



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Pentecost 17 - Proper 22 (C)
October 6, 2019

RCL: Lamentations 1:1-6; Psalm 137; 2 Timothy 1:1-14; Luke 17:5-10

Lamentations 1:1-6

Sometimes, we just need to give voice to our grief. The worst thing we can do is to ignore it—push it aside because it is too painful. In today’s Old Testament reading, the author is facing the reality that Jerusalem, a city that was once full of glory, prosperity, and prominence, has fallen. It is a raw time for the author, a time to face the unforgiving reality of sorrow and suffering head-on. Through it all, though, God is there. The pain is a crucible from which the Jewish people will emerge; God will see them through it. That’s the interesting thing about Lamentations—it’s one long prayer, a prayer of expression, a lifting up of one’s pain to God. God can take the pain, God wants us to lift our pain to God because God wants all our humanity, not just the clean and neat parts.

- How do you give voice to your grief?
- How do you bring your grief to prayer?

Psalm 137

This is a psalm that very few Christians like. It is brutal and contains some of the most disturbing imagery found in scripture. “Happy shall be he who takes your little ones, and dashes them against the rock” (Psalm 137:9, BCP). Who can find God in that? But when we imagine the echoes in which this psalm is written, we can understand where the author is coming from.

Jerusalem has been razed to the ground, many of her inhabitants killed—men, women, children, and even infants. God’s temple was plundered and destroyed, and a majority of the survivors were taken captive to Babylon. This is a harsh memory of ruthless violence.

And the author does not shy away from the feelings created by this event. The author’s raw and exposed emotion is on full display for all to see. The words are offered up to God as an authentic, though disturbing, reflection on not only the author’s emotional and spiritual state but also the Jewish people’s emotional and spiritual state.

This is something we try to shy away from when talking to God—the offering up of our unclean and polluted thoughts. “How honest can I be?” we ask ourselves.

We sometimes try to hide the dark bits of our humanity, thinking that they might offend God or turn God away from us. But God can take it. We can offer those feelings up to God and let God hold them, let God have them so that God can help us through those times when our thoughts are less than magnanimous. We just need to trust that the God in which we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28, NRSV) is there regardless of our emotional or spiritual state. We just need to open ourselves up to God's abundantly generous grace.

- Have you ever been ashamed of your thoughts?
- Do you try to hide those thoughts from God?
- What would it feel like if you openly and authentically offered your whole humanity to God?

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Paul writes something very interesting to Timothy. He writes, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you" (v. 5, NRSV). How important it is to pass our faith down to future generations. We should want to pass it down because our faith should inspire us, excite us, and inform the very essence of who we are and who we want to be. And that's the thing—our faith is a living faith. *But* a living faith needs to be lived, explored, challenged, and internalized until it becomes part of our DNA. Then, and only then, can our faith be passed down, like a dominant physical trait, from one generation to another. The only way to spread the Good News of Jesus is to live it and proclaim it, especially to those closest to us.

- How do you proclaim the gospel to those closest to you?

Luke 17:5-10

Our faith asks that we give ourselves fully and completely to God. In doing so, we will be compelled to serve God fully and completely. Serving God involves not only loving God but also loving our neighbors as ourselves (Lk. 10:25-28). In loving God, we serve others, giving our time, talent, and treasure to ensuring that the dignity of every human being is realized. We do this not just because it is the right thing to do, but because every single human is made in the image of God and is known by God long before he or she was fashioned in the womb. No thank-you is needed. No attention desired. We only do what we ought to do (Lk. 17:10, NRSV) because as followers of Christ, we cannot do anything else. This is not easy at times; we have doubts, frustrations, and anxieties to wrestle with as we work to selflessly give ourselves over to God and others. We must rely on our faith—faith that God is there supporting us and holding us as we give ourselves over to the work of building God's Kingdom here on earth.

- How do you serve God and others?
- How does your faith help you in that service?

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