

### *Perspective*

<sup>22</sup> *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;* <sup>23</sup> *they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*

<sup>24</sup> *“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”*

<sup>25</sup> *The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.*

<sup>26</sup> *It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.*

<sup>27</sup> *It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.*

<sup>28</sup> *Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him;*

<sup>29</sup> *let him put his mouth in the dust—there may yet be hope;*

<sup>30</sup> *let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, and let him be filled with insults.*

<sup>31</sup> *For the Lord will not cast off forever,* <sup>32</sup> *but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love;*

<sup>33</sup> *for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men. (Lamentations 3:22-33 ESV)*

Our first reading began with the verses <sup>22</sup> *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;* <sup>23</sup> *they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.* As I mentioned in the bulletin, we recognise that there is truth in these words. Who would like to put their hand up and tell God ‘Well, actually those words aren’t right!’? Nevertheless it’s one thing talking about God and love and his mercies being new every morning academically, almost in the abstract, but it is another thing entirely to talk about these things when you’re in the thick of living – especially when God and his love and his mercies seem far away and what happens each morning is the same ol’ same ol’ of pain and troubles.

Think about the woman in the crowd who wanted healing – relief – bleeding for 12 years – 12 years possibly of ritual uncleanness – 12 years of pain maybe – cramps that won’t go away – we don’t know – and suffering 12 years of medical treatments which didn’t work and now left her broke as well as sick. I can easily imagine her grumbling at year 1 and 2 and 5 and who knows what she would say to God after 10 years – the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases?! Mercies new every morning?! So this desperate woman is now prepared to sneak in the anonymity of a crowd, from behind, and touch Jesus’ garments – and yes, she’s healed and she is confronted for Jesus somehow knows(!) and he blesses her and commends her faith. Now after 12 years what is she saying about God? That’s actually a good question!

Think of Jairus – father of a sick girl – this isn’t swine flu – not run of the mill – this is very serious, possibly complications, death is a real possibility – and he’s got to do something. Remember he’s one of the rulers of the synagogue – so let’s assume that he’s been reading his Scriptures and praying. We don’t know the details of the length of the girl’s illness – all we know is that this father gets the news no parent ever wants to get – your daughter is dead. Great is your faithfulness, God?! (And we can imagine him screaming on the inside – I prayed – I believe – where is your ‘great’ faithfulness?!) Again Jesus intervenes and his word challenges the message from home and Jairus must decide which word to believe. Again we know the ending – Jairus and his wife get to hug their daughter again and watch her grow up. Yes, it’s a miracle and now I am pretty sure Jairus and his wife are happy to talk about God’s love, mercy and faithfulness.

Today’s first reading comes from an Old Testament book that is often ignored – pushed over and hidden behind other books, this little book of 5 chapters doesn’t even have a name – in Hebrew it is known by a sound ( אֵיךְ אֵיךְ – translated ‘Ah, how’ – if you had stage notes for reading: begin with a deep sigh). The Greek version calls it ‘Wailings’ and the Latin Vulgate uses the word ‘Lamentations’. Each chapter is a lament, a dirge, giving grim and pretty graphic accounts of the fall of Jerusalem.

Misery and woe, death and rape, killings and cannibalism, destruction and slavery – not just for one morning and then God rescues in the afternoon – but for a long time. The laments are attributed to Jeremiah who was God’s messenger of judgement. This book is not known – if it’s known at all – as a favourite and yet when everything is terrible – and there is no end in sight, no relief – Jeremiah has the what – insanity? cruelty? audacity? faith? to say <sup>22</sup> *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;* <sup>23</sup> *they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*

Jeremiah could speak in this way because the context of the misery Jerusalem was suffering was their own sin and rebellion. The laments are both personal and for the city – and they acknowledge that they are getting the consequences of their unbelief, their lack of justice and mercy shown to each other, their false worship, and their deliberate and continual breaking of the covenant where they had promised ‘steadfast love’. In one sense Jeremiah is pointing out that the fact that they are alive itself is evidence that God hasn’t gone all out against them but has used these admittedly drastic and painful methods to still reach out to people. <sup>28</sup> *Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him;* <sup>29</sup> *let him put his mouth in the dust—there may yet be hope;* <sup>30</sup> *let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, and let him be filled with insults.* <sup>31</sup> *For the Lord will not cast off forever,* <sup>32</sup> *but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love;* <sup>33</sup> *for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men.*

Jeremiah’s perspective and the perspective of the city – finally – helped them to hope that their suffering would one day come to an end. And we know that after the land itself had had a Sabbath rest (70 or so years) from all the desecration and defilement done on it, exiles returned and Jerusalem was eventually rebuilt but it didn’t had any political or royal independence. However one day the Messiah would come. Jews today are still waiting.

For Christians, the Messiah is Jesus who fulfils all of the Old Testament in himself – prophet, priest, king, and sacrifice – a type of holocaust sacrifice – totally destroyed – and also the scapegoat – cast out with all sins of the people on it. Jesus is God’s action in making a new covenant – which he does with his own body and blood – which he also gives to his people for forgiveness, physical healing, and faith – in other words for life. This is very important for us – no Jesus – no salvation – no Jesus – no life – no Jesus – just death and hell. Jesus’ death and resurrection and ascension thus give us the perspective to face each new day.

We no longer have prophets who speak in such ways that we can say definitely that this country or that city is being punished by God. God allows consequences to be felt to be sure but for those who stand under the cross – there is no way without destroying the cross that we can say that God is punishing us for our sins as we deserve if he has already punished his Son for them. If people reject God’s grace and forgiveness then when the final judgement comes they will see and contemplate their foolishness for eternity. In the interim we should not be so quick to speak of God’s punishment but rather his discipline and above all his steadfast love, his mercy, and his faithfulness.

Yes, I am saying what you may be thinking – that death or cancer or an assault or other evil done to us or disease – particularly the degenerative ones – horrible and painful and life affecting as they all may be – whatever they are – are NOT punishments from God. God hasn’t zapped us for our sins but allows sin and evil which we have caused and which continue to have ‘some rope’. We are burdened – and suffering is horrible often precisely because it is inexplicable and it defies us – and those burdens affect our perspective so that God is either out of sight or we’re cross with him for not helping.

Thus to say <sup>22</sup> *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;* <sup>23</sup> *they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness* can either be a mockery or meaningless when the perspective is too low. But when we look up – not much – maybe about 10’-12’ or so – about the height of crucifixion – and see how God has laid upon Jesus all our sins, then we can move into each new day – with hope and seeking strength – in our situations from our God who is faithful, who is merciful and forgiving, and who has never stopped loving us.