

The Weekly Word

Aug 5-11, 2019

Welcome to August. Happy summer Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, August 5: Lamentations 1 – How do you process a tragedy?...

How does a person process a great tragedy? There is no 'one way' but there are poor ways. And not facing the tragedy is part of the recipe for many poor ways of processing tragedy. The reverse, facing and being honest about the tragedy and its pain, is one ingredient of better and healthier ways to process tragedy.

Standing outside of Lazarus' tomb, Jesus wept. He felt the loss and the pain of his friend's death.

Lamentations is Jeremiah's lament over the destruction of Jerusalem. In Lamentations Jeremiah processes his pain with his pen.

As I read I consciously work to enter and embrace Jeremiah's pain...

I have no personal tragedy that compares with the pain Jeremiah expresses.

I sit in stillness... latching onto moments in my life when I felt abandonment, loss. Nothing akin to what Jeremiah expresses.

Lord, as I sit today, I am realizing what a blessed life You have allowed me to live. I have not even come close to the pain Jeremiah is expressing. I am grateful and feeling quite blessed. I don't know what to pray... thank You and bless You seem inadequate, but they are all I have at the moment. Through my Lord and Savior Jesus I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, August 6: Lamentations 2- Discipline of reading God's word...

It is so hard to sit with someone in utter pain. I want to run past Lamentations, to get through it as fast as I can. Still I read and sit with it. Little if anything inspirational has touched me. Instead I return and re-read the utter destruction. I imagine the pain it cost to record these words on a page. Reliving the horror. Experiencing again the incredible abandonment of God's judgment. Facing the physical and spiritual agony.

No food, children dying limp in their mother's arms. *My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within; my heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed, because children and infants faint in the streets of the city. They say to their mothers, "Where is bread and wine?" as they faint like the wounded in the streets of the city, as their lives ebb away in their mothers' arms (11-12).*

Total destruction of Israel's worship life... how can they connect to God without an altar and priests? [God] *has laid waste his dwelling like a garden; he has destroyed his place of meeting. The LORD has made Zion forget her appointed festivals and her Sabbaths; in his fierce anger he has spurned both king and priest. The Lord has rejected his altar and abandoned his sanctuary. He has given the walls of her palaces into the hands of the enemy; they have raised a shout in the house of the LORD as on the day of an appointed festival (6-7).*

I don't know what to do with this...

I wonder why it is in Scripture.

Then I ‘see’ refugees in refugee camps and believers throughout history enduring unthinkable horrors using these words and crying them back to God. Then I ‘see’ these words – words that I struggle to find any meat for my life within – become sustenance for them as they endure great pain.

This reading might speak to you today, but it is speaking to someone today. So I pray for those ‘someones’...

Lord, I lift up the broken and broken hearted. I lift up the refugee, the person running for her or his life, the person enduring war in their land, the person trudging across lands and borders hoping to find some kind of safer way of living. I lift these people to You and ask You to send mercy; somehow send mercy. Send an advocate. Bring relief. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Wednesday, Lamentations 3- Anchored to the Lord...

I was dreading my Bible reading today. Not a good feeling. Jeremiah weighed on me and now Lamentations is weighing on me. Jeremiah’s personal cries in the early verses seemed so genuine. His life had been difficult. As God’s prophet, people had maligned, ridiculed and imprisoned him. Then his writing shifted from self to the Lord and the skies brightened for me. I caught a glimpse of how Jeremiah survived those decades of dismissal ministry. His faith was solidly on the Lord... come good or ill his faith was anchored to his God.

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. I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.” The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD (22-26). His words buoyed my soul. I rose on his faithfulness, which of course rested on God’s faithfulness. Yes, I nodded, *The LORD is good to those [who] hope ... in him.* Life may not be good. Circumstances may not be good, but the Lord is good and His goodness is there in good and bad times of life. I affirm that! I proclaim that! I hope I live that.

Shafts of grace continued to stream into my life. For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone (31-33).

