

Sixth Sunday After Pentecost – Lexi Baysinger

Lamentations 3:22-33; Psalm 30; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15; Mark 5:21-43

I have to admit, I've had to wrestle quite a bit with our lectionary texts for today. I received them from Pastor Judy over a month ago and I haven't been able to reconcile them within myself. They seem to go against what I've come to believe about our faith and how God wishes us to exist in the world.

Lamentations 3:22-33 reads: *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for one to bear the yoke in youth, to sit alone in silence when the Lord has imposed it, to put one's mouth to the dust (there may yet be hope), to give one's cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults. For the Lord will not reject forever. Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone.*

Our text from Lamentations seems to be calling us to passively wait for salvation—that we should be happy that we bear hardships in our youth so that we can relax when we are older. But I couldn't help read this and think about the children in cages. Why must they bear a yoke that they have no business bearing? Why should we be quiet while this is happening?

Even our text from Mark seems to contradict this message from Lamentations. Here we see two stories of people either directly asking for help or moving forward as an active participant in their healing. For the woman would have never been healed if she wouldn't have reached forward in faith and touched Jesus' robe.

I bring this up because it's my fear that the church has internalized this idea of being quiet. That we have become so wrapped up in not wanting to become political that we sit to the side while the children of our world bear the burden of our silence. I don't even just mean the immigrants who are seeking asylum from their country, who face further trauma when they attempt to legally cross the border. We could look as close as Flint, MI, which still doesn't have clean water after five years. We could look as close as our school systems that may not have access to art or music classes because of budget cuts. We could look anywhere and would see a lot of empty rooms except for the remnant doing the work to bring God's kingdom to earth.

Even our lesson from the Psalms seems to push back against Lamentation's call. David praises God, writing that the Lord has turned his *mourning into dancing* so that his soul would *praise* him and would *not be silent*—David, a man who spent a lifetime crying out to God.

At times it would seem like the Lamentation text calls us to similar lifestyles that Jesus asks of us during his lifetime. To turn the other cheek and to celebrate when others speak slander of us because of the work that we are doing for him. But I wonder if the church has forgotten about

that. That we are called to a lifestyle that would bring us under criticism because the world doesn't understand our motivations.

And I admit, this is very difficult. Speaking up during controversial times is never going to be easy. I know. I spent most of my 24 years keeping most of my words to myself. You can ask any of my family members or any teacher/professor that I've ever had. I have never been one to speak up. I believe that words have power and I wanted to use my power well. But because I didn't want to say the wrong thing, I would often say nothing at all. And I think that this is dangerous, especially in dominant culture churches. Staying silent leads to movements like #metoo. It leads to immigrant bans. It allows us to forget that Jesus was a refugee who had to flee persecution.

Now, you might be wondering how those are similar. This summer, I had the chance to go on a pilgrimage that was focused on how we have mistreated people of African descent in the US since the country's inception. On the trip, we were constantly reminded of the importance of remembering, and how, when we are silent, we are given the opportunity to forget. The Israelites were called to be intentional about reminding their children whenever they asked about the ways that God delivered them from their troubles. They were mandated to remember the past so they never forgot who their Deliverer is. We don't often follow this practice, and in our silence about our history, we lose out on what it means for our present. We are followers of a Messiah who identifies with the oppressed.

And we are called to advocate for the oppressed. This call comes in a couple different forms in Scripture. But our call today comes from Paul in his letter to the Corinthians. He instructs us to give in joy so that all would have enough. I do not think that he just meant money. For our faith is not based out of a love for money and the things that it can bring. I believe that Paul also meant any capital that we may have access to. This includes our bodies. My friend Michelle Higgins will often say that it is the duty, that it is a spiritual practice for every Christian to engage in protest. To engage in action. The more time I spend learning about our world, the more I see the truth in this. While our lectionary texts may not directly state that we must engage in activism, I can't help but see this call in Paul's final echo of Exodus when he writes, *The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.*

We will all participate in this work in different ways. All of us are gifted in different ways, but Paul assures us that when we help others *the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have.* So we are each called to act. Dominique Gilliard ends Rethinking Incarceration with the thought that none of us can do everything but we can all do something. This is the same thing that Paul writes to the Corinthian church in this letter. We may not be able to offer everything, but we are all called to give according to what we have. It is in giving what we have that all will have the plenty that God promises.

And this is where the promise at the start of our Lamentations passage applies. For God's mercies are new every morning. His love is steadfast and will encourage and empower us to do the work that we have been called to in the world. Sometimes, though God does not wish it, we will have to quietly endure insults like Jesus when he was put to death. We will have to carry the

yoke quietly at times because we will be under too much stress to cry out. At those times, we will have to rely on others in the church to cry out for us.

This weekend, we saw that happening at over 700 protests across the country. Whether or not everyone who protested was a Christian, and I guarantee not every person was, they were marching to affirm the dignity of the humanity in others whom they did not know. That is the work of the Kingdom. That is recognizing the reality that God has created every person in their image and that we will make sure to shout, so the walls shake, that every person has been created with dignity in the image of a God who chose to come to earth as a Middle Eastern man who was a refugee in the first moments of his life. It is at these moments that I can level with the text from Lamentations. I may not agree that it is best to bear the yoke in our youth (there are too many children in cages currently for me to sit well with that part of this text), but it may be that at times that we bear the grief that is being inflicted while others cry out for us.

And that is what I think the call of the church is to do. We are called to cry out for God's justice to the world; I think that it is dangerous to sit with this text in Lamentations that tells us to wait quietly, because we've done that for too long and we're seeing the effects of that. And the call of the church is to be one that speaks truth to power. So what does that look like for each of the gifts that we've been given?

But if we must be silent, let our works show what we believe. Let us step forward like the woman in Mark who was healed because of her faith. Let us take some of the burden away from our children so that they have the opportunity to be children. Let us not let another day pass without proclaiming the truth that God has decreed that everyone will have enough to thrive in their lives. This may mean that we may have to live with a little less, but in doing so we will make sure that our brothers and sisters will have enough. May God grant us the courage to live boldly into His call. May we not fear, only believe. Amen.