

Bible Study
Proper 22, Year C
October 2, 2016

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

Lamentations 1:1-6

For the people of Judah the fall of Jerusalem and exile must have been a shock. They lost the security that their great city provided. They lost all their possessions. They lost their freedom. Through it all they felt abandoned by God. Their theological understanding was that God gave them their economic and military might. They had come to take it for granted. During the exile they came to understand, through the prophets, that God had taken these things away and allowed them to suffer so because they deserved it.

While our theological understanding of God is centered on Grace, we do not think our suffering is punishment for our sins. But what we can relate to is the pain and grief of loss. We do see the suffering of others and experience it ourselves. This passage lists loneliness, loss of social status and power, dislocation, captivity, being betrayed and tricked as ways that the people suffer.

- Many people feel that God punishes them because they have done bad things. How can we help each other understand how God's grace works?
- When you see that someone is suffering, do you think it would help him or her to hear about a time of suffering in your life that you experienced? Did you feel that God helped you through that time?

Psalm 137

This is a difficult passage. Who knows how to deal with the last two verses of revenge and that horrible last line of this Psalm? But the rest of the psalm gives the first steps in recovering from the suffering described in the first Lamentations reading above. While in exile, the people are reminded of their beloved Jerusalem. Their captors taunt them, eager to ridicule their songs of Zion. But the songs remind them of a time when they felt the love of God and lived gratefully in God's service. It is the beginning of moving out of despair and finding a glimmer of hope. Next comes the choice of anger and revenge, or forgiveness and love.

- When we have been wronged, don't anger and desire for revenge come easily? If you look to Jesus for inspiration to strive to forgive, do you think of a particular story from the gospels that help you?
- Can you think of a person whom you wronged who blessed you with forgiveness?

2 Timothy 1:1-14

There is an implication that Timothy is suffering. Certainly, it seems that Paul thinks Timothy needs encouragement. Timothy's faith is deep and is rooted in the faith of his grandmother and

mother. Paul says that he is suffering too but they must rely on the spirit of power and love and self-discipline that God has given them.

What gets Paul through the tough times is the knowledge that the work he is about is not his own but that of God. Paul suffers in order to spread the gospel that Jesus has abolished death and brought immortality. Paul tells Timothy that his trust in God is what gets him through. It certainly helps to get through tough times if we feel that there is something to live for. Especially if we think that something is greater than us. Paul feels a responsibility to God. The Gospel is the good treasure entrusted to him and Timothy. Paul essentially tells Timothy, buck up. You have work to do and God has given you the strength and power to do it. Trust that.

- Do you feel as though God has entrusted you with the Gospel? Does that feel like a heavy burden or an invigorating challenge?
- When you are discouraged and feeling hopeless would it help to imagine God saying to you “Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy”? Not that our sadness makes God happy, but that our turning to and being with God does.
- Try to identify the gifts that God has given you to keep going when things are tough. What gifts do you have to do the work God trusts you to do?

Luke 17:5-10

At first these two paragraphs seem unrelated. They look like two random bits of wise advice, one following the other like the verses of Proverbs. But perhaps the part about the slave serving the master at dinner is a continuation of Jesus’ response to the apostles’ request for more faith. Perhaps this is Jesus statement about faith without works.

Jesus tells them that even with a tiny bit of faith they could tell a mulberry tree to jump into the sea. This wouldn’t be a very useful miracle though. In a way the apostles have just asked the master to let them eat at the table rather than serve. Through his metaphor, Jesus tells them to get the work done instead. Do all that you are ordered to do without expecting reward. It is not that Jesus says we don’t need faith. He’s telling us that lot’s of faith isn’t the most important thing. Doing what he tells us to do is what is important.

- Do you feel that you have found the right balance of faith and works?
- Can you identify good works that you see need to be done in your faith community?
- What work can or are you involved in outside your faith community?
- Do you rely on your faith to inspire you and empower you to do the work Jesus asks us to do?

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