

Our lamentations are the birth cries of a new world
Philippians 3.17-4.1; Luke 13.31-35

17 March 2019

2nd Sunday in Lent St Luke in the City

‘How often have I desired to gather your children together as a mother hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing’

Jesus laments over Jerusalem. He voices publicly his pain and distress and grief over this holy city and its people whose history is so long in killing the prophets sent by God, who fail to listen and to act in a way which honours its position and role as the holy city of God. It is a heart felt lament, full of emotion and tears.

Jesus in the tradition of the psalms voices his pain, his distress, his grief. The psalms are full of such poems, full of a personal or communal lament. Something is wrong – whether illness, unidentified misfortune, or national disaster – and there comes an outcry, a turning of pain into speech. And today we lament the shocking events of Friday, the attack on our Muslim brothers and sisters, the attack on all of us, for we are one with them. They are us.

The exiled Hebrews lament ‘By the waters of Babylon, we sat down and wept.’ And ‘Out of the depths have I called to thee O lord’; ‘I am sinking into miry depths and have no foothold: I have come into deep waters, and the flood engulfs me. I am wearied with crying out, my throat is parched: my eyes grow dim with watching so long for my God’. To pray the psalms is not only to rejoice in God’s goodness. It is also to groan along with a world broken and distressed, to voice our anger and frustration. Yesterday I spent time with some of the families, some still not knowing whether their loved one is alive or dead. We cried, our hearts were full, we shared our common humanity. WE lamented the terrible tragedy which has overcome them, their nearest and dearest, which has overwhelmed all of us.

When Jesus laments over Jerusalem he builds upon many of the psalms, broken-hearted hymns that reach out for hope in the midst of pain. He looks out over Jerusalem and indeed the world, he pours out his heart felt pain and distress and anger that the political systems and power structure, the powerful evil ideologies

which turn people away from justice to breed fear and hate in order to foster self-aggrandisement, power, prestige and wealth, and do not care for the needs of the whole people, oppressing the poor and marginalised, the different. That the people as a whole cannot see or hear the promise of salvation which has been in the proclamation of the prophets over the centuries and now is perfectly revealed in Jesus. Rather they will destroy that, and only that which can set them and all people free from this bondage. It is a world all too sadly portrayed on our nightly TV news and media reports.

And Jesus in expressing his grief leaves us with a tender, gentle and surprising image. 'How often', he says, 'have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing'.

So no warrior king, this messiah. But rather a mother hen eager for her chicks to find shelter beneath her soft comforting wings. Here is love, a tender love born out of deep sorrow and grief. Here is love which foreshadows the powerful dramatic presentation of an alternative way than that of power over, control and oppression. It is a way of self-giving love that will love even the unlovable amongst us, will not give up on us. An alternative way which is stronger than hate, than the ways of death. In these weeks of Lent we follow the working out of this drama, the way of salvation which leads to the cross and the empty tomb. The cross and the empty tomb are one and the same thing, an expression of the way things are – the fact that new life is pregnant in every deathly situation. It is a way of collaboration, perseverance and empowerment that we are working so hard for here in our own city. Our Prime Minister reminds us that we are family. She champions the principles and values which are of kindness, courage, togetherness as one people. For someone who is not religious she demonstrates it means to seek to show love in action. A love which is the core of all the great religions.

Too often we fail to lament. Too often we dare not lament, for then the enormity of the evil or the pain we fear may engulf us. Too often we bury our grief, and pretend it's all alright, when it isn't. Too often we fear that if we embrace our grief and express it, we will get stuck in it and not be able to move on. But, my friends, in our lamentations are the birth cries of a new world, of new hope and new determination for a better way, for healing and new life.

Jerusalem of course is a symbol for all in our human community which undermines life and love. Where we attempt to solve our social problems by building more prisons. Where we try to maintain control over the planet and its peoples by increasing our arsenals. Where entertainment and advertising do violence to basic human dignity. Where differences of ethnicity or sexual identity turn into walls of separation and bitterness. Where people become small and mean and shrivelled, unloving and uncaring. Then Jesus weeps, laments 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers here brood under her wings, and you were not willing.'

Lamentations, the facing of our feelings, our pain and distress are or can be the audacious start of something new. Jesus calls us to break free from poisonous silence or turning away, from the culture of denial or neglect, of not being willing to hear or to see. He calls us away from mere grumbling and toward broken hearted lamentation. He invites us to mourn that we may be blessed; to grieve rather than deny the burden inside us.

For when we lament a broken relationship, it opens the way to healing. When we lament an injustice, it opens the way to transformation, to action for change and a better way. When we lament a loss, a way to resurrection, to new life. When we lament our shortcomings, it opens the way to unexpected change. Such lamentations are the birth cries of a new world.

When today we break the bread and share the communion we are reminding ourselves of the truth of our faith that all that separates and injures and destroys is overcome by all that unites and heals and creates. And we are the body of Christ to share in God's work