

Isaiah 25:6-9

Psalm 24

Revelation 21:1-6a

John 11:32-44

## **Sermon November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

### *Our Lament and God's Hopeful Message*

In our readings this morning we hear about three different communities who are living in suffering times. Three different communities who are wrestling to make sense of their suffering. Three different communities who lament to God for relief. Three different communities who receive words of comfort and hope from God in response to their lament.

In 597 BCE the Israelites went into Babylonian exile. Their Temple was destroyed. Their land was taken away. They were separated from friends and family through displacement strategies, and in more extreme cases, through death. They were no longer able to practice their faith without facing severe consequences.

The Israelites spent many days lamenting to God during the exile. Asking God to liberate them from their oppressors. They grieved over the loss of all that was taken away from them. Some days they felt despair, hopeless about their future.

In response to the Israelites lament, God sends prophets into their community to reassure them that God has not abandoned them. God is listening to their lament. God will liberate them from exile.

I'm sure at times this message was hard to believe for the Israelites. Especially, during some of the darkest periods of the exile. But God continues to send prophet after prophet with messages of hope to help the Israelites hang in there through this long period of suffering.

In our reading of Isaiah this morning, we hear one of these messages of hope. God will lift the blanket of oppression off of God's people and will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Or in other words, God will redeem Israel from the suffering they have had to endure during the exile.

The Israelites cling to this message throughout the exile.

Turning to the first century CE the early church faced persecution living in the Roman Empire. Some of the Emperors who ruled during this period felt that Christians were a threat to rebel. So, they arrested people who were practicing Christianity. Sometimes, they faced crucifixion or forty lashes. Sometimes, they would be exiled to an island like John, who is the writer of the book of Revelation.

For much of the early church's history, Christians lived in fear of being persecuted for living out their faith. Their pain and suffering led to cries of lament, and prayers for liberation from the Empire.

For John, he writes a letter to seven churches in Asia Minor with words of hope that Christ will return, and that God will redeem their community from their suffering.

John shares a vision with the persecuted church about what the world will look like when God's healing and redemption comes in its fullness.

Now, we spend way too much time focusing on all the blood and gore we see in the book of Revelation. Often times, people use this book as a revenge book or a book to entice fear in people. God will get even with those who hurt us. God will punish you if you don't turn to God.

I find it ironic that a book that was meant to give people peace and hope in God's redeeming love has become a book that causes people anxiety, fear, and turns them into cheerleaders for the violent judgement of God.

In our reading of Revelation this morning John shares with us the central message of his vision. God will dwell among us. God will wipe away the tears from our eyes. Death and pain will be no more.

This message of hope is one that Christians have clung to over the centuries when facing persecution or any other type of suffering for that matter.

Again, like in Isaiah, God listens to the cries of Christ's disciples. God listens to their pleas. God listens to their lament. And then God leaves them with a hopeful promise that God will redeem them from their suffering.

As we now turn to our gospel this morning, we hear that Mary and Martha are grieving, because their brother Lazarus has died. They can't believe Jesus has taken so long to arrive. If only Jesus had shown up when he first heard the message that Lazarus was sick. Maybe, Lazarus' fate would have been different.

Well, Jesus eventually does arrive. And when he does, he sees the magnitude of the pain and suffering that death brings to his friends lives. Mary is in tears. Only able to muster up a few words to Jesus. Why didn't you come sooner? She falls to her knees as her grief has weakened her. The community that grieves with her is wailing. They too can't believe that Martha and Mary are suffering so profoundly.

Jesus is standing there seeing Mary's pain. Seeing the community's pain. Jesus can't hold back his emotions any longer. Jesus is deeply moved. Or in other words, Jesus is angered at the pain and suffering that death causes his friends. Then Jesus does the unthinkable. Jesus weeps. The Son of God weeps.

Jesus is so overwhelmed by their pain that he cries with them. He can no longer hold back the tears. Jesus laments with Mary and Martha.

Then we see that this lament moves Jesus to action. The promises of God have been heard. It is time to act. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

When reflecting on these three stories there are three themes that emerge. God listens to our lament. God sends us a message of hope. And then God acts on behalf of our lament.

For the Israelites, they are liberated from exile when the Persians come. For the early church, they are liberated from their suffering when an emperor decides that Christianity is the accepted religion in the Empire. For Mary, Martha, and their community of family and friends. They are liberated from their grief when their brother Lazarus is raised from the dead.

Today we commemorate All Saints Day. Today we grieve the death of loved ones who were examples of faith for us in our lives. Today we grieve the death of all people who suffered for living out their faith in our world.

Today we reflect on our current suffering as a community, and our hope in God's promises. We grieve over the many losses we have experienced during this pandemic. We grieve with our indigenous neighbours over the terrible sufferings they had to endure in the residential schools, and the continued suffering they experience today from these wounds. We grieve with other marginalized groups in our society who experience injustice. We grieve with God's creation over all the destruction we have seen from forest fires, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, drought as our climate changes.

Today we grieve as we walk with loved ones in their dying. We grieve as we walk with loved ones in their fight with cancer. We grieve as we walk with loved ones in their mental health struggles. We grieve as we walk with loved ones as they suffer from a chronic illness or condition. We grieve as we walk with loved ones as they suffer from broken relationships. We grieve as we walk with loved ones as they suffer from a job loss.

We have suffered as a community. We lament to God. We ask God to liberate us from our suffering. We ask God to heal our wounds and breath new life into us when we grieve the death of a loved one. Wiping away every tear from our eyes. We ask God to give peace to those in our life who are dying. Bringing them to their heavenly home where they will suffer no more. We ask God to restore our world from this pandemic. To breath new life into our world so that we can learn from the mistakes of our past. And live healthier lives moving forward. We ask God to give us the heart and the mind to walk with our indigenous neighbours on a path towards reconciliation. We ask God

to help us create a just society for everyone. We ask God to give us the tools we need to take care of God's creation. We ask God to heal us from those conditions that impact us long term. We ask God to heal broken relationships and to heal our hearts when these broken relationships are unfixable. We ask God to liberate us from unemployment. To give us opportunities.

We lament to God. We hope in God's promises.

And what we hear in our gospel this morning, is a God who listens to our lament. A God who cries with us when we suffer. A God who speaks a hopeful message to us. A God who is moved to act to liberate us from our suffering.

Sometimes it is a patient journey as we see in Israel's experience of exile or in the persecution of the early church. Sometimes it happens sooner like in our gospel where only days after the death of their brother, Martha and Mary see new life emerge from their brother's tomb.

Whatever happens, our faith encourages us to believe that God is listening to our lament. God welcomes our lament. God walks with us in our lament. God speaks a message of hope to us. God is moved to act. Redeeming us from our suffering.

Let us pray, redeeming God, we are suffering. We are weak and in need of your healing love. Heal us from our suffering. Grant us faith to believe that you are walking with us. Breath new life into us. So that we can reveal your healing and redeeming work to all the world. **Amen.**

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