

Lamentations 3:22–33

July 1, 2018

“Great is Thy Faithfulness”

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

6th Sunday af. Pentecost

Rev. Brent Hartwig

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior and God our Heavenly Father. Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Introduction]

Between 1931 and 1935, the Hoover Dam was constructed.

When you walk along the sidewalk on the top of the dam,
you can see the dam’s face on one side and Lake Mead on the other.

Here, is a modern marvel.

Here, is a modern marvel of great power and productivity.

Amazingly, such power and productivity arose from a time of crisis in America:
the years of the Great Depression.

During the depression,

the unemployed traveled across America to find work building this dam.

Out of this national suffering came what was to be known for a decade
as the tallest dam and the largest hydroelectric plant in the world.

In the midst of suffering, people saw great power and great work.

Our text shows Christians a glimpse of God’s great power and work
in the midst of suffering.

Israel has been exiled to Babylon,
her city Jerusalem laid siege,
her walls torn down,
her temple destroyed.

Out of this suffering comes a voice of lament, the Book of Lamentations.

And in the center of this book

is a revelation of the amazing faithfulness of God.

From the cry of God’s people in the midst of suffering and judgment
comes a word of faith that remains firm for future generations.

God’s Faithfulness Is Great and Guides Our Lives in Hope.

[Lamentation]

The Book of Lamentations contains five laments, *AND* each one is different.

Our text is part of the third lament.

This third lament is personal.

It’s the cry of a man who has seen suffering (3:1).

It’s the cry of the exiles.

It’s the cry from God’s judgment upon his people.

Having seen these things,
having lived these things, this man cries out in grief.

In his lament, he ends up speaking about God.

Note that. He speaks *about* God rather than *to* him.

God is the one hiding in the brush like a “bear lying in wait” or “a lion in hiding” (3:10).

God is the one who has been like an archer.

God has marked out this man as prey and driven his arrows into his kidneys (3:13).

Physically, mentally, emotionally,
this man has experienced the judgment of God
and reached the point where his endurance and his hope from the Lord
have perished.

He can't speak to God.

He can only speak about him.

You see, that means, he is no longer able to pray. What's the point?

But then – the man remembers something.

Well, actually someone.

He remembers God.

He calls to mind God's faithfulness,
 God's mercies,
 God's steadfast love.

These words are not new to this man.

They are old words,
the language of love that God gave to Israel,
found in her history books,
spoken in her psalms.

When God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt,
he revealed himself to them at Mount Sinai.

Moses asked to see God, and God gave him a glimpse.

As the Lord passed before Moses, the Lord proclaimed these words in his hearing:

***“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger,
and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness”*** (Ex 34:6).

This was the cry that Israel remembered in times of sinfulness and distress.¹

This is the cry that this man remembers

and, from this memory, something amazing happens.

¹ (Ps 25:6; 86:15; 103:8)

God restores a relationship with this man.

Suddenly, the man is speaking to God rather than about him.

In our text, we hear the beginning of his prayer,
the prayer of a person in relationship with God.

The man says, “**Great is your faithfulness**” (v 23).

Not great is God’s faithfulness. Great is *your* faithfulness.

This God, who had pursued him like an enemy,
suddenly is near to him in faithfulness and love.

God will not forsake his covenant or his love toward his people.

This God, who once delivered his people from slavery in Egypt,
will deliver them from exile in Babylon.

This God, who judged his people for their sin,
will forgive them and bring restoration.

In the face of great sin and great suffering,
God’s faithfulness is great, a greatness his people rely on.

In our world, people sometimes see God according to their lives.

That is, they use their life experiences
as a way of determining and measuring God’s love.

If God has delivered them from suffering, then God is powerful.

If God has prospered their business or family, then God is loving.

When life begins to break down, however, so does their God.

Our reading calls us to return to God.

Rather than see God according to our lives,
we encounter God according to his promises,
and his promises never fail.

As the text says, “***For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief,
he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love***” (vv 31–32).

We know about the steadfast love of our God.

In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus,
God has shown us his everlasting love.

There upon the cross, God revealed his love, once for all time.

Using a Roman instrument of torture,
God wrote his faithfulness in the landscape of our history.

His love is so great that he bore the judgment of our sin for us.

His love is so great that he promises life eternal to us.

[**Hope**] After this man remembers God's faithfulness, suddenly he begins to live in hope.

God's great faithfulness guides our lives in hope.

Living in hope does not mean that the suffering has been taken away.

In fact, for this man, the suffering is still present.

He continues to lament.

But this time, when he remembers his suffering (3:40–54),

he does so with hope (vv 55–66).

Earlier, he was at the end of his resources.

He was without peace (v 17),
 without happiness (v 17),
 without hope (v 18).

When he opened his mouth, all that came out was an expression of emptiness,

“my endurance has perished; so has my hope from the Lord” (v 18).

Now, however, his soul is full. Full of the promises of God.

“The Lord is my portion,” he says (v 24).

When God is your portion, you live with hope.

The one who created the universe,
the one who defeated death and the devil,
the one who forgives your sin is on your side.

He fights for you.

[**Conclusion**]

Even in the midst of suffering, this man speaks of God's goodness.

Because God is good (v 25), life is good (vv 26–27).

Life in the midst of exile and suffering?

Yes, even there God's faithfulness is great.

Life in the midst of our troubles and traumas?

Yes, even there God's faithfulness is great.

On the night when Jesus was betrayed, he gave his disciples a promise.

After he had washed their feet,

warned Peter of his denial,

and prepared them for his own betrayal and death,

Jesus gave them this promise:

“In the world you will have tribulation.

But take heart; I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).

Great is Thy Faithfulness. Amen.

“Now may the God of peace... equip you with everything good
that you may do his will, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen.” (Heb 13:20-21)
