

The Messiah's Lament

By Linda Rex

March 13, 2022, 2nd Sunday in LENT—Lost and all alone. Wandering in the wilderness. Struggling to survive one more day. Fearful of every person they meet, wondering if they are friend or foe. This is the life of a person caught in a heart-rending situation such as war or abuse.

When life gets tough and we have lots of questions and concerns about what is going to happen next, it is good to be reminded of the compassion and tender concern of our living Lord. Indeed, it is at those times when we're at the bottom of the well and looking up that we begin to see how much we need Someone looking out for us and tending to our every need. And we have such a person in our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Here in America, the average citizen has not experienced having their city invaded by a foreign army. Nor do many of us know what it is like to live in a war zone, fearful to do the simple tasks of life like buying groceries or visiting a neighbor. Our veterans understand the horrors of war, having experienced this firsthand on the battlefield. And some of our citizens and immigrants within our borders know this kind of devastation, having experienced it in their home country.

I don't believe that God ever intended for any of us to experience the terror and suffering of war. We find that war is a natural consequence of placing our focus on earthly things rather than on the heavenly realities which are ours in Christ.

What is true about our existence as human beings is that what our senses experience often becomes the focus of our attention. What we experience often becomes our reality, unless we intentionally make the effort to turn our attention to the spiritual realities which are ours in Christ. When we allow what is going on around us and the opinions and preference of others determine our life choices and decisions, we are often tossed about and caught up in circumstances and situations which take control of our lives.

Jesus was often caught in the midst of experiences which might have become the motivation for his actions. But he had his focus squarely placed upon the Father's will, and was intentionally moving toward the goal that he had been given—the salvation of our souls, through death and resurrection.

In this Sunday's reading we find Jesus having a conversation with the Jewish leaders, who were encouraging him to leave the area lest Herod take his life. It's possible, but not likely, that they were genuinely concerned about his safety. For the most part they had constantly plotted Jesus' death since his ministry often interfered with their earthly concerns for popularity, power, and prestige. Even so, in this passage, we find them insisting that for his safety, Jesus should leave the region.

Jesus knew Jerusalem's historic attitude toward the prophets—they often ended up stoned or killed. He pointedly reminded the Jewish leaders that he knew the road he was on. His path involved healing the sick, casting out demons, and heading towards the goal of his ministry—the crucifixion and resurrection. Then he broke into deep lament for the people of Jerusalem, who rejected the One who so dearly loved them and sought to gather them into his arms of love. How deeply he felt that rejection! He knew the price they would soon pay for choosing other messiahs other than the true Messiah—they would experience the loss of their city and their beloved temple, and experience all of the suffering involved in being invaded by a Roman army.

In Jesus we find that God has come and lived in our human flesh, experiencing in our place and on our behalf, suffering, death, and resurrection. What Jesus has done is significant and

powerful. He has brought all of humanity into the presence of the Father in the Spirit, and he has sent the Spirit to us so that we can live in intimate relationship with God now and on into eternity.

Our problem is that we often believe these spiritual realities become intangible and irrelevant in the light of our increasing focus on tangible earthly realities. What I hear people being concerned about often has everything to do with ourselves, what we need, want or desire, and very little to do with God or what he might want or desire. In fact, one's perception of the spiritual realities is often associated with going to church somewhere, or reading some book, or having a religious symbol to focus on. It's easy to miss the point completely that the spiritual realities have to do with a living Being, with having a relationship with the God who loves us so much that he came personally to join us in our humanity and to bring us home to himself.

God is calling us out of our blindness and deafness into the light of his presence. He has come for us in Christ and has done what is needed to make us right with himself. Just as Abram slept through his covenant agreement with God (Genesis 15:1–12, 17–18), we have been included apart from our own effort in the covenant God has made for us in the sacrifice of his own Son. Our participation is saying yes to God's 'yes' to us in Christ. Rather than being "enemies of the cross of Christ", we receive the perfect gift of God's own Son in his death and resurrection, trusting in his finished work, and receiving the gift of new life given to us in the Holy Spirit (Philippians 3:17–4:1).

In Christ, God has done all that is needed for our salvation. He will finish what he has begun in us. We focus our minds and hearts on the things of the Spirit, not on earthly things (Col. 3:1–2). We focus on our relationship with God through Jesus in the Spirit, trusting in Christ's finished work, not in our own ability to make things how we believe they need to be. Jesus is our firm foundation, and we stand firmly in him as we trust in his finished work and God's love and faithfulness.

God has our best in mind, and will not quit until he has finished what he has begun in us. This means that even though we are facing difficult, painful, or devastating events, we are not alone. God is still at work. We turn away from ourselves and our own self-sufficiency, and trust in the One who has the capacity to make things how they need to be. As we experience the consequences of choosing our own way, as we live in a fragile, broken world, we can be comforted, knowing we are not alone, but are held in God's love and grace. He will not stop until all is brought into conformity with his plan and purpose—our inclusion in his love and life now and forever.

Dearest Abba, thank you for loving us so much—for caring for us in spite of our willful turning away to ourselves and the things of this life. Open our minds and hearts to the spiritual realities, that we may see you and live in the truth of who we are in Christ. Thank you for bringing us into the fullness of that glory which is ours through Jesus your Son in the Spirit. Amen.

"Just at that time some Pharisees approached, saying to Him, 'Go away, leave here, for Herod wants to kill You.' And He said to them, 'Go and tell that fox, "Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I reach My goal." Nevertheless I must journey on today and tomorrow and the next day; for it cannot be that a prophet would perish outside of Jerusalem. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it! Behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" ' ' " Luke 13:31–35 NASB