

Lamentations 1:1-6 (The Message)

Jerusalem has been devastated and the people of Judah have been conquered – their former glory and pride lost in their humiliation. God remains compassionate, God’s mercies are new every day, and those who remain can continue to wait for God’s salvation.

¹How empty the city, once teeming with people. A widow, this city, once in the front rank of nations, once queen of the ball, she’s now a drudge in the kitchen. ²She cries herself to sleep each night, tears soaking her pillow. No one’s left among her lovers to sit and hold her hand. Her friends have all dumped her. ³After years of pain and hard labor, Judah has gone into exile. She camps out among the nations, never feels at home. Hunted by all, she’s stuck between a rock and a hard place. ⁴Zion’s roads weep, empty of pilgrims headed to the feasts. All her city gates are deserted, her priests in despair. Her virgins are sad. How bitter her fate. ⁵Her enemies have become her masters. Her foes are living it up because God laid her low, punishing her repeated rebellions. Her children, prisoners of the enemy, trudge into exile. ⁶All beauty has drained from Daughter Zion’s face. Her princes are like deer famished for food, chased to exhaustion by hunters.

Luke 17:5-10 (NRSV)

Jesus explains the immense impact that even small measures of faith can have, and encourages his followers not to expect reward for simply doing what should be considered their duty as they seek to serve God and follow Christ.

⁵The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” ⁶The Lord replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you. ⁷“Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from plowing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and take your place at the table’? ⁸Would you not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink’? ⁹Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? ¹⁰So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’”

COCU 59C Readings

The Old Testament and Psalm readings explore the pain and humiliation of God’s people when they are defeated, conquered and exiled, and as they long for forgiveness restoration and salvation. The New Testament readings, on the other hand, explore the impact that a life of simple, ordinary faith can have, and the attitude of humble servanthood which expects no undue reward for simply living faithfully. In essence, both Testaments are saying the same thing this week. In a world where bad things happen to good people, and where it often appears that the lawless and ‘godless’ get the best, it can be tough to live in faith and faithfulness. Justice can take a long time to come, and it can be tempting to use any means – however undesirable – to achieve what we long for. This applies even when our goal is to manifest God’s reign. However, as we live in faithfulness, and pass our faith on to others who come after us, the small, ordinary acts of goodness and justice that we do each day, the small faithful commitments to our convictions that we renew each day, really do ‘move mountains’ and change the world, little by little, into a place where God’s salvation is visibly revealed.

In the light of the huge challenges facing our world – hunger and poverty, human rights abuses, unequal distribution of resources, human trafficking, dread diseases, environmental degradation, conflict and war – it is easy to get frustrated and impatient, and it is extremely tempting to embrace any strategy that gets results. The danger here, though, is that we can too easily become what we seek to overcome. Two important principles that the lectionary offers us this week are 1) the power of small acts of goodness and justice, and 2) the need to think systemically and long term - to observe, nurture and cooperate with any manifestations of God’s reign that emerge. In the world of big business, big politics, and powerful lobby groups, such long term thinking can be frustrating, but faithful, consistent and just living results in significant change. What long term commitments to justice can you embrace or renew in your community this week? (*John van de Laar, Sacredise*)

‘From little things big things grow....’ (*Paul Kelly song*)

Psalm 137 (NRSV)

A Psalm of grief for the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of God's people.

¹By the rivers of Babylon.....

there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion.

²On the willows there we hung up our harps. ³For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

⁴How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?

⁵If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! ⁶Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you,

if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

⁷Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem's fall, how they said, "Tear it down! Tear it down! Down to its foundations!"

⁸O daughter Babylon, you devastator!

Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! ⁹Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!

Psalm 137 (The Message)

Alongside Babylon's rivers we sat on the banks; we cried and cried, remembering the good old days in Zion. Alongside the quaking aspens we stacked our unplayed harps; That's where our captors demanded songs, sarcastic and mocking: "Sing us a happy Zion song!" ⁴⁻⁶ Oh, how could we ever sing GOD's song in this wasteland? If I ever forget you, Jerusalem, let my fingers wither and fall off like leaves. Let my tongue swell and turn black if I fail to remember you, If I fail, O dear Jerusalem, to honour you as my greatest. ⁷⁻⁹ GOD, remember those Edomites, and remember the ruin of Jerusalem, That day they yelled out, "Wreck it, smash it to bits!" And you, Babylonians - ravagers! A reward to whoever gets back at you for all you've done to us; Yes, a reward to the one who grabs your babies and smashes their heads on the rocks!

2 Timothy 1:1-14 (NRSV)

Paul celebrates Timothy's ancestry in the faith, and encourages him to stay true to Paul's teachings about Christ and the way of Christ, even to the point of being prepared to suffer for the sake of the Gospel.

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, ²To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. ³I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. ⁶For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; ⁷for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. ⁸Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, ⁹who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. ¹¹For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, ¹²and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him. ¹³Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.