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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
Lectionary 13B, June 30, 2024
Lamentations 3:22-33
Joy Comes in the Morning

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our First Lesson gives us some words to be cherished. They are words about the steadfast love of the LORD and they go this way:

²²The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
²³they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23, RSV)

And our reading ends with words about the affliction imposed by the Lord, reassuring us that even in the midst of that affliction, God's steadfast love is still at work:

³¹For the Lord will not
reject forever.
³²Although he causes grief, he will have compassion
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
³³for he does not willingly afflict
or grieve anyone. (Lamentations 3:31-33, RSV)

Let us remember these words. Let us *claim* these words, so that we pray something like this: "Lord, I am counting on you. I am counting on these words of Holy Scripture. I am counting on you to one day melt away my afflictions, revealing the plain abundance of your steadfast love."

When I speak of the troubles that you might have known or might know even this moment, I realize that I am walking on holy ground. I am speaking of pain and doubts and tears when no one is looking. Troubles can wrench your heart. They can bring sorrow to your family and others who know what you are going through. They can wrench the heart of our God, for he loves you. He does not willingly afflict anyone, and he is hard at work even now arranging and rearranging things that someday your troubles will give way to joy. But till then, your troubles are the subject of much concern in heaven.

Indeed, St. Paul says that when we pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us “with sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:26, RSV). So, at least our God knows what lies on your heart. You are precious in the eyes of your Maker. The bad things that trouble you also trouble Him!

Let me pause to make a follow-up point here. Our sorrows and the sorrows of others are serious matters. They are not to be taken lightly nor to be spoken of casually. And yet our sacred text says that the mercies of the Lord *never* end, that “they are new every morning.” My follow-up point, then, is that you and I are the ones in this town who believe it. So, we are the ones in this town who can give some hope to others if we try. Jesus says that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Part of what this means is that we are the ones who are in the position to say, Jesus lives, and therefore all sufferers have some hope in this world. It is one thing for the people of our city to stagger along, suffering as if there is no real end to it, but only death finally. It is something different and better to be able to say, Jesus loves you and he will solve this one day.

We live in a fallen world, with its right fair share of troubles. But our world is not *that* fallen! It is not utterly desolate. Seasons of peace and spiritual renewal do come from time to time. They *must* come because our world contains Jesus and he is a good man. Indeed, *you* can help bring some more joy to this old world by joining Jesus in his goodness. Our world is loved by the steadfast love of our Maker, and so we need not be overly gloomy about things. Our Bible Lessons for today would have us understand that our troubles will not last forever. Even if we are old and have little time left in our three score and ten years, still our troubles will pass. They shall be overwhelmed with joy if not today, then certainly in the resurrection. And short of that good day, the Lord might well replace our present troubles with some relief even nowadays. So ask Him! Think of today’s Psalm, and in thinking of it, be encouraged. Especially I love these verses:

- ⁴Sing to the LORD, you servants of his;
give thanks for the remembrance of his holiness.
- ⁵For his wrath endures but the twinkling of an eye,
his favor for a lifetime.
- ⁶Weeping may spend the night,
but joy comes in the morning. (Psalm 30:4-6, LBW)

What a great phrase that is: “but the twinkling of an eye”! That is how our troubles shall seem to us someday. They might well be overwhelmed in better

times to come in this earthly life, and certainly they will be overwhelmed in the joys of heaven. They will seem as if they lasted only the twinkling of an eye. If God blesses us with healing in these earthly days, the troubles of the past might fade from our consciousness, as if they had their day and it is passed. Those troubles of bygone days are not worthy anymore of spoiling the good days that lie before us. As the Psalm says: "Weeping may spend the night, but joy comes in the morning." In the ordinary course of things, the night gives way to the dawn. The night loses its grip and is replaced by sunshine. Many of us have experienced that in our troubles. At last, they lost their grip. They gave up. May God give us grace to enjoy sunshine again.

Next Sunday, St. Paul speaks about his "thorn in the flesh." We do not know exactly what he means. Maybe it is something physical like arthritis. Or maybe it is emotional like depression. They say that Martin Luther struggled with depression all his life. Maybe St. Paul was prone to that too. So, we do not know exactly what St. Paul means by his "thorn in the flesh," but we do know that he prayed to be relieved from it. His answer: No, the Lord wanted St. Paul to be as he is, for the Lord's own good purposes. And so we read of St. Paul's prayer and the answer:

⁸Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; ⁹but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:8-9, RSV)

I am tempted to preach on this passage from 2 Corinthians next week, but I am not sure about that. Our First Lesson from Ezekiel 2 and our Gospel Lesson from Mark 6 also seem important to me. For now, let me lift up St. Paul's example to remind us that though "joy comes in the morning" and that troubles last "but the twinkling of an eye," nonetheless, it is best for us to trust our Maker's wisdom about things. Even the prayers of a holy man like St. Paul had to wait to be fulfilled. They certain shall be fulfilled, but the apostle had to wait upon the Lord, and he was content to do so.

