

June 27, 2021

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

“The Life In Which You Hope”

Lamentations 3:22-33

*“It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.”* Jeremiah writes this meaning that it is beneficial a person learn suffering early on in life. Why? Probably because life has a lot of suffering attached to it. *“Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him; let him put his mouth in the dust—there may yet be hope; let him give his cheek to the one who strikes, and let him be filled with insults.”*

Hardship and suffering, it’s good training. Want and humiliation, you may not like the idea, but it is good preparation for a broken world filled with evil and strife. When life is being tough and nasty to you it forces you in one of two directions; anger and despair or hope. And for those who know the true nature of God in Christ, hope is what He gives us. *“For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men.”*

Weirdly enough, I think one of the troubles facing the Christian church today in our North American context is that we don’t face enough hardship, suffering, want, humiliation and abuse. Maybe it’s not just the church, but our society at large.

Think about it. What is one of our biggest health problems? Obesity. We have too much food and we eat it! Another problem; a sedentary lifestyle. We aren’t forced to toil and labor so we spend too much time on the couch watching Netflix! Another problem we’re facing—people are living too long! Medicine has extended our lives to a point social security didn’t plan for. Such horrible problems—not! Truth be told we live in the best place in the best time of all of history! Through a supercomputer that fits in the palm of my hand I have access to all the world’s knowledge, communication with those near and far and can have nearly whatever I desire delivered right to my door. Life has never been so good!

That’s not healthy, at least not spiritually. When this life is this good where do people start placing their hope? This life. And I think we’re seeing that doing so just doesn’t work at all.

Look at all the anger and division in our country that in truth is abounding with prosperity and opportunity for all! Young folks at universities and even corporations need safe spaces not from violence, but from words and opinions with which they disagree! And perhaps more than any other place and time in history, people are taking the attitude that they somehow deserve a life free of hardship, suffering or any type of want, that the world should be taking care of them and making them happy. It’s as if no one has looked at the history of human life—a history that is ugly and full of evil, hardship and suffering.

I’m not saying that we all need to make a point of suffering more. My last two sermons have highlighted the fact that whether it’s happening now or not, the afflictions of the fallen world will catch up with you eventually, ultimately in the death to this life. But I’d just like to use the people in our Gospel lesson to remind you of where your hope is rightly focused.

Jairus is a lot like us in that he is kind of on top of the world. He is a ruler of the synagogue, likely meaning he had the means to donate lots of cash to it, possibly had a home big enough to house the synagogue itself. He has the respect of all his neighbors and seemingly the favor of God Himself.

And then his daughter is afflicted and dying. Where does he place his hope? Not in his stuff of the world. Jairus falls at the feet of Jesus, humbling himself and begging for mercy. His hope for his daughter is all in Christ, not in the world.

Then the world seems to do its worst. *“Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?”* Jesus does not let this man’s faith crumble, but encourages him, *“Do not fear, only believe.”* Despite the mocking of the worldly mourners, Jairus’ faith is rewarded and his daughter raised from the dead.

Likewise, the unnamed woman with the discharge of blood. She’s the opposite of Jairus. Suffering for as many years as his daughter had lived, she is considered unclean and unfit to participate in the worship life of Israel. She’s likely shunned and having spent all her wealth on healers she is financially destitute.

Yet her faith is greater than that of Jairus, believing that only touching Christ’s garment will bring her healing. A great throng is crowding and touching Jesus, but this lowly woman’s great faith receives the mercy of God in healing.

For both of these their suffering led to faith in Christ, and faith in Christ receives the reward. But let me ask you this, were their lives in the world now perfect and wonderful? Of course not. The world was still fallen and this life still broken. The woman? Still destitute. Maybe her prospects were better now but she would still die someday. Jairus and his daughter? He was still a Jew under oppression of Rome and his daughter might even live to see the horrible destruction of Israel several decades later. And they too would die one day.

But how would they face all that? I’m betting with hope in the same Christ who answered their faith that day in Galilee. I’m nearly certain that they later heard about Jesus’ crucifixion and then of His resurrection and they believed the Gospel proclamation of forgiveness, salvation and the life everlasting. In this they have the same faith as you do, and it receives the same reward.

Do you envy Jairus and the woman’s experience with Christ? Maybe we should. Their loss and suffering brought them to faith in Christ. Today, I fear our life of ease and abundance in many ways stands as a snare to such faith. I fear many, even Christians, get caught up in the joy and comfort of this life to the point where this life is the main thing, the only thing in which they trust. And when the world inevitably fails to fulfill its empty promises of peace and happiness, anger and despair is all that is left because hope in Christ has died for lack of faith.

How do we safeguard ourselves from such a fate? I guess you could go out and find a way to suffer want, strife and affliction—it wouldn’t be the first time Christians have done so. But no, God doesn’t call us to that and the truth is that those afflictions are coming, ready or not—the world is fallen indeed.

No, the best thing you can do is to keep focused on Jesus Christ and what He has done to serve and save you. You want to talk suffering? See the innocent Jesus leaving Pilate’s condemnation bearing your sin and mine in His bruises and scars as He bears His cross to calvary. See His humiliation before the world as He hangs there dying, receiving the mockery and insults of those He came to save. See His work completed as He, forsaken by God above, declares “It is finished.” See the precious, priceless sacrifice made not that you could have this worldly life of abundance in sin, but that you would be saved from it to perfect life everlasting.

Then see Christ risen to that perfect life everlasting into which you stand baptized this day by gift of grace. Know that the door to His presence now stands open by the forgiveness of your sins.

Then ask yourself, suffering or not; in which life shall I place my hope?

I guess it is good to suffer here; it makes it that much easier to lean on your Savior. But the Gospel is knowing Him for the love of God made manifest that He truly is. Receiving this Gospel in faith makes us like Jairus and that woman—we don’t look to the world. We know where to hope. We know where to beg. Broken and needy, we know who is the only one who can grant us the healing and life that the world never will.

Amen.