

## Feast of Unity

Psalm 137

October 6, 2019

“Has God ceased to be God?” In other words, has God abandoned us and relinquished his divine covenant with us? This is a question that is repeated over and over in the commentary for today’s reading. You and I hear this question, and we’re quick to reply, “Of course not! God will always be God! God never abandons us!” However, we are all guilty of asking a question like this at some point in our lives. I recently finished reading a book titled “Stories from the Edge: A Theology on Grief” which dedicates a whole chapter to the expectations that God will perform miracles whenever we need them so long as we’re faithful. “I attend church every week and pray every night. Therefore, I won’t be one of the many people whose job is cut at the end of this cycle.” “I live and breathe the Bible and its teachings. Therefore, God will save my loved one from their terminal illness.” “I give away that which I don’t need for survival to local charities and volunteer regularly. Therefore, God will save my irreconcilable marriage.” Then, when the job is cut, when the loved one dies, when the marriage ends, that expectation we had that God would work some magic for us and perform a miracle is broken, and we wonder, even for a moment, “Is there a God there in the first place?” We get angry with God, some even losing/abandoning faith altogether because of God not meeting our expectations.

The pain felt in these moments, this is the pain felt by many people throughout the Bible. In today’s reading, we see this mourning for the fall of Jerusalem, this utter struggle to remain faithful while also wishing severe punishment upon those that destroyed Jerusalem. Similarly, in Lamentations 1, we hear similar lines. “How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations! She that was a princess among the provinces has become a vassal. She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has no one to comfort her; all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they have become her enemies . . . From daughter Zion has departed all majesty. Her princes have become like stags that find no pasture; they fled without strength before the pursuer.” Again, we hear this mourning, this somber realization that life as it once was is gone, that it will never be the same again.

What’s unfortunate is that this feeling of abandonment, it’s not an unfamiliar feeling to humanity as a whole. People around the world are persecuted for what they believe or who they are. Some countries are torn apart by civil wars or wars with other countries. Many are not given a voice because they are not rich enough or they don’t fit a certain set of qualifications. The starving, the impoverished, the persecuted, so many people around the world feel the pain of the psalmist today, the pain of those exiled, the pain of Jeremiah, who authored the book of Lamentations, wondering “Where is my god, and have I been abandoned?” Such terrible fates makes us wonder, “What next?” What do we do in times like this?

I imagine this was the same question that Jesus’ disciples ran into with his death. He was with them for three years, and some even defended him when he was arrested. Then, their wondrous teacher is being tried and hung on a cross, a sentence reserved only for the worst of the worst, for those whose death wasn’t enough. No, their death had to serve as an example to

everyone else of what happens if you do what this person did. Before Jesus is even arrested, tried, and crucified, he shows his disciples what to do. He washes their feet, as a servant would, as a sign of equality and brotherhood among them. He prays over the bread and the cup, and he shares a meal with them. In this foot washing and in this sharing a meal, they are together, unified through this simple event, something that happened more often than we often think about.

Today, we do just that. Today, for those of you who don't know, is World Communion Sunday. It is a Sunday where all churches, no matter the denomination, no matter the country, no matter the time zone, we partake of the Lord's Supper together. It is a meal where we are reminded that, though we might be thousands of miles apart and scattered to all corners of the globe (as was the case with the Exiles from Judah and Israel), though we might be facing those moments where we wonder where God is or *if* God is (just like those exiled and just like those who face hardships innumerable), we are not alone. God is here right now among us, uniting us through the Spirit and joining us, the individual members of the Body of Christ, into that unified Body. We join together in the sacrament of communion, an event where we get a foretaste of the great feast being laid out for all God's children in Heaven, where Jesus goes to prepare a place for us. We join together and eat of the bread that represents Jesus' body broken for us and drink grape juice/wine that represents Jesus' blood shed for the remission of our sins. In so doing, we are reminded of all that God has done for us, all that God continues to do for us, and in so doing, we find comfort. We rediscover that God is with us, now and always, and that, even if our terminally-ill loved one dies, we lose our job, our marriage ends, we face some other catastrophe, God mourns with us those losses.

We find such reassurance in the book of Lamentations. In Lamentations 3:20-25, the prophet Jeremiah, a rather pessimistic prophet to begin with and one who, as we heard earlier, deeply mourns the downfall of Judah, writes: "My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him." So, even amidst being in exile, Jeremiah has hope and continues to rejoice in the name of the Lord, because he sees God's mercy at work every day, even in exile. Similarly, in partaking of Communion, no matter what is going on in our lives, no matter what pain we feel, we are reminded of all that God has done, is doing, and will do for us. We're also reminded of our not being alone, that God is with us, that we are part of something much greater, and that we have brothers and sisters who will show forth that same love to us as well. Therefore, let us never forget the love of God shown to us from its various sources and God's presence with us through all our times, the good and the bad, and let us celebrate today with not just a Lord's Supper, but with one enjoyed by all God's children everywhere.