More light... Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come? Why should the living complain when punished for their sins? Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD. Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven, and say: “We have sinned and rebelled and you have not forgiven (37-42).

Life is not random, God remains in control. And sometimes we have to sit in the pain and ask, “Lord, what are You showing me? Lord, what would You have me learn? Lord, where have I sinned? Where have others sinned?”

Bracing for dread this morning... I found hope, light, perspective...

Thank You, Lord, for the gift of Your Word and for the discipline to stay in it. Bless the Lord, Oh my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name. Amen.

Thursday August 8: Lamentations 4- God’s discipline...

Lamentations returns to grieving over Israel’s punishment and exile in Babylon. Towards the end of the chapter there is a glimmer, the faintest of glimmers of hope. *Your punishment will end, Daughter Zion; he will not prolong your exile. (22a).*

Israel was punished for her sins. Hers is not a forever punishment. It has a beginning and an end. It is meant to be redemptive, burning off the dross, so the gold can be purified.

Such is the discipline of the Lord for His people. God's discipline stings. We don't want it. What child wants mom or dad's discipline? The writer of Hebrews says it well:

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:7-11).

I hope and pray that I accept the Lord's discipline when it is necessary with the wisdom of Hebrews...

Lord, I need Your correction, as much as I need Your mercy. I long to be Your faithful son... bring me to maturity so that my life might shine for You and bring others to trust and believe in You. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Friday, August 9: Lamentations 5- Falling onto the mercy of God...

You, LORD, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation. Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long? Restore us to yourself, LORD, that we may return; renew our days as of old unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure (19-22). And so Jeremiah's lamentations conclude.

Jeremiah has poured his heart out to the Lord. There is nothing more he can do but fall onto the mercy of God.

At its root, what does Jeremiah ask for? *Restore us to yourself, LORD, that we may return.* I find this profound. It is not riches or fame; it is not heights of power or any other earthly glory for which he longs. Jeremiah asks to be restored to the Lord Himself.

Everything with the Lord is built on relationship and nothing is gained without relationship. Jeremiah understands this...

Faith in the Lord is all about relationship, about being in communion with the Lord.

This recognition presses me to consider my walk with Jesus and when there are cracks and fissures to simply pray. Restore me, Lord, to You. Remove my sin, clean my life and restore me, Lord, to you.

So, Lord, today I ask you to cleanse me with hyssop that I might be clean. Forgive my sins and strengthen my heart. Restore to me the joy of my salvation. And may my life be a witness to Your amazing love and grace. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, August 10: John 1 - I am expendable, Jesus never is ...

I admit that I was thrilled when I saw my reading was in the New Testament, and particularly the gospel of John. After slogging my way through Jeremiah and Lamentations I was anticipating the fresh breeze of the Spirit as I read the gospel.

The Lord did not disappoint.

I found myself drawn to John. There is much in this chapter about John. What an incredibly humble man he is, humble that is, when it comes to his place verses Jesus' place. *"I baptize with*

water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie” (26-27). John truly believed this.

I was impressed that he didn’t attempt to stop his disciples from leaving him to follow Jesus. The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus (35-37).

I can become so possessive of ‘my people’, not John. John knew that Jesus was the answer, he was only a forerunner.

Knowing my place is an important understanding if I am going to live fully for Jesus. I (every one of us) need to understand my calling and live fully within God’s given arena. When I slide into other arenas I can create problems.

People come to me with all kinds of questions. I have to know when another professional is needed. And when/if the Lord moves people from the flock I am called to pastor to another flock, I have to trust the Lord and let them go as God leads.

None of this is easy. Developing relationships and then letting them go is hard. Admitting I don’t have all the answers can be hard as well. Like John I have to remember I am NEVER the Savior, only a person pointing to the Savior. I am expendable, Jesus never is.

John is such a good example of this...

Thank You, Lord, for including John’s story within Your story. I can glean so much from John. Lord, as I read this gospel, continue to use the people you include in it to teach and instruct me. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Sunday August 11, 2019, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the Living Hope website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@LivingHopeCT.org.

Click [here](#) for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.