So, again, here is our general principle in this sermon:

²²The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
²³they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23, RSV)

Now, let us enjoy a quick look at some concrete illustrations of this principle. I mean, the sad case of the land of Judah and the Lamentations about her case, and then the happy stories in today's Gospel Lesson — the healing of the woman with the hemorrhage and the raising up of the twelve-year-old girl.

First, about Judah, the prophet Jeremiah had warned Judah again and again that she was heading into trouble. In Jeremiah Chapter 8, for example, the LORD speaks of his frustration with a people who plunge onward into sin, failing to return and mend their ways. And so we read:

⁴You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD:
When men fall, do they not rise again?
If one turns away, does he not return?
⁵Why then has this people turned away
in perpetual backsliding?
They hold fast to deceit,
they refuse to return.
⁶I have given heed and listened,
but they have not spoken aright;
no man repents of his wickedness,
saying, 'What have I done?'
Every one turns to his own course,
like a horse plunging headlong into battle." (Jeremiah 8:4-6, RSV)

There is great pathos in the book of Jeremiah. It is as if the prophet can see the disaster as if it has already happened. And he grieves, because he loves the people. His words go this way:

¹⁸My grief is beyond healing,
my heart is sick within me.

Then the prophet recounts the complaint of the LORD against the people:

"Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images,
and with their foreign idols?"

Then, finally, the prophet expresses the lament of the people once the disaster has befallen them:

²⁰“The harvest is past, the summer is ended,
and we are not saved.”

²²Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there? (selections from Jeremiah 8:18-22,
RSV)

Now we can see the importance of our First Lesson from Lamentations 3. The grim prophecies of Jeremiah have come true. The mighty Babylonia Empire has crushed Judah, destroyed the Temple, and whisked much of the population off into captivity in Babylon. But in Lamentation’s talk of the “steadfast love of the Lord,” we learn that the LORD’s dealings with Judah are not *destruction* but rather *discipline*, as in the lovely saying in Hebrews 12:

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth... (Hebrews 12:6,
KJV)

Lamentations reminds the people that the steadfast love of the LORD never fades away and that He never forgets the covenant promises he made to Israel so long ago:

²²The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
²³they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23, RSV)

Now, this phrase about the mercies of the LORD being “new every morning” gives me a way to talk about the immense importance of Jesus. I look at it this way: In the long sweep of human history, there has been an awful lot of nighttime and an awful lot of trouble. But the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus mean that a radiant dawn is coming for humanity. The mercies of our Maker are hard to discern sometimes, but they always exist, working their way toward radiance. And the mercies of God *will* shine forth; the morning shall come, because of Jesus.

The delightful thing, then, about today’s Gospel story is that we see a couple concrete illustrations of the dawn to come. We see two anticipations of the joy to come, thanks to Jesus.

First, let us speak of the woman has been bleeding for twelve years. This has left her poor and lonely. Doctors do the best they can, but sometimes

things work out as they did for this woman. And so we read about her that she...

...had suffered much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was no better but rather grew worse. (Mark 5:26, RSV)

But on this good day, she does not deal with just another physician, but rather with the Great Physician of Body and Soul. Jesus heals her. There is healing ahead for each of us, thanks to Jesus. The morning shall indeed come.

And then there is that child who lies dead. Her father has hastened to Jesus and asked him to come and save her. But she dies before Jesus gets there. Jesus says that she is not dead, but sleeping. The onlookers laugh at Jesus. They know death when they see it. But at this point, they might know death, but they do not know Jesus. They do not know that he is stronger than death. So, Jesus simply takes the girl by the hand, raises her up to life, restores her to her father, and tells folks to give the girl some food, since children always seem to be hungry.

In these two stories, we have a considerable portion of this world's troubles. We have sickness and we have death. Neither one is eternal. Neither one can last before the morning sunshine represented by Jesus. In our reading from Lamentations, we have the whole community staggering on in the midst of darkness. In our Gospel Lesson, we have two individuals being overwhelmed by troubles, including sickness and death. For both groups, for both the church and for individuals, it is as our lovely text says:

²²The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
²³they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23, RSV)

This is most certainly true, thanks to the grace and merits of Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.