

SERMON: Proclaiming Our Hope and Faith in Jesus – Lamentations 1.1-6, 3.19-26; 2 Timothy 1.1-14

Beloved Father, thank you for your promise of eternal salvation. May our hope and faith in your son Jesus grow deeper every day, giving us the power through your Spirit to fearlessly proclaim your gospel truth to the world.

How would you describe the world today?

Some words I would use are:

Morally lost; dangerous; greedy; unsustainable, secular; suffering; unsettled

Whichever way you look at it, we are living through a time of significant change.

Our readings from Lamentations and 2 Timothy 1.1-14 also describe periods of dramatic change. I'm going to explore what they may teach us about our response to our own circumstances.

Lamentations

Starting with the book of Lamentations, these poems were written probably not long after 586BC. Jerusalem's Temple had been destroyed and many of the Jewish people sent into exile in Babylon. They describe the grief of those left in Jerusalem, as they come to terms with the desolation around them. You can't help but be moved by their desperate cries in the opening verses of Lamentations 1:

"How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations!... She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks."

The first lesson we can learn from these cries of despair is that it is ok for us to share our heartache with God. Whether it's caused by personal circumstances or societal ones, when our emotions are raw, they're raw – and our Father needs to hear our honest feelings. As our loving parent He will listen to our cries and wrap His loving arms around us to comfort us in our times of need.

In Israel's historic circumstance, for decades prophet after prophet had warned the Israelites of their impending doom. They were repeatedly called to obey the covenant God made with them and told all would be well if they did – but they chose to continue to break the law that God had given them. However, now, amidst their suffering, they do turn to the Lord. As Chapter 3 verses 22 and 23 reveal they found hope in God's promise that:

“the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

The seed of renewal is found in verses 40 and 41 which declare:

“Let us test and examine our ways and return to the Lord. Let us lift up our hearts as well as our hands to God in heaven.”

As the Israelites repented, God in his merciful forgiveness comforted and restored His people. For as verses 25 and 26 tell us: *“The Lord is good to those who wait for him, for the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.”*

So what does this mean for us? Amidst all the suffering and hardship and fear that permeates throughout our world, is it possible to find a hope filled pathway to live our lives and have a real, positive influence on our families, our community and our world?

It would be glib of me to simply say: Yes, there is – it is through Jesus. Especially as it took me many years to deeply accept that pathway. And it started with taking a good hard look at myself. Only when I tested and examined my ways, did I find the freedom in Christ to accept God’s hope. I’m not suggesting that everyone has to experience hardship in order to turn to faith, but it is often the case that there is some form of catalyst that shakes us out of our previous comfort zone and leads us to explore a new understanding of life. It certainly was for the Israelites and on a much less dramatic scale, it was for me and perhaps for you also. And it can happen repeatedly throughout our life as the Holy Spirit helps us to grow in our relationship with our triune God. Have you had that experience – just when you think you’ve worked out your faith journey, something happens and you realise there’s still so much more to learn! In that moment of transformation, we turn to God and apologise for our shortcomings – we repent and thank Him for His saving grace.

I suggest that the events of the world today are causing many people to rethink their world view. It is a catalyst that is reawakening an interest in God. It is a time when all disciples of Jesus, are called to be attentive to the work of the Holy Spirit as people earnestly seek an alternative, better way of living.

Timothy 1.1-14

To that end, let us be ready to share our testimony whenever the opportunity is given to us, for just as we are being transformed, so does God long for all His children to be. This is the longing that we have been given to share with the world. No matter how desperate things seem God gave us His only Son to grant

us the promise of an eternal, restored life. This is the message Paul passionately gives to Timothy throughout today's reading which opens with the greeting:

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus the Lord."

The closeness between Paul and Timothy is palpable. In verses 3 to 5 he speaks of his constant prayers for Timothy, his deep longing to see him and his clear knowledge of the deep faith lived by Timothy and his maternal relatives. They have ministered together through good and hard times. Their relationship is based on both their shared humanity and their mutual love of Jesus. Yet Paul does not take for granted that Timothy's faith will see him through his adversities. In verses 6 to 9 Paul urges Timothy to remain strong with the words: *"For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. So do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God."*

Dramatic words for dramatic times. But are our times any less dramatic? I once again suggest that particularly in countries like our own we are in a time of spiritual upheaval. Christian values which once formed the basis of our society are no longer shared by the majority of its citizens. In many respects, just like the people of Israel, we are called to repent and turn back to God. Just like Paul and Timothy we are called to have no fear and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to proclaim the gospel of our Lord Jesus, even when that brings hardship upon us.

So what can that look like for us? How do we, just as Timothy is encouraged to do in verse 6, "fan into flame the gift of God?" The first thing to note is that the gift of God is exactly that. It speaks of both the gift of grace to believe in Jesus and of the spiritual gifts received through the Holy Spirit. But the fanning into flame of those gifts is our responsibility. So what are your thoughts on this? How do we enliven the gifts given to each one of us?

Some ways are:

To seek regular inspiration from the bible; to talk to Jesus regularly and invite Him to share our daily activities; to actively discern what our spiritual gifts are and ask the Holy Spirit how we should use them; to lovingly support one another as members of the Body of Christ.

One I would particularly mention is to be prepared to take risks and learn from our mistakes. Verse 7 tells us “*For the Spirit God gave us, does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.*” As we move forward as the Hope Ginninderra Anglican Parish, together with Holt Parish in our Ministry District, through the power, love and self-discipline given to us by the Holy Spirit, we can and will experiment with different ways of proclaiming the gospel message of our saviour Jesus Christ. Some will work some may not. But we will never be afraid of sharing testimony of our Lord.

The 2 Timothy passage concludes with Paul adjuring Timothy to: “*Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.*”

My brothers and sisters, let me conclude by stressing that this same message holds for us today. Amidst whatever darkness envelops our world, let us be beacons of light, zealously guarding the gospel truth, knowing that we stand firm in the love and power of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.