

Friday February 19

Lamentations 3:16-26 - waiting

- 16 He has broken my teeth with gravel; he has trampled me in the dust.
17 I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is.
18 So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD."
19 I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall.
20 I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.
21 Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:
22 Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.
23 They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
24 I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."
25 The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him;
26 it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

The Book of Lamentations does what it says on the tin. It's a lament. On Ash Wednesday I started this series with Psalm 137, picturing traumatised, exiled, ridiculed Israelites frogmarched to a foreign country far away, pictures of slaughter and destruction permanently seared into their memories, No wonder they were full of lament.

Lamentations follows the book of Jeremiah in the Old Testament. It has 154 verses, full of word pictures that describe terrible scenes of suffering and destruction. It also puts into words the despair and the trauma that these people were going through, such a long way from home and not knowing if they would ever be able to return. But here in the middle of Lamentations chapter 3 it's a bit like a hurricane: it has a still, small centre.

A few quiet verses reveal three things worth hanging on to: THE COMPASSIONATE LOVE OF GOD; THE IMPORTANCE OF HOPE and THE CHALLENGE OF WAITING. Listen to this:

"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.
I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." "

As we journey together through Lent, a pandemic making us exiles in our own homes, this Book of Lamentations reminds us of the same 3 things to hang on to: THE COMPASSIONATE LOVE OF GOD; THE IMPORTANCE OF HOPE and THE CHALLENGE OF WAITING.

Today, let's think about waiting. Waiting for things to get back to some sort of normality, with something we can begin to call freedom. In the meantime we wait and it's not easy. I've had my first dose of vaccine; I still have to wait another 9 weeks for the second dose. My wife had to wait for a couple of weeks longer for her first jab. It's hard, all this waiting.

I've heard lots of suggestions about what we can do while we wait: taking up a new hobby, for example. Yes, that's not a bad idea! But here's something else. Lots of psalms talk about waiting, and one of them says this: 'Trust in the Lord and do good'. In other words, keep looking *up* and keep looking *out*. As you wait, is there something you can do to help someone else? Even if you can't get out there's no need to feel this doesn't apply to you. Give someone a call. Write them a letter or send a card. It may not seem much to you. But it might mean the world to them.