

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: PROPER 22C**OCTOBER 2, 2022 --04**

Lamentations 1.1-6

St. David's Church

Lamentations 3.19-26

N. Chesterfield, VA

2 Timothy 1.1-14

Ruth Partlow

Luke 17.5-10

“HOW LONELY SITS THE CITY THAT ONCE WAS FULL OF PEOPLE! HOW LIKE A WIDOW SHE HAS BECOME! – SHE THAT WAS GREAT AMONG THE NATIONS . . . SHE .WHO HAS BECOME A VASSAL WEEPS BITTERLY IN THE NIGHT! (LAM. 1:1)

THIS WEEK WHEN VLADIMIR PUTIN INFORMED THE WORLD THAT FRIDAY RUSSIA WAS GOING TO ANNEX FOUR REGIONS OF UKRAINE – CLAIMING THEM AS RUSSIAN TERRITORY, I COULDN'T HELP BUT NOTICE HOW THESE FEW VERSES IN LAMENTATIONS CAPTURE WHAT IT MUST BE LIKE TO BE OVERRUN BY A FOREIGN ENEMY. HOW EMPTY OF PEOPLE ARE THE STREETS IN THE CITIES AND VILLAGES. MANY HAVE FLED TO OTHER PARTS OF UKRAINE OR EUROPE. THOSE WHO HAD TO STAY BEHIND MUST BE FILLED WITH FEAR OF RUSSIAN OCCUPATION. I SUSPECT WE ALL UNDERESTIMATED PUTIN'S INSATIABLE HUNGER TO RECONSTITUTE IMPERIAL RUSSIA AND PERHAPS ADD OTHER PARTS OF EUROPE WITH HIMSELF AS A TOTALITARIAN KING OR CZAR.

THESE FEW VERSES IN LAMENTATIONS DESCRIBE A CAPTURED AND DEVASTATED JERUSALEM CENTURIES AGO. THEY ARE A REMINDER OF HOW TENUOUS LIFE IS. AS I WATCHED THE KEN BURNS SERIES ON THE HOLOCAUST, WE LEARNED THAT THE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES WAS NOT ALWAYS PRETTY AS WE HAVE BEEN TOLD OF YEARS. IT WAS ONLY AFTER THE BOMBING OF PEARL HARBOR THAT WE ALLOWED OURSELVES TO BE PULLED INTO THE WAR.

I'VE ALSO THOUGHT A LOT ABOUT THE WAY OUR FOREBEARERS SWEEP WEST AND CONQUERED THE TERRITORIES THAT MAKE UP THE CONTINENTAL UNITED

STATES – AND HOW MUCH WE STOLE FROM THE NATIVE AMERICANS. THERE IS SOMETHING IN US HUMAN BEINGS THAT IS NOT SATISFIED UNLESS WE ARE IMPROVING OUR OWN “LOT.” THE BIBLE HAS ACCOUNT AFTER ACCOUNT OF ONE PERSON TAKING ADVANTAGE OF ANOTHER – EVEN THE HEROIC FIGURES LIKE KING DAVID. THERE IS SOMETHING IN OUR DNA THAT PUSHES US TO WANT MORE, TO SEEK MORE.

THAT’S WHY GOD KEPT TRYING TO GET THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH TO LISTEN TO GOD’S WAY – THE WAY OF FAITH, THE WAY OF LOVE, THE WAY OF RESPECT FOR ALL PEOPLE. YET, AS I LOOK BACK OVER HISTORY, AS I READ THE OLD TESTAMENT AND EVEN THE NEW IT’S CLEAR WE NEED HELP – WE ARE EASILY PUSHED AND LURED INTO SIN – TAKING ADVANTAGE OF OTHERS, TRYING TO BETTER OURSELVES AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS.

GOD HAS A BETTER WAY – YOU KNOW IT, I KNOW IT. WE WOULDN’T BE HERE TODAY IF WE WEREN’T SEEKING TO GROW MORE AND MORE INTO THE PERSON GOD CREATED TO BE. WE ALSO KNOW IT TAKES A LIFETIME OF GROWING, LEARNING, FAILING, REPENTING, SEEKING FORGIVENESS AND RETURNING. EVEN AS WE GO DOWN TO THE GRAVE, GOD IS STILL DRAWING US, LOVING US, AND GUIDING US INTO THAT NEW DEEPER LIFE.

WE ARE BLESSED BECAUSE THERE ARE SO MANY WITNESSES TO GOD’S LOVE AND CARE. TODAY WE HEARD FROM THE APOSTLE PAUL AS HE WROTE TO HIS “SON” TIMOTHY. TIMOTHY HAD TRAVELED WITH PAUL FOR A TIME, BUT ABRUPTLY LEFT HIM. PERHAPS THIS LETTER WAS WRITTEN AFTER THEY SEPARATED. IT’S A REMINDER TO TIMOTHY TO ALLOW THE GIFTS IMPARTED TO HIM TO BE FANNED INTO A FLAME SO THAT HE TOO COULD FULFILL HIS CALL TO MINISTRY AND DRAW MANY TO JESUS CHRIST. THEY CERTAINLY REMIND ME AND I HOPE YOU THAT WE

EACH HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE GIFT OF BAPTISM, THE LAYING ON OF HANDS AND THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR OWN LIVES. IT'S A CALL FROM THE APOSTLE PAUL TO EACH OF US TO LIVE OUT FAITH RIGHT WHERE WE ARE, AND IN OUR OWN CIRCUMSTANCES.

