

Sunday, October 8, 2017 – 18th Sunday after Pentecost

“Lament and Hope”

Lamentations 3: 19-33

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Frame and Refrain

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

It has been a long week friends. It's a week the likes of which we'll never forget and I hope we'll never have to endure again. Our city is steeped in grief. Victims, their families, hospitalizations, first responders and doctors working long, emotionally scarring and anguished hours. As the immediate shock of Sunday night subsides we're left holding the bag with what comes next.

I've never preached on Lamentations before. It's as depressing as it sounds – a lament is a dramatic cry of grief and anguish. Lamentations might be the saddest book in the Bible. In this case it's the lament of one of the Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah when Jerusalem was destroyed by an invading army from Babylon in 586 BC and a nation that had lasted over 800 years came to a bitter end. Jeremiah wandered the ruins wondering aloud what they could have done differently, grieving the loss and the beauty of what was gone and crying out to God to please, please not abandon them. It is pages and pages of immense sorrow, save for one little section in the middle – in between the countless reports of people lost and how life will never be the same, Jeremiah remembers some other things that are true, things about God, promises that God makes, promises that stay true no matter how lamentable things become. That's the text for our consideration today. As we lament, we hope in God.

Because the truth is our soul keeps remembering and is bowed down. Of course it is. Major tragedies such as last weekend have rocked us all to varying degrees. Some know those who were killed or hurt and others know the terror of that night firsthand. But even if you weren't actually there and have found yourself more irritable, or mired in a sadness you can't shake, or fearful, or struggling to answer your kids' questions, those are typical reactions after something like this.

We remember it, and we should – but then Jeremiah continues, “But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.” As we lament, we hope in God.

God's mercies keep going forward even in tragedy – and perhaps especially in tragedy. The light of dawn broke on Monday, and on Tuesday, and on Wednesday, every day this week – beautiful, cool fall mornings, days the Lord has made. And lines formed at blood banks now filled to capacity, at least for the next few weeks. Donations came overflowing. Thousands attended prayer services like the one here on Monday night, or candlelight vigils. Impromptu memorials went up around the city. People are looking out for each other, reaching out to strangers – people are reaching out to help one another, and that is great, because His mercies that are new every morning apply to everyone but at the end of the day, that still leaves you with a casualty list and a sense of senselessness and the creep of chaos.

I'm not usually given to quote memes but there was one going around this week from the old children's TV show host Fred Rogers. I'll paraphrase – when you see pictures of bad things happening and your kids are worried, ask them to look for the helpers. There are always helpers.

Friends, let's look beyond all the love and care everyone has given and the community connections, wonderful as they are, and let's not let the sheer force of evil get obscured and forgotten. Sit a moment with that discomfort and that sorrow and that lament and the fact that no matter how much good comes out of this, in the darkness we saw evil face to face on Sunday night. The doctors and police and brave citizens were remarkable but they, too were traumatized by evil. Where's the Helper?

Jesus took the evil head on. He didn't stay out of it, He came running into our world and committed all the way, right down to taking on the flesh and the blood we walk around with every day from here on out. He is the Light of the world. He took temptations right from the devil and battled back. And then He took all the sin of the world and let it leech into Him, soaking it up like a sponge, every trauma perpetrated, every fear realized, every sorrow and regret and lamentation every point that evil notches in your life, in my life, on our neighbors and on our city and world and Jesus became a wastebin, a receptacle of all of it the trauma, fear, sorrow, regret and lamentation over evil for the entire world. Collected all in one place, that sin and those horrors God took that sin and evil and killed it, buried it and left it in an empty tomb when dawn broke on a whole new kind of day on Easter. Now evil is in its death throws, thrashing around

and we saw the other night the damage it can still do but even in the middle of our lamentation God's mercies are new this morning because Jesus, the light of the world, takes the evil perpetrated in the darkness head on and we know the end of the story – Jesus wins and as we lament, we hope in God.

satan can't win, he's relegated to squirming around in the darkness. The light of Jesus defeats him. And now, God works through you to shine out wherever darkness clings in this sinsick world. I'm not giving you something to do, I'm stating a fact. I'm not asking you to go be lights, I'm telling you that you are lights – God repositions you to reflect the love of Jesus everywhere you go, in everything you do to love each other well. Wherever you help, whomever you help, God's light goes with you – reaching out to that hurting person you don't really talk to much at work, holding your kids tight, standing in line to give blood and doing your job motivated the love and light of Christ shining in you. And so we're coordinating at Mountain View to arrange new ways to help array and align those lights and combine our efforts to love our city. As we lament, we hope in God.

God's mercies are new every morning. Another kind of dawn is coming – the dawn that is spoken of in Psalm 95 – a dawn from on high that will break over us to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death – the light of that dawn will guide our feet into the way of peace.

Sing your laments, open up and grieve as your soul keeps remembering and is downcast, but also call to mind the reason for your hope – God's love, His mercies that are new every morning, the light of a new dawn – Jesus is the light and His light shines in you. As we lament, we hope in God.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

¹⁹Remember my affliction and my wanderings,
the wormwood and the gall!

²⁰My soul continually remembers it
and is bowed down within me.

²¹But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:

²²The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
²³they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
²⁴"The LORD is my portion," says my soul,
"therefore I will hope in him."
²⁵The LORD is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul who seeks him.
²⁶It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.
²⁷It is good for a man that he bear
the yoke in his youth.
²⁸Let him sit alone in silence
when it is laid on him;
²⁹let him put his mouth in the dust—
there may yet be hope;
³⁰let him give his cheek to the one who strikes,
and let him be filled with insults.
³¹For the Lord will not
cast off forever,
³²but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
³³for he does not afflict from his heart
or grieve the children of men.