**“Hope For Tomorrow” Sue Black 10-21-18**

In our Bible reading this week we read the book of Lamentations written by the Prophet Jeremiah. With the name Lamentations, most of us wouldn’t chose this particular book for a bit of light reading but in it Jeremiah, the “weeping prophet” as he’s called, wrote beautiful poetry expressing God’s and his feelings of sorrow for the Israelites. Despite the warnings of the prophets, the people continued to sin, their sins were judged by God and the consequences were severe.

The scripture reading this morning is Lamentations 2:10-11 and 3:19-26.

Listen now for the Word of God.

*“The elders of Daughter Zion sit on the ground in silence; they have sprinkled dust on their heads and put on sackcloth. The young women of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground. My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within; My heart is poured out on the ground because My people are destroyed, because children and infants faint in the streets of the city.”*

*“I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for His 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.”*

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Wearing sackcloth and weeping with dust on their heads, the people were in mourning. The armies of King Nebuchadnezzar had burned the Temple of Jerusalem to the ground. The surrounding towns and fields were destroyed and many of the people were captured and carried into exile. There was nothing left for the people who remained, no shelter, no food, no hope to save themselves.

Jeremiah could have walked away with an “I told you so” kind of attitude but full of compassion he stayed. He stayed to give the people hope. This was not the end of the story. God asked the Israelites, as He asks us, to wait quietly in times of suffering and to place our trust, not in what is seen, but in the Lord. He is a God of great love and mercy.

If you’ve been through rough times, and we all have, you may know that many grief counselors and self-help books recommend journaling to help process what has happened. Journaling simply means to write down your thoughts and feelings in a notebook or journal. Some people copy scripture or poems that inspire them. Some use pen and paper to express anger or joy at situations or people, like Jeremiah did.

This is a journal I kept several years ago when I was teaching 4th grade. It was about three years after my daughter Sarah had passed away and it was still a very rough time for me. As a part of our routine, my class and I took a few minutes to write each morning. The purpose for writing was for the students to practice getting their thoughts down on paper. They did well, their writing improved during the year but what surprised me was what came from my pen. Reading these entries there are hints of my own journey, my joy and sadness, many things that I never told anyone.

My writing isn’t near the level of the poetry that Jeremiah wrote but I’d like to read a little of the last page of this journal to you. *“I’m in trouble, this is the last page of my notebook. I guess I should have written on more backs of pages, poor planning again. I thought I’d make it until June but I never realized the power of the Holy Spirit through the written word could be so personal. I never thought I would have so many things I would want to write about or that writing about what was on my mind would do so much to settle my soul.”* God used this simple assignment that I gave my students, to help me figure out some things and as an opening for His Spirit to bring healing.

Journals come in all shapes and sizes; some with glitter or a football theme (this one has a really cute dog on it) but nothing beats a plain old spiral bound notebook and I know you’ve got at least one of those cluttering up your desk. The most famous journal is in the Bible, it’s the book of Psalms. We don’t know if David wrote down his psalms as he composed them or if he committed them to memory and they were written down later but we can use our imagination.

I can see David the shepherd in the fields at night, sitting around the fire, with one eye on the sheep and the other on the stars. He has pen and scroll in hand, writing poetry about the goodness of God. I can see David the warrior in a cave hiding from his enemy Saul, crying out and writing urgent requests for God to rescue him from danger and certain death. And David the father riddled with guilt over the death of his infant son with Bathsheba, praying and writing of his grief, pleading for God’s mercy.

Jesus understands human emotions because He was and is fully human in addition to being fully God. He knows what it’s like to experience and be tempted by the things of this world, tempted by Satan. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus had fasted in the desert for forty days when Satan appeared to try to lead Him away from God. Jesus knows what it’s like to suffer loss. In the Gospel of John, having chosen to obey his Father, Jesus purposely delayed His trip to Bethany knowing that his friend Lazarus would die. And even though He knew He would raise Lazarus from the dead, Jesus wept alongside Lazarus’ sisters Martha and Mary. Jesus knows what it’s like to be in pain, to suffer public humiliation and death. Though He did no wrong, Jesus chose to pay the price for many. He died on the cross for us. He experienced the wrath of God as payment for our sins.

We should never be afraid to talk to God, give it all to Him, all of our anger, all of our grief, all of our frustration. God wants honesty. He wants us to turn to Him with every human emotion we possess, because in the telling, healing can begin. In Psalm 30 David wrote, “*You turned my wailing into dancing; You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to You and not be silent.”*

The prophets wrote beautiful imagery that describes God’s care for us. Jesus is our shelter from the storm, the stream of water and the shade of a giant rock in the desert. One day we will know the wisdom of all things, our eyes will see, our ears will hear, our hearts will understand and our tongues will be able to clearly say what we believe.

The Apostle John reveals God’s plan in the book of Revelation. *“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”* But until then, until God’s appointed time, He asks us to trust in the wisdom of His plan as He uses our most difficult times for His purposes and for drawing us into a deeper relationship with Him. His plan is to bring us joy.

Let us pray.