THIS IS NOT ALWAYS THE EASY TO DO. WHEN WE MAKE PROMISES AT OUR BAPTISM, AND RECOMMIT TO THEM AT CONFIRMATION OR WHEN WE ARE PRESENT AT ANOTHER'S BAPTISM WE REAFFIRM THESE PROMISES – TO LOVE GOD, TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR AND TO LOVE OURSELVES. BUT AS WE GO ABOUT OUR DAY TO DAY LIVES WE FIND THIS IS DIFFICULT. JESUS KNEW THIS. I IMAGINE HE HAD HIS OWN FAITH STRUGGLES. IT'S NO WONDER WE READ OF HIM IN SCRIPTURE OF GOING OFF TO PRAY, TO BE QUIET AND STILL BEFORE HIS FATHER, TO BE STRENGTHENED AND ENCOURAGED ON HIS LIFE'S JOURNEY. HE KNEW HIS TASK . HE WAS FAITHFUL TO IT IN SPITE OF ALL THAT IT WAS DEMANDING OF HIM.

I THINK SOMETIMES WE THINK OF JESUS AS A PLASTIC PERSON OR A PUPPET BEING MANIPULATED BY GOD, SO EASILY DOING THE WILL OF HIS FATHER. YET I BELIEVE HE WAS AS HUMAN AS WE ARE AND STRUGGLED AS WE DO. YET HE WAS ABLE TO BE FAITHFUL, STAND FIRM AGAINST THE DEVIL AND ALL THE TEMPTATIONS THAT CAME HIS WAY. IN MY HEART OF HEARTS, I WANT TO BE LIKE JESUS.

ALL OF US GATHERED HERE TODAY HAVE SAME HOPE, THE SAME DESIRE IN OUR HEARTS – TO BE LIKE JESUS, TO RESIST TEMPTATION, TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS GOD LOVES US. YET, WE ALL KNOW THAT WE WILL FALL SHORT IN SOME WAY – MANY WAYS. OUR YEARNING AND HOPES TO BE MORE LIKE JESUS SOUND ARE JUST LIKE THE DISCIPLES IN TODAY'S GOSPEL WHEN THEY ASKED, “LORD, INCREASE OUR FAITH!”

ISN'T THAT WHAT WE ALL WANT? TO KNOW JESUS, TO BE LIKE HIM TO BE STRONG IN OUR FAITH?. I FOUND HIS RESPONSE FASCINATING – AND PERPLEXING TOO. I THINK JESUS WAS IMPLYING THAT FOR THOSE WHO FOLLOW HIM, AS FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO PLEASE GOD, THERE IS A DEFINITE RESPONSIBILITY IN WHAT WE DO. AS JESUS SAID, IF YOU'RE A HIRED HAND OR A SLAVE WORKING FOR A MASTER YOU HAVE CERTAIN RESPONSIBILITIES AND REQUIREMENTS. YOU KNOW WHAT YOU CAN DO AND WHAT YOU CANNOT DO.

THE WORKER DOESN'T EXPECT TO COME IN AND SIT DOWN AT THE TABLE WITH THE MASTER! INSTEAD S/HE MAY BE THE ONE WHO PREPARES AND SERVES THE MEAL. IN OTHER WORDS THERE IS A “PECKING” ORDER, A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THE WORKER, THE SLAVE. IT IS DIFFERENT THAN THE ONE WHO FOR THE MASTER – JESUS – OR GOD.

AS WORKERS IN THE KINGDOM, WE CALLED TO BE FAITHFUL, TO FULFILL OUR ROLE – OUR MINISTRY HOWEVER WE ARE CALLED. IT REMINDS ME A BIT OF 1 CORINTHIANS 12 WHEN THE APOSTLE PAUL COMPARES THE KINGDOM – TO THE BODY AND ITS MANY PARTS. – WE EACH HAVE CERTAIN ROLES/DUTIES. THEY DIFFER ACCORDING OUR JOB, OUR ROLE. IT'S NOT THAT ONE IS BETTER THAN THE OTHER, THE ROLES AND DEMANDS ARE SIMPLY DIFFERENT. JESUS IS THE HEAD – WE ARE THE DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE BODY.

JESUS WAS TRYING TO HELP HIS DISCIPLES UNDERSTAND THAT EACH OF THEM CAN BE A PART OF THE WHOLE, AND THAT EACH IS CALLED TO CARRY OUT HIS OR HER ROLE – RESPONSIBILITY IN THE KINGDOM. WE EACH ARE CALLED TO BE FAITHFUL WITNESSES TO GOD'S LOVE AND PRESENCE IN OUR LIVES. EVEN WHEN WE FALL SHORT WE ARE STILL IN “THE BOAT” WITH JESUS. IT'S A CALL TO BE FAITHFUL NO MATTER WHAT COMES OUR WAY. MAY WE HAVE THE STRENGTH AND

FORTITUDE TO STAND STRONG IN OUR FAITH NO MATTER WHAT THE CIRCUMSTANCES. LIKE SO MANY IN UKRAINE MAY WE STAND STRONG IN SPITE OF LIFE AROUND US. WITH THE DISCIPLES MAY WE TOO PRAY, “LORD, INCREASE OUR FAITH.”