



Carstairs-Bancroft United Church

June 3, 2021

DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC By Rev. Maria Szabone Berces



Source: Our Daily Bread

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

“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.” (Lamentations 3:22-23) These are powerful words and a great reminder to all of us. Because all of us encounter affliction and even bitterness at certain stages of our lives.

I haven’t met anyone who has been exempt of grief; who has never tasted failure in personal or professional life; or who has never been sick at all. What Jeremiah, the writer of Lamentations experienced is well known to many nations and peoples. We just have to watch the news or read online articles: the grief that First Nation peoples have been going through because of the ‘misconducts’ at several residential schools; the millions of refugees who lost their homes due to wars, violence or natural disasters. It’s heartbreaking to think about those who lost their lives in genocides, murders and mistreats.

History and all these news show that humanity hasn’t changed that much since Jeremiah. People in political power or physical strength can, and do kill others, and many peoples have suffered expulsion not only centuries ago, but even in our times. Moreover, the economic difficulties caused by pandemic brought financial devastation to countless individuals, families and small business owners. I know from close family experience what it feels like to apply for job after job without any success.

When we face pain or uncertainties due to circumstances way greater than us, and when we can’t see the relief coming week after week, or month after month, the question below raised by Julie feels quite relevant: *“God, why aren’t you taking care of me?”*

These are the times when we can draw strength from remembering that God hasn’t changed either. As Jeremiah formulates it: **“his compassions never fail.”** Even if we can’t see it, the Almighty is standing by us, and has been holding us and our situation in his omnipotent hands.

I found the Scripture Insight below especially meaningful, because it reminds us that hope is not just *“an optimistic emotion”*. It acknowledges the pain and loss, but it is also grounded in the faithfulness of God. The waiting process for relief or healing is never easy. But this waiting does not mean that we have to sit passively. In my understanding it is *the action* of placing ourselves into the compassionate and faithful hands of the Almighty God.

When we choose this active waiting over anxiety, we may receive the strength and endurance until we see the sun, until we find peace and healing, and until we find proof in our changing circumstances that God does really cares for us.

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



It's Okay to Lament

The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him.

Lamentations 3:25

READ Lamentations 3:19–26

I dropped to my knees and let my tears fall to the floor. “God, why aren’t you taking care of me?” I cried. It was during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. I’d been laid-off for almost a month, and something had gone wrong with my unemployment application. I hadn’t received any money yet, and the stimulus check the US government had promised hadn’t arrived. Deep down, I trusted that God would work out everything. I believed He truly loved me and would take care of me, but in that moment, I felt abandoned.

The book of Lamentations reminds us it’s okay to lament. The book was likely written during or soon after the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 587 BC. It describes the affliction (3:1, 19), oppression (1:18), and starvation (2:20; 4:10) the people faced. Yet, in the middle of the book the author remembers why he could 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” (3:22–23). Despite the devastation, the author remembered that God remains faithful.

Sometimes it feels impossible to believe that “the Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him” (v. 25), especially when we don’t see an end to our suffering. But we can cry out to Him, trust that He hears us, and that He’ll be faithful to see us through. – By **Julie Schwab**

REFLECT & PRAY

Father, I need You right now. Please help me to trust You to come through for me in my difficult situation. Amen.

What’s making it difficult for you to trust God today? What will help you feel comfortable enough to cry out to Him?

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

When Jeremiah refers to “bitterness” and “gall” (Lamentations 3:19), bitterness is literally “wormwood,” a bitter-tasting plant, while gall is a poisonous plant that causes great pain if eaten. Together, the words function as a metaphor for great anguish, in this case attributed to God’s judgment (Jeremiah 9:15).

It’s the capacity to hope (Lamentations 3:21) that gives the prophet strength to endure. While today “hope” is often synonymous with an optimistic emotion, in the Old Testament both Hebrew words translated “hope” (*yakhal* and *qavah*) refer to waiting. In Lamentations 3:21, the word *yakhal* is used and is the same word translated “will wait for” in verse 24. Therefore, a posture of hope—waiting in expectation—isn’t based on an optimistic perspective on the current situation but on God’s character and faithfulness to bring about future restoration (see Psalm 39:7). – By **Monica La Rose**

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