

Pastor T.C. Arnold
4th Sunday of Easter
Lamentations 3:22-33
April 21st, 2013

A faithful church parishioner sees argument after argument at his congregational voters meetings, members complaining about each other, and hurtful words and actions are being used. He says to another parishioner of the same church, “there is no demonstration of love and compassion at our church anymore.” And, for the most part, that parishioner was right.

A church in the Deep South that was going through painful struggles because of multiple families in the congregation fighting over issues inside the church and outside in the community were gathered at a church council meeting. One member was wondering why the church was not growing so he said to those on the church council, “Why don’t visitors come back to our church after they visit for the first time?” The pastor responded, “Because they can tell that we don’t love each other.” And, for the most part, that pastor was right.

Listen to what Peter says in 1 Peter 4, “*Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*” Peter is right. He tells us quite candidly, “*love each other.*” That’s what Christians do, they love each other. And believe you me, this does not mean love your fellow believer when it is convenient to do so. This doesn’t mean love your neighbor when they are acting, “loveable” – when it is easy to love them. No, the Lord says through Peter, “*Above all, love each other deeply...*”

And you see, the Lord would never ask us to do something He hasn’t already done for us. Nearly six hundred years before Christ, Jeremiah wrote these words in Lamentations chapter three. Let’s look at these words on the back of your bulletin this morning. Let’s say them together: “***The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.***” Words like, “there is no love here,” or, “They can tell that we don’t love each other,” can never be said about our Lord who loves us and loves the church. They shouldn’t be said about us Christians, but they can never be said about our Lord.

It’s easy for us to say those words about the Lord. We love to play the blame game. When terrible things happen we wonder why God is not intervening. We wonder why, at times, He is silent in the face of tragedy. We know that people have already used the excuse that God must not exist or that He doesn’t care because why else would He allow an 8 year old boy to get blown up at the finish line of the Boston Marathon – others who died and were injured in terrible ways. They say, “See how powerless God is. See how He doesn’t care or how He is not even present to save His people.”

How short sided we are in our perspectives, and how arrogant we are to think we can know the mind and will of God and how He is at work in times of national tragedy. Arrogance is a sin that is so hard for us to get away from. Arrogance has us look inward for explanation when there isn’t one. Arrogance believes that we have all the answers and that our conclusions matter the most. This is exactly why we have the book of Lamentations in the Old Testament.

These “laments” are laments over sin. You see, back in the time of Jeremiah, the grand city of Jerusalem would fall into the hands of the Babylonians. The Lord said this would happen. The people were not faithful and destruction came upon their city. The people of Judah sought after their own kind of gods instead of the one true God. Their arrogance believed that they could find a god that matched their way of thinking, their way of life. It doesn’t sound so different for our world today, does it?

Laments to the Lord are an expression of sorrow over sin. There was much infidelity going on between Israel and the one true God. Now, it was time to repent. “Lord, I have been wayward... chasing after other gods. I have put other things above you. I have not loved you with my whole heart...” And any of us could and should say this before our Lord. The reason, we have all been guilty of arrogance while at the same time seeking after other gods.

But hear the Lord's response. Look again at verses 22 and 23 of Lamentations chapter three. Let's say it together again, "***The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.***" In times of our "lack of" love or unfaithfulness, we have a God that never stops loving us and is faithful to us until the end.

An English theologian by the name of Richard Sibbes who lived not long after the time of Luther once wrote, "The depths of our misery can never fall below the depths of Christ's mercy." I know at times it doesn't feel that way, but it is true. Great is the faithfulness of God. Great is His faithfulness and mercy. "***The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.***" His love is never removed from you or this world. His love is steadfast – It's always there – and His mercies (plural – so much of it) never come to an end. God is at work. How that work gets carried out can be strange to us – often it is. But make no mistake about it, God is in charge and His love and mercy does not end.

Take the example of Easter. Who would have ever thought that God's love and mercy for you would be carried out the way it was on Good Friday and the Day of the Resurrection? Who could have ever imagined it? Jesus convicted by a crowd of detractors who saw Him as a severe threat to their religion – which was a religion of arrogance that focused on themselves and how they could get ahead with God by their own works. Jesus, the Savior of the world, allowing Himself to be pushed around hit, scourged, stripped of his clothes, mocked, made fun of, carry a cross and be nailed to it by sinful men to be placed between sinful men. How could love and mercy look like a dying man with a crown of thorns, bleeding to death from a tree? How could love and mercy for me, from God, look like this?

It may not seem so strange to us Christians because we believe it, we know it, and we have grown up with it. But then why do we have a hard time believing that God is present during our sufferings with things we don't understand – things we cannot comprehend – things that cause us to ask, "Why?"

"Why," is a difficult, even at times impossible, question to answer – especially when bombs go off. That question will never cease to exist. However, we do know also what will never cease to exist and that will be those words from the prophet Jeremiah in Lamentations chapter three. Let's look at them one last time and say them together. "***The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.***"

God is faithful. Funny, we talk about Christians being faithful. We say, "Have faith," to each other. That's what Christians are supposed to have... faith. But God can be faithful too. And He is. He is faithful to His Word. This means that when the Lord says your sins are forgiven, it is so. He doesn't make exceptions to the rule. He says it and He is faithful to His Word. He forgives you even when we wonder, "How," or are asking that difficult question, "Why?" Only our mind makes exceptions... only our reason makes it seem as if God can't or won't pull it off when it's all too much, too bad, too severe. God is faithful to you.

Those examples of love, or the lack there of, I gave at the beginning of the sermon are real life examples. They are other churches and people who struggle with loving one another. You see, beloved in the Lord, loving one another is only a problem for us sinners and not for our Lord. Our Lord loves and is faithful... to the end... it never ceases (as it says in the text). Great is your faithfulness, Lord. Thank you for being faithful. Thank you for a love that never ceases. Thank you for dying and rising to life. Thank you, Lord, for all you give to me so that I can love my neighbor, tell your truth, live your truth and see your unending faith to me. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.