THE LIVING WORD OF THE SEASON AFTER PENTECOST

A DEVOTIONAL GUIDE
October 2 - October 8

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST

Proper 22

If this week's readings were a musical score, it would be played, sung, and heard in minor keys, full of dissonance, dark tones, and despair. If it were a weather forecast, they'd be alerting us to turbulent, threatening storms ahead.

But as the written word? The primary thought is lament. Along with several follow-up questions like: where do I go with my mourning? What do I do with my grief? When can I be free of this weeping?

In Lamentations 1, brokenness is seen through the perspective of a beloved city that has plummeted from the status of a queen to that of a slave. We have bitter tears, the lack of comfort, betrayal of friends, ongoing affliction, and no resting place. Anguish is so deep even the roads mourn.

Lamentations 3 moves from "out there" at a city to "in here" to a personal heart, when the writer remembers that they caused their own suffering. Their wandering ways left their soul downcast. Have you ever felt dismayed, dejected, disappointed, discouraged, or disheartened to the very depths of your soul? It can be a literal heart ache.

What's striking here is how they suddenly and intentionally flip from recalling their failures to remembering God's faithfulness. This conscious choice is shown quite clearly in verse 21, "yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope, because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail, they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness". Great love. Compassion. Fresh. Every. Morning. From there on in the focus shifts from the person to God, as they learn to instruct their soul to have faith not in themselves but in Him.

Psalm 137 returns to a minor key with a deep longing for Jerusalem and treasured days back home. Now living as foreigners in captivity in Babylon, they hang up their harps and refuse to sing when their captors want to

hear something cheery. The emotion again is intense and verse 9 is flat out troubling to hear from warring countries.

Habakkuk comes along and is so comfortable in his relationship with God that he takes his lament and aims it directly at Him pointing out His perceived lack of listening, inaction, tolerance of evil and wickedness. He continues with how justice does not prevail and in fact is being perverted. Then he positions himself in a place determined to hear God, and God answers with great clarity, "... the righteous person will live by his faithfulness."

Psalm 37 gives tangible ways to consider what this might look like with two contrasting and recurring phrases, "do not fret" and "trust in the Lord". Then helps us think about the fragility of life and the beauty of taking delight in the Lord, committing our ways to Him, being still, waiting patiently, and having hope in Him.

Paul's letter to Timothy brings it all to life in a relational manner by showing the impact of faithfulness from one generation to the next. We see the value of prayer-filled living, sincere faith, fanning into flame the

gift of God. And then Paul invites Timothy to "join with me in suffering for the gospel" by relying on the Holy Spirit.

In Luke 17, the apostles come right out and ask Jesus to "increase our faith!"

So, where do we go with our mourning? What do we do with our grief? When can we be free of this weeping? Let's start by talking to God. Asking Jesus for help. Relying on the Holy Spirit.

FOR PRAYER & REFLECTION

For all of our vaunted technology and strength, the consuming darkness of our world still threatens to overwhelm us — and it can take many forms. Consuming darkness can be natural, social, emotional, or spiritual in nature. Lord, have mercy.

Where does consuming darkness threaten you?

In Scripture, Babylon names a consuming darkness that threatens to overwhelm God's people. Babylon is a raging current that crashes over walls of security, leaving Zion – the land of God's love and desire – in utter ruins. Babylon is a force that brings God's people to the brink of disbelief.

By the rivers of Babylon -- there we sat down, and there we wept when we remembered Zion... How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? (Psalm 137:1, 4).

What do we believe when all we can see is darkness? How do we respond in the face of overwhelming darkness? Babylon reveals the substance of our faith.

Whenever we find ourselves frozen and speechless in the face of consuming darkness, Lamentations and the Psalms offer guidance through the art of lament. In Scripture, lament threads a needle between denial (of pain) on the one hand and disbelief (in God) on the other.

"The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in Him." The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him. (Lam. 3:24-25)

Will you hope in the Lord? Will you wait for Him? Will your soul seek Him in the face of consuming darkness?

This week's Gospel also picks up a posture of lament. Jesus has just instructed His disciples to forgive offenders without limit (Luke 17:3-4). They respond with a cry, "Increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5) because faith here is about imitating Jesus. Faith in this instance is about loving God and others the same way God loves us, and the disciples realize this is impossible unless Jesus Himself steps in.

Where do you need Jesus to increase your faith? Where do you need Him to step into an impossible feat of costly forgiveness?

Whether we feel the weight of God's absence (in suffering) or the weight of God's presence (in a call to forgive), lament is our most reliable path to avoid denial (of suffering) and disbelief (in God). Lament dignifies God by demanding divine action in the face of consuming darkness, staking everything on a single claim: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. God's mercies never come to an end. (Lam. 3:22)



SCRIPTURE

READINGS FOR THE WEEK

Thursday

Lamentations 3:19-26; Jeremiah 52:1-11; Revelation 2:8-11

Friday

Lamentations 3:19-26; Jeremiah 52:12-30; Revelation 2:12-29

Saturday

Lamentations 3:19-26; Lamentations 1:7-15; Matthew 20:29-34

Sunday

Lamentations 1:1-6; Lamentations 3:19-26; Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4; Psalm 37:1-9; 2 Timothy 1:1-14; Luke 17:5-10

Monday

Psalm 137; Lamentations 1:16-22; James 1:2-11

Tuesday

Psalm 137; Lamentations 2:13-22; 1 John 5:1-5, 13-21

Wednesday

Psalm 137; Lamentations 5:1-22; Mark 11:12-14, 20-24

Why do the daily readings begin on Thursday?

The daily readings for each week begin on Thursday and end on the following Wednesday. The Thursday through Saturday readings prepare the reader for the Sunday ahead. The Monday through Wednesday readings reflect on what was presented on Sunday.

The Morning Liturgy

Opening Scripture

The hour comes, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him.

John 4:23

Opening Prayer (based on Psalm 51)

Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim Your praise. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Give me the joy of Your saving help again and sustain me with Your bountiful Spirit. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.

Amen.

Scripture Reading (read Psalm and Gospel text here)

Period of Silence

Confessing Our Faith (Apostles' Creed)

The Lord's Prayer

The Collect (Proper 22)

Almighty and everlasting God, You are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve: Pour upon us the abundance of Your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior; who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Amen.

A Midday Prayer

Blessed Savior, at this hour You hung upon the cross, stretching out Your loving arms: Grant that all the peoples of the earth may look to You and be saved; for Your mercies' sake. *Amen*.

An Early Evening Prayer

Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know You as You are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of Your love. *Amen*.

A Bedtime Confession and Prayer

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in Your will, and walk in Your ways, to the glory of Your Name.

Amen.

Visit this place, O Lord, and drive far from it all snares of the enemy; let Your holy angels dwell with us to preserve us in peace; and let Your blessing be upon us always; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

