

Sunday, October 6, 2019

Lamentations 3:19-26

Luke 17: 5-10

Be a Bridge: Lament to Joy in Jesus Christ

We continue in our fall series on “Be- a part of Christ’s Church” with our focus on what it means to be a bridge when speaking about our church family and our relationship with God.

We live in a bridged or tunneled community which means that we are connected to the world on the other side of water by structures which just 90 years ago did not exist (Ambassador Bridge opened in 1929 and the Detroit-Windsor tunnel opened in 1930) These structures serve the same purpose—linking people over or under the Detroit River and enable people to cross to work or to extend their travels beyond the border cities into both the US and Canada. People do complain about the wait times to cross either way, but these two means of getting from one side to the other are the busiest international structures in North America. The bridge and the tunnel are so important to the economy of both countries that much money is being spent in improving them and of course building a new structure all together.

But there are other bridges built which are important as well—for trains to cross over land, water, roads and in some areas bridges cross over other bridges as different routes criss-cross each other enabling drivers to go where they want. And still there are other bridges that exist but maybe not so easily seen.

This week we have experienced such a change in our weather- from record setting temperatures on Monday to just above 10 overnight a few days later. There was much excitement about the hot humid day that we had and yet once the cooler temperatures came upon us, people lamented and in some cases were upset that the reality of autumn was truly present. With cold wet days what could we do but complain and be wet as we put on more clothes and boots and coats. Yet when the sun did come out it wasn’t truly joy filled enthusiasm, but the reality that the seasons have changed.

Lament to joy. The reading from Lamentations 3 is part of a reflection that Jeremiah the prophet recorded as he and many people were exiled from their homes. Writing from one voice, he writes on behalf of the many people who lament or express their grief of the abundant losses that they have endured since they were removed from their homes and city. They share their feelings of hopelessness at the situation they now have and cry out what they collectively feel and think about life, God and their future.

If we think about situations in our world today we hear people lamenting over potential plant closures and with this, the loss of job, income and stability. We hear people lament because of the need for affordable housing when any housing is needed by thousands living in the streets. We also hear people lament because health services are not swift and quick- yet people have surgeries, are well cared for in health centres when needed with medical tests completed in somewhat reasonable times. People complain a lot but maybe what they are really doing is lamenting the fact that they have lost control over their lives and are searching for something or someone to bridge the gap so that their lives are made new.

Jeremiah states in vs20 “My soul continuously thinks of it and is bowed down within me.” From within people are bowed down in pain, in sorrow, in grief and loss because of the need to let feelings and expressions out. Jeremiah speaks of the lowest points in many people’s lives and yet there is something down deep that remembers. And it is at this low point that he now builds up on the right foundation.

He continues and remembers what was before he says, I have hope. What is the bridge Jeremiah remembers or calls to mind? I have hope. He remembered that as beat down and defeated the people of Jerusalem and Judah were, they were not yet completely consumed. There was still a remnant, and a remnant with a promise of restoration. And God cared for these people in exile and through their lives, He also leaves hope and this hope is filled with compassion. These compassions are new every morning: Each dawning day gives people hope in fresh mercies and compassions from God.

As people we need hope, mercy and compassion and God has promised to send them without fail. No matter how bad the past day was, we can look to the new morning with faith and hope. This is the bridge that we are called to express and live out—to be the bridge that moves people from grief and lament, suffering and loss to have hope, and eventually joy.

These mercies are always new because they come from God. Every morning ends the night. Every morning brings a new day. Every morning brings new provision for the day. Every morning brings new forgiveness for new sins. Every morning brings new strength for new temptations, duties, and trials. And every morning brings hope because God is faithful and meets us where we are—for there is no place we can go that God is not. Yet many people hide from God because of what is needed to repent and lament and let go.

The bridge between lament and joy is faith. The disciples had faith and they witnessed Jesus' miracles and yet after Jesus taught them about the need to forgive many times over, they boldly asked Jesus, "Increase our faith" but instead of Jesus saying ok—you have more faith, he took something so small a seed of a mustard plant and showed them that if they truly believed in Him and had faith, that they could say to a much larger tree to uproot itself and plant itself in the sea it would occur. But Jesus knew differently- not only the nature of the tree, but because the disciples believed, but it was the portion of their unbelief that led them to live in fear and searching for more.

Lament to Joy—how do we get there—walk the bridge of faith and leave the past behind knowing that what lies ahead is new. Every morning is a new beginning, with its own challenges, and changes, and choices. Every morning is a new day to feel the joy that Jesus gives because of his death and resurrection.

Jesus knew what lamenting involved—he told the disciples to share in the bread and the cup as a holy meal. And then hours later he prayed to God to take it away- out of fear, lamenting and even out of wondering how it would all turn out. Yet he died and rose again. And with his resurrection there is joy in the morning- every morning there is hope because he is the bridge who will turn your crying to joy-if you have faith and are willing to let it grow.

But we are also called to be a bridge as we tell others how we fill the gap between lament to joy through the story of Jesus' death and resurrection and we do this by remembering what he asked us to do. Eat the bread. Drink the cup. And on this worldwide communion Sunday we will do this like many Christians around the world. We will do this so that we can live with hope even when we are grieving and lamenting and crying for what was once before. God's faithfulness is everlasting and what we need to remember is that our faith will only grow stronger if we put our trust in him. As disciples of Jesus we need to believe and have faith that the bridge we have and can share is Christ himself.

Are we willing to be a bridge and turn lament into joy? Are we willing to grow in faith so that others may see Jesus in us and know who we are?

Let us pray: God as we seek Jesus who moves us from lament to joy we pray that we may walk with Him as our bridge of faith . Enable us to find joy in our faith in you. And enable us also to be a bridge for others who are seeking joy in their hearts as they journey in this life searching for you. Help us O God as we too move from lament to joy as forgiven loved and free through Jesus our Saviour. Amen.