the morning, the very first thing we get to think every single day is “My God loves me.” That was true for the people of Judah, even as they were marched away into exile, leaving behind the smoldering wreckage of the holy city Jerusalem. That was true for every person we read about in the entire Old and New Testaments. And that remains true for every single one of us connected to God by grace through faith – Our God loves us. Great is your faithfulness, LORD!

Therefore *I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.” <sup>25</sup> The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; <sup>26</sup> it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.* Will our challenges and problems immediately stop just because the LORD loves us and we know it? No. This doesn’t stop being a fallen sinful world and we don’t stop being fallen sinful people affected by the sins of others and by our own sins.

But we have something worth waiting for – an END to the fallenness, brokenness, and sin. You come to this place every week because you know that when you’re here, you will hear again the amazing life-changing good news that your God loves you so much that he sent his one and only Son Jesus into the world to perfectly live for you, willingly die for you, and victoriously rise for you. And because Jesus has already done that, God declares you fully forgiven in his Son’s name and an adopted child and heir in his family. All by grace through faith.

What does that mean? It means God loves you so much that he works through his Word and sacraments to fill your heart with belief and trust in him, connecting you to Jesus so that the benefits of everything he accomplished for you come to you. When our hearts are filled with faith, two things happen: (1) we know and admit we're still in an imperfect life right now; (2) we know and rejoice that a perfect life is coming for us. When that powerful truth is in our hearts and minds, we realize that no matter what happens to us in this life – no matter what the diagnosis is, no matter what we lose, no matter if our homeland burns to the ground and we're taken captive, and no matter how many caskets and gravestones we see (up to and including our own!) – *the LORD is our portion*. God is enough! He's all we need! *The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him*. When we find our hope in the LORD, we will never be let down. I have a picture hanging in my office that I love looking at every day. It's a simple picture of a road leading off into the horizon – can't see where it goes and don't know what's going to happen on the way. And these words are printed on it: *But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you."* (2 Corinthians 12:9) A simple, beautiful reminder: God is always enough for us.

Therefore, **We Wait Quietly for Salvation**. One of the hardest things to do in life is to wait for something that we know is going to be great. But with the LORD on our side, we can wait quietly and patiently. I've talked to many Christian people older than me who wonder why God is taking so long to call them home and why they must keep enduring the pains of this world. The only answer I can give them is to point them back to a God who knows them and their situation far better than I do, a God who has already saved them, a God whom we can trust to always do what is perfect for us. We won't always understand these moments, maybe not even a single time! But *the LORD is our portion*; he is always enough for us, and *therefore we will wait for him*.

No reason for lamenting will ever be able to stop the love our God has for us. **Because of the LORD's great love** for us, death doesn't frighten us anymore. It has become nothing more than a door from a broken life of sin into a perfect holy life in the presence of our Creator and Redeemer forever. **Because of the LORD's great love, we are not consumed** by death or fears of death or any other negative thing this world tries to throw at us. Rather, **because of the LORD's great love, we wait quietly for salvation**, knowing that because of Jesus we are already saved and when we finally reach the perfect time he has chosen, we will be delivered from every problem forever. God's promises cannot be broken, *his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great indeed is your faithfulness*, LORD. For such priceless comfort, we praise and thank you, now and forever. AMEN!

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.