

Trinity 4 2021 27th July

9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton	Lamentations 3 vv 22-33 p826
11.00 Holy Communion Halling	II Corinthians 8 vv 7-15 p1163 Mark 5 vv 21-43 p1007

O GOD, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy; Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal: Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord. *Amen*

In freer times than these, on some Sundays, I ask the choir to choose the hymns. One much loved favourite, especially at Halling, is *Great is Thy Faithfulness*, which is based on today's OT lesson. It has a good tune. The words are biblical and they resonate with our own experience of God. So it's a good hymn.

The Book of Lamentations is a lament on the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 586 BC. Lament is an important part of the biblical witness. Human beings do sometimes go through tough times to which the natural response is lamentation. We can't be happy clappy all the time. There is grief. Pain is very real. Disasters happen. We would be unnatural creatures if we did not experience sorrow when things go wrong, not merely for ourselves, but also for other people – especially the people whom we love. Sadness one of many natural human reactions to the bad things which happen in the world.

The people who wrote the bible knew their share of trouble and very often put their emotions into words – grief, sorrow, anguish, anger, perplexity at the ways of God. We can read what they wrote in passages such as today's OT lesson and in many of the psalms. As we use these psalms and other passages of Scripture in our prayers and in our worship, they give us the words in which we can express our own feelings about things, about life and about God.

The people who wrote the Bible experienced the complete gamut of human emotions from praise to depression, from confident hope to despair, from faith to doubt, from absolute trust in God to frustration with Him and perplexity at His ways, from the deepest love for God to anger at what is happening to them in the world. And yet they kept talking. They opened their mouths, they took up their pens and put into words whatever it was that they had to say to God. God heard their prayers. God can take whatever it is we have to say to Him. He loves us. He understands us. So, they kept the channels open. They didn't walk away from God. They didn't turn their backs on Him. They continued to cry out to God whether in devotion or frustration. We can do the same, using their words, the words of the Bible - if we find them helpful. God didn't walk away from them or turn His back on them. He never gives up on us. God is faithful. Great is His faithfulness.

The opening chapters of the Book of Lamentations are horrifying. They describe what it is like when a great city is besieged and destroyed by a mighty army – the destruction of buildings, the loss of life, human pain, the lack of food and other basic necessities, captivity for many, the humiliation of defeat. All this was especially poignant for the Jews because Jerusalem was the city of the Great King, the place where the LORD had caused His Temple to be built, the Temple which was then in ruins following the Babylonian onslaught. More

bitter still was the thought that the people had brought this disaster upon themselves by their rejection of the LORD and of the Law of God.

The people were at rock bottom. This was as bad as it could get. Yet, for all this, at least some of them kept the channels of communication open. They continued to talk to God - openly, honestly & sincerely. And, in doing so, they came to a deeper understanding. Despite everything, whatever happened, despite all the sins they had committed and all the disasters which had befallen them, great is God's faithfulness. His mercies are renewed every morning.

The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.

For the Lord will not cast off for ever:

But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.

For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow;
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father.
There is no shadow of turning with thee.
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not.
As thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

Great is thy faithfulness!
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

We can trust God whatever happens.