

The faithfulness of God in lamentable circumstances \* Lamentation 3:22-23 \* Anniversary Sunday  
June 13, 2021 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

Whenever Anniversary Sunday rolls around, my mind always goes to the theme of God's faithfulness. A church anniversary after all is not just about the number of years since the founders put a shovel in the ground; a church anniversary is all about God's faithfulness to the church from the time it was founded up to the present.

And whenever I think of God's faithfulness, my mind always goes to a passage of Scripture that you know well because of the hymn –

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. (Lam 3:22-23 NIV).

A church anniversary is a great time to stop and say together as a church – 'Great is Your faithfulness O Lord.'

But there's something else about that passage that makes it especially relevant for us today. Do you know where that passage comes from? Lamentations. The book that is all about lament. The words that inspired 'Great is Thy faithfulness' were written during the exile. About fifty years before Daniel, Jeremiah looked around at the upheaval of the exile, the way the world he knew seemed to crumble around him, and still chose to proclaim – 'Even so, God's mercies never fail. They are new every morning; great is His faithfulness.'

And because of that, I think that this passage is a neat opportunity for us to think about God's faithfulness in light of COVID-19. We haven't been torn from our homes like the exiles, but we've certainly been stuck in our homes. It's been a time of upheaval and uncertainty, a time of challenges and sacrifices, but even so, God has remained steadfastly faithful throughout.

So I want to take today to highlight some of God's 'new every morning mercies,' so that we don't miss them in the midst of everything else that's going on. We're going to stop and think about God's faithfulness to us as a church this anniversary Sunday. And here's the framework that I want to use this morning - God has been faithful to the church during COVID-19, providing what we need, preserving our community and preparing us for future ministry.

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So first, God has been faithful to the church during COVID-19 by providing what we need.

Just like Jeremiah, we have discovered that God's mercies are new every morning. We have had all that we have needed from the LORD. Think about it. Have you once woken up hungry because you missed a meal the day before? I doubt it. Maybe we've had to wait a bit or line up to get it, but even in the midst of a pandemic, God has provided our daily bread.

Certainly, farmers have worked hard and truckers have worked hard and grocery store staff have worked hard (and deserve more thanks than we usually give them) but all of that has unfolded under

God's sovereign care. He is the one who gave growth to the crops and He is the one who gave us energy to work to earn wages; He has provided what we have needed.

And God has been providing SO faithfully that you've been confident enough to give faithfully. You know, one thing that I regret about online church like this is that we don't really have the opportunity to give our offerings to the Lord in a formal way. There's no offertory song and collecting of envelopes. And yet that certainly hasn't stopped you from giving. I know that in many churches, giving is way down and some churches are in very difficult straits because of it. You though have kept us afloat and not just that, you've given to the point that we've been able to upgrade the stairways, replace the floor in the hall, put in new lights back there so you can see better. Not to mention that we've continued to support our missions at the usual level when for many of them, offerings have been down. You have been faithful in giving and we can't thank you enough for that, knowing that you are sharing what God has given to you. God has worked through you to provide what we need as a church.

And not only has God given us what we need materially, He's given us what we need spiritually. I think that He has given us the same kind of peace and confidence and hope that Jeremiah experienced. It's clear from Lamentations 3 that Jeremiah had been through a lot. Verse 17 says "17 I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is." Verse 19 says "19 I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall." (Lam 3:17-19 NIV).

And yet the awareness of God's faithfulness gave him hope. You see that in verse 21 - 20 I remember them well, 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 (Lam 3:22-23 NIV).

The steadfast, never-failing, new every morning love of God is reason for hope. And God has given us that hope.

God has been faithful to the church during COVID-19, providing all that we have needed.

God has also been faithful to the church by preserving our community.

I've said it a million times - online church is not the same as in-person, but it's better than nothing and God has worked through it to hold our community together. A year and a half ago, you probably had no idea what a Zoom was, but here we are, week after week, joining together to honour God as best as we can, given the circumstances. And God has preserved our community through it. Again I know that there are churches that are struggling to keep people involved and yet, here you are, week after week, eager to honour God as best as you can.

Not only that, God has added some new people to our community, which is absolutely wonderful. While there are some churches struggling with engagement right now, God has faithfully preserved us as a church community.

And that's true on another level too. I know that some of you know people who have been affected by and even lost their lives to COVID but by and large our immediate community has been spared the virus. Many of us have other health issues, so I am grateful that we have been spared the coronavirus on top of it all.

God has faithfully preserved our community.

And God has been faithful to the church during COVID-19 by preparing us for future ministry.

You know, if nothing else, COVID has disabused us of the notion that the church is the building. This is certainly a special building, but the church has carried on, even without meeting all together at 1601 Colborne St E.

And that has led you to be very creative in your ministry to others. I know that many of you have taken groceries and meals to neighbours; I know that the Missions team has worked hard to continue to serve people in need in ways unlike we've ever done before and been really neat to see the creative ways you've come up with to serve others. From Fred McLellan preparing spaghetti and meatballs for the Blessing Centre to strawberry shortcake for Why Not's online cooking class, you've thought outside the box and that I think is going to serve us well in the future. The world we knew may be gone and with it the old way of doing things, but we will still be able to be the hands and feet of God to the world.

In addition to that, we've started to think about how we can use technology to reach more people on Sunday mornings. It has been great to have so many people take part and we're already thinking about how we can carry on when we're able to meet all in the building again. Also, our website is getting close to two hundred visits a month, and I know many of you are watching the videos I've made and looking back over my manuscripts; it's great to think that we can serve people whenever they need it through the resources that are up on our website.

God has been faithful during the pandemic, preparing us for future ministry.

God has been faithful to the church during COVID-19, providing what we need, preserving our community and preparing us for future ministry.

The thing that I like about Lamentations 3 is that it is an idea that has been tested in the furnace of life. 'Great is Thy faithfulness' is not an idea wistfully written down by the poolside with a daiquiri in hand. 'Great is Thy faithfulness' is a conviction borne out by the hard struggles of real life. God's faithfulness is great even in lamentable circumstances. And we know that from experience. The world has changed but God has not. He has been faithful to the church and to you. And in the future, He will be faithful to the church and to you too.

Let's pray -

God's provision  
God's preservation  
God's preparation

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.

(Lam 3:22-23 NIV).