

Looking back to the origins of our faith, people in relation to God have always been able to laugh at themselves and find humor in life, which most often we attempt to share here. But this morning I need us to be serious, because these are hard passages about the deepest realities of life.

There are some circumstances, like the hurricanes striking to the Eastern Seaboard and the flooding of Bangladesh which are Catastrophic. Talking with our Insurance Adjusters about the Hail damage to our Church in July, they tried to describe that as AN ACT OF GOD; and as Pastor I said "Wait a Minute, I know a thing or two about Acts of God!" These events are devastating and horrific, but there are also circumstances for us as Individuals, Family and Nations which are overwhelming. The Prophet Jeremiah's description in Lamentations, of his affliction as Eating Wormwood (the residue of Termites) and Drinking Gall (that is Vinegar), because these are the only things there are, describes just how bitter and overwhelming experiences can be.

I ministered to a family, where the 90-something Patriarch was an esteemed retired Business leader, his son and grandsons had been CEO and CFO of several Fortune 500 Companies. When at the end of the Patriarch's life, it was disclosed that throughout their lives he had abused his daughter, and granddaughters and great-granddaughters. And the 70 year old son wanted to know both, how do we as a family change this and create healing? But also, is forgiveness possible for a man who did this, for my father?

I knew someone who had an extremely successful career. He began when they were \$800,000 in debt, and everyone thought the business was going under. He not only saved the corporation, but doubled every measure of their productivity. But when he turned 60, the business went through a hostile takeover, and he was fired for being too old. Now this man thought he understood what it meant to be a Christian. So he never fought back. He did not sue anyone. He never complained. He served out the time given him waiting for justice to rescue him; and a year later he was lucky enough to start over in a new job. But years later, the Wormwood and Gall of his affliction, were still palatable.

There are those of you who were in Chuck Ramsey and Pastor Diane's Bible Study this week, learning about Lamentations. I hope that what was said was that there is credible belief this was written by the Prophet Jeremiah. Who, in Israel for 70 years, being attacked by Babylon, as Ukraine has endured since March, offers this lament of that overwhelming circumstance. Painfully, in all of the 57 Chapters of Jeremiah and Lamentations these few words are among the only words of Consolation. But they are powerful words of hope.

BECAUSE OF THE LORD'S GREAT LOVE WE ARE NOT CONSUMED,
FOR GOD'S GREAT 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.

In the early 1960s on the south-side of Chicago, African American Christians regularly crowded into theaters for rousing worship services which became the Civil Rights Movement. Those Worship services always began: "I AM SOMEBODY. I AM SOMEBODY. I AM A CHILD OF GOD...THE OBJECT OF CHRIST'S LOVE."

Being a Caregiver for the one you love, can be Overwhelming. In circumstances of Alzheimer's and other Mental Illnesses, as a Caregiver you try to provide your very best, while they can project their anger back

onto you. Sometimes you can be bitten, other times you clean up messes. More than about your brother wronging you 7 times a day, needing to be forgiven; I believe this passage from Luke describes being a Caregiver. To which, anyone who has a rational or objective mind would cry out "INCREASE OUR FAITH!" However, Faith is not quantifiable, the tiniest tiny speck, like a Mustard seed is enough. Like the Parable of the Elephant being witnessed by mice, there is always more to discover, not just a trunk or ears, or pillar-like legs... not just to forgive, but to Forgive Over and Over even 70 times 70 times every day!

And the worst reality, is that Luke followed this with a parable from the Caste System of the ancient Roman world describing Slavery, but is really about SERVING and becoming a SERVANT. "When you have a Servant who has been plowing in the field all day in the sun, caring for your home and tending your sheep. Who among you, when the worker comes to you at the end of the day, entreats that servant to take a place at your Table? Would you not rather say "Put on an apron and serve me while I eat and drink, then afterward you can be fed from the leftovers?" Do you Thank a servant for serving? So we also, when we have done all that we are ordered to do, can only say "We have done, what we ought to have done." AND THIS, more than any of the other Parables I want to say: "WELL DONE GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANTS. WELL DONE! ENTER INTO THE JOY OF GOD'S LOVE."

This week I was in the Alzheimer's unit over at Prestige Assisted Care, when I came upon these words from Owen Darnell:

Do not ask me to remember.

Do not try to force me to understand.

Let me know that you are with me and let me rest in peace.

Kiss my cheek and hold my hand.

I am confused beyond any concept.

I am sad and sick and lost.

All I know is that I need you to be with me at all cost.

Please do not lose your patience with me.

Do not scold or curse or cry.

I cannot help the way I am acting, can't be different though I do try.

Just remember that I need you.

While the best of me may be gone, please do not fail to stand beside me.

Love me, 'til my life is done.