

Lamentations 3:22-33
“The Lord is My Portion”
3rd Sunday in Lent

March 8, 2015
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Rev. Brent Hartwig

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen! Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

[Introduction] I’ve got good news and bad new!

It was 587 BC and it was all gone...

God’s earthly dwelling place –Solomon’s Temple –
and all the rest of Jerusalem was laid waste
at the hands of the King Nebuchadnezzar – the Babylonian king.

Like Jesus at a later time,

Jeremiah, the “weeping prophet,” mourned over the city as he viewed
the religious, moral, and political breakup of God’s people.

And Jeremiah knew weeping...

Jeremiah was called to be a prophet while still in his mother’s womb,
and like young Timothy he needed reassurance about his ministerial office because
of his youth (Jer 1:4–8).

He prophesied that God broke the yoke that bound Israel
that is God forgave her sins and delivered her.

Yet because Israel continued her sinful ways,
God would enslave her to Babylon with a yoke
(Jer 2:20; 5:5; 27:8–12; 28:2–14),
though he also promises final deliverance from every yoke (Jer 30:8).

Jeremiah himself actually wore a yoke to dramatize his message (Jer 27:2; 28:10),
and that is part of the biblical background for the wearing of the stole to mark the
office of the pastor as one who bears the yoke of Christ.

For forty years,

Jeremiah had proclaimed a deafening message of judgment to unhearing, uncaring hearts.
Then finally, doom fell. Jeremiah’s grief is unimaginable.

Yet in his grief Jeremiah also spoke words of hope,
seeking to rouse his hearers to repentance and faith in the God of hope.

Our text is in the center of a highly poetic book,
a lament, actually five, over the destruction of God's temple and city,
and the consequent dismemberment of God's corporate people into scattered exiles.

Against this background comes a beautiful reaffirmation of living trust in God,
who is able to raise the dead,
and who extends hope in the midst of the most dire circumstances.

This is a theme close to the heart of every hearer.

How often are we speechless in the face of overwhelming catastrophe.
Disasters occur in all our lives,
and in the face of death we can only hope in the life of the world to come.

We would not know what to say,
what Christian witness to offer,
were it not for the assurance that "The Lord is my portion."

So which do you want? Good news? Oh! You want the bad news first!

1. Bad News!

A. Disasters in life.

- (1) Personal, family, church, community, nation, world.
- (2) Some are caused by our own evil behavior; others are caused by the evil deeds of other people.
- (3) Some are intentional and related to the sinful nature of humanity; others are "accidental" and due to the fallen state of this world.
- (4) All result from sin: the sin of Adam, inherited original sin, or deliberate actual sin. They impact our lives daily, with terrible effect.

B. Our response is often helplessness and hopelessness

- (1) Confusion and impatience when our "solution" to an anticipated problem or disaster doesn't work.
- (2) Terror when there seems to be no possible deliverance from an impending disaster.
- (3) Remorse when a tragedy has occurred. How can we or should we interpret what has befallen us? What do we do now?
- (4) Helplessness and hopelessness are similar, but hopelessness is worse. Jeremiah's message brings both help and hope.

2. What is good? The Good News is that God's steadfast love *is there for us*.

A. God himself *is there for us*.

(1) We are not "all alone." The great "I am" is with us.

(2) God does not deal arbitrarily with us.

Neither does he relish "getting even" or gloat, or say "I told you so."

(3) God cares about what happens to us.

He knows our pain as he watches us react to tragic events in our lives.

(4) God intentionally intervenes at times,

and instructs us about life's realities,

so that happily we see and believe the truth: he *is there for us*.

B. God's *hesed*, his grace and steadfast love, *is constantly there for us*.

(1) He loved us from the beginning.

And His love did not fail when the first man and woman
brought sin and ruin into His good creation.

And His love does not fail when you, man or woman,
bring sin and ruin into His good creation.

(2) The grace and love of God came personally in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Our Lord suffered the pains of being human in a fallen world
even as each of us does.

Moreover, he bore the sins and griefs of all humanity.

He literally gave his cheek to the smiter and was full of reproach (v 30).

He poured out his life to death in order to redeem us from hopelessness.

His resurrection from the grave is the source of steadfast hope
even in the face of death.

He now lives and is with us to the end of the age—and beyond.

(3) His "compassions" are new every morning. Daily we remember our
Baptism into Christ's death and resurrection. The hope he gives us
will be with us as long as we live and at the hour of our death. Do we
take time to acknowledge God's *hesed*—past, present, and future?

C. God's promise of hope—"I will be your portion"—*is there for us*. We lay
claim to this promise of hope by moving:

(1) *Through* solitude: "sitting in silence" (v 28).

(2) *Through* repentance: "bury his face in the dust" (v 29).

(3) *Through* humility: "offer his cheek" (v 30).

(4) *To* hope in God and in Jesus.

(5) *To* trust in God's wisdom, power and love.

[*Conclusion*]

Someone once said,

“If we look back, we find only the record of much that is wrong.

If we look forward, we may see only question marks.

If we look around us we may find only confusion.

If we look inside ourselves we may see little reason for comfort.

So let us look to the cross and empty grave, to *‘the Lord, who is our portion.’*”

There is cause for real joy today because of the hope within us,
given by God’s promise, “I will be your portion!”

So if drastic and dramatic changes frighten and disturb us,

let us remember God’s promise, “I will be your portion!” Amen!

You are the body of Christ, each one of you part of it. Amen!