

SERMON: *“Lament over Jerusalem”*

Rev. Geoff Ross: Sunday, March 13, 2022, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

This Lent we are reflecting on how Jesus – and we/you/me/each of us – is/are drawn to the Cross. And it’s true. Last week we heard Jesus was immediately tested/tempted after His baptism/being affirmed by God as God’s Son – and we heard how we’re no different. And this is also true. And, while Lent is no different than the rest of the year, it does help us to focus/remind us to stop/assess our lives/faith. For forty days, Lent is a time when we hold a mirror up to our lives/reflect on who we/we’ve are/become. For forty days, we are drawn to the Cross – both the crucifix with the crown of thorns/bloody nails, and the barren cross with its triumphant emptiness – and what it means to/for us. Lent reminds us of the cost and the need of the Cross – how far we are from God/much we need it’s saving power.

Don’t believe me? Let me ask you: How’re you doing/the past 2 years been/holding up – how’s your faith/trust in God’s presence/promises of a better tomorrow? If you’re like me, it’s been tough. Like you, for me, every day has been a trial. Every day we toil/strive to find the balance between right/wrong – good/evil. Every day we make choices – decisions that will affect us in ways unknown. Every day it’s the same thing – the same doubt/anxiety/questions. And the Cross stands/hangs there – searching us/mute/silent, neither benign/malevolent, waiting for us – for you/me. Like you – especially over the past 2 years/past 2 weeks! – I’ve wrestled/struggled/railed/disagreed with/against the world we live in/grappled with what the cross wants/expects of me: I know that *“I’m a long way from where I was/where I need to be.”*(U2) Every day is a trial – but even in my darkest moments, I’m still a ‘grace-guy’, a ‘hope-guy’ and I will *“stand firm in the Lord”* as Paul writes in his Letter to the Philippians.

But it isn’t easy, is it!? We live in a world that groans under the weight of sin/evil – the collective weight of warfare/violence/greed/pride/hubris/sin – where *“evildoers,”* as the Psalm calls them, assail/chew on us like wild animals, where literal/spiritual armies clash by night against us/loved ones abandon us/our heath deserts/undermines us – where, it appears that God has forsaken us – the Cross stands as a reminder of a covenant made by the God of salvation. Psalm 27, a Psalm of faith sung by a people in need of faith/something to trust/believe in – offers us hope/reassurance that, no matter what, we live by God’s grace through a covenant of love/sacrifice. Similarly, the covenant detailed in the Genesis reading – between God/Abram – is the foundation of the People of God’s belief/understanding that he/they would/will be delivered from slavery/sin/death – saved to live in God’s presence forever. This covenant symbolized God’s faithfulness and offers us assurance/hope that we, too, shall be saved.

Every day is both a trial and, according to Paul, an opportunity that places us at a fork/crossroads where one path follows Christ, the other blazed by “enemies of the Cross” – the choice is up to us. Essentially this is what the Cross asks us to do: we can choose to follow/*“imitate”* Christ or not. To be drawn to the Cross/way of Christ is not easy, and we shouldn’t forget it: sacrifice means just what it sounds like – cost/loss/surrender,

atonement/punishment/penitence, reparation/payment/giving oneself up. The Cross calls us to decide.

Paul, writing from the perspective of the empty Cross, calls for us to have hope/live in faith since, it is *"in the Lord"* where our lives are lifted up/share in our resurrection hope as a "citizen" of *"the City of God."* Like Paul's, our faith is founded in a hope in the coming Saviour who will transform this earthly/fallen world into a heavenly kingdom bringing Good News to poor/release to all captives/sight to the blind/freedom for the oppressed; a world where the *"last will be first, and some are first will be last."*(Luke 4:18-19;13:30) Jesus offers to radically change our human existence from living in a *"body of our humiliation"* to taking on/conforming to *"the body of his glory."*(Phil 3:21) But it is only through the Cross and Jesus' resurrection from the cross that this can happen.

And, God/Jesus knew this/His becoming one with/of us would mean His death – it's our fallen fate. And this is why Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem/He 'lamented' Jerusalem and its citizens/was drawn to the Cross. He knew that to fulfill God's/His saving plan for us, He would have to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves – turn the Cross, an earthly instrument of torture/judgment/death/despair into a symbol of love/acceptance/salvation/hope. Lent is a time of trial – every day we wake up in a fallen world far from God – yet it is through trial that one/we/you/me is/are transformed. The Good News is that nothing on earth is going to stop God's kingdom from coming – the Cross we are drawn toward stands before us: we have a choice to make. Amen.