

Lamentations 3:17-26 2 Corinthians 5:17

One year ago, it feels as if it was 5 years ago, we were preparing for our New Year luncheon in Fellowship Hall after the service. As a member of the Nurture Committee, I was assigned to do centerpieces and table decorations. So, I set out these stem glasses so we could toast the New Year and filled them with Hershey candy kisses and hugs. When I spoke before lunch, I said "May you get many kisses and hugs in the New Year." Oops! Now it's not the time to give out kisses and hugs! Who knew? It's hard to give kisses and hugs when you are 6 feet apart!

Using the pun of having 20/20 vision in 2020, I also set out toy glasses and some papers quoting several Bible verses about seeing and looking. So, I'm sure everyone is seeing things so much more clearly now. No? Did I miss that one too?

As we look at the first few verses of today's Bible reading, it is like today's news." I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is. My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord." Such despair and misery!

The book of Lamentations was written by Jeremiah, which is why it is right after the book of Jeremiah in our Bible. In Jeremiah, the prophet recalls his travels throughout Israel warning everyone to repent and turn back to God. They ignore him, mock him, and throw him into prison. They do not listen to his warnings. Finally, Jerusalem is destroyed. In Lamentations, Jeremiah is sitting in a cave looking over the city and lamenting the destruction. In the first two chapters and the first part of chapter 3, Jeremiah is very depressed and crying out to the Israelites for not heeding his warnings.

Suddenly, in verse 21, Jeremiah takes a sudden turn in his thinking. Instead of continuing his lamenting, he looks up and remembers God's faithfulness in the past. Therefore, he has hope. He changed his whole mind set. We can think ourselves into despair and hopelessness, or we can set our mind upon the Lord and have a whole new outlook on life. One of victory and hope.

When the outlook is so bleak you can't face it try to look up. Put a new set of thoughts into mind. Instead of thinking about yourself, look up to God. Looking at yourself is depressing, looking up to God is encouraging.

As we enter 2021, the world does look bad. But we need to focus on God. Romans 8:28 says that “All things work together for good, to those who love the Lord. To those that are called to His purposes.” No matter how bad the world looks now, remember that God is still in control. He’s got this.

Verse 22 says “Because of the Lord’s great love, we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail.” If God had given to us what we deserved, I wouldn’t even be here to see this mess. It is only by God’s mercies that any of us are alive today. Our lives are all in His hands. Even those who are biting the hand that is holding them!

God’s mercies. Is that a buzz word that Christians toss around without really knowing its meaning? Mercy is refraining from punishing offenders. Mercy is kindness excess of what is to be expected or demanded by fairness. Mercy is NOT getting what we deserve. Since we are all sinners, we deserve eternal punishment and death from God. But that is not what we receive. Instead, we get His constant love and blessings.

God’s compassions are new every morning. The mercy and love of god is continually renewed. They are fresh every day. It will never run out. If they are new every day, imagine how big they are for a whole year!

Great is His faithfulness. There is one sure thing in life. God will be faithful to His word. That should bring joy and comfort to your heart. If you trust God with your whole heart, he will be faithful to His promises to you.

The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him. Make sure you are on the right side of His faithfulness.

Three aspects of the nature of God brought comfort to Jeremiah. God is merciful, He is compassionate, He is faithful.

2 Corinthians 5:17 says “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come.” This verse is often demonstrated by a caterpillar, cocoon and butterfly. A baby caterpillar begins its life not knowing what the future holds. It just eats and grows. Eventually, it goes into a cocoon and completely changes into a beautiful butterfly. This is what happens in our lives when we give our lives to God and are born again. Our lives are more than just existing. We now have a purpose to love God and to better His kingdom. Last

week, Pastor Tori had everyone pray the Sinner's Prayer, asking God to come into our lives. We are different with God. He will sustain and make us flourish during these difficult days.

The Lamentations excerpt ends with "It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord". The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him. Waiting is an issue of patience. Patience is a virtue. It does a needed work in us. Patience develops our faith. It produces peace in life. Patience pleases God.

Waiting doesn't mean sitting around doing nothing, just waiting for God to do something. God is always at work. God is waiting on you. Perhaps you need to get more mature, to get into the right place, to obey or repent. God has perfect timing. There are 4 important things you can do while waiting. First, serve the Lord. We serve the Lord by attending to His kingdom. We need to be salt and light to everyone around us, following the Holy Spirit, and loving God with all our heart, soul and mind.

Second, be thankful. Thank God for His goodness, grace and mercy in your life. Thank Him in advance for the answer to your prayers.

Next, trust God. He is working everything for good. He knows all things and wants the best for you. Trust Him and He will direct your path in the direction and at the pace you need to go.

Fourth, remember there is a purpose in the process. Whenever my patience is being tested, I ask the Lord, "What are you trying to teach me or show me. What do you want me to learn from this? When a chicken hatches from its egg he has to peck his way out. If someone tries to help him by cracking the egg, the chicken will not survive. In the same way, when a butterfly emerges from its cocoon, you cannot help it. It needs to go through the process to be strong enough to survive outside. We need to go through the process to be strong enough and ready for what God has for us.

Our world today is in terrible disarray. We can lament about the terrible state of affairs as Jeremiah did as he looked at the rubble of Jerusalem or we can look up to see and trust God for all things.

A meme that has been going around on Facebook the last couple weeks is 2021 gives us 12 months of Happiness, 52 weeks of fun and laughter, 365 days of

success, 8760 hours of good health, 525,600 minutes of blessings, and 31,536,000 seconds of joy. God's mercy, blessings and love are included in every one of those time periods. Love and serve Him with all your heart throughout the New Year.

Our memory verse for this month is "Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" Ephesians 4:24 further illustrates our need to become new in Christ.

As we enter the New Year of 2021, remember that we are new creations in God and that God's mercies are new every day. Behold, He makes all things new! (Rev. 21:5)

Happy New Year!!

As we sing our last hymn, Great is Thy Faithfulness, notice that the refrain is taken directly from the Lamentations passage we studied today. Remembering this hymn will be an easy reminder of our reliance on God throughout 2021.