

Sunday 8th November 2015 Christ Church 10.45 am

God's story, my story. The Broken Dream Lamentations 1:1-12

My favourite book as I was growing up? The House at Pooh Corner. The chapter I wanted mum to read over and over again was when Tigger came to breakfast. He finds out he doesn't like honey, or acorns, or thistles, but instead settles for baby Roo's strengthening medicine, extract of malt!

Genius writing by Milne if you're a parent and trying to give medicine to a child. Now I'm not sure what featured in your breakfast this morning, but I suspect none of these are particularly appetising. Honey on its own, acorns, thistles or medicine are unpleasant and each remembrance Sunday brings me to that same feeling of unpleasantness. I have no appetite for wars past or present. The human cost, the suffering is horrific. Indeed some aid agencies claim 2014 has been the worst on record for children displaced by or affected by wars.

We'd expect the bible help us come alongside those for whom today will bring painful memories, but it should also challenge us to see our story and God's story come together once more.

Carol to read for us this morning, on page 823.

Thanks Carol

We're around 587 years before Jesus and Babylon under king Nebuchadnezzar invades Judah. Many of the towns and villages are destroyed, there's a siege in Jerusalem and the most traumatic episode of the exile period begins with the destruction of the temple. The temple was looted and burned and all that remains is a small exiled community allowed to live within Babylon. As Carol read for us following the destruction of the temple, God's spiritual home among his people, comes this lament for what has gone before. A painful description of their present situation.

We have a saying don't we "how the mighty have fallen" and that is a great description of the first two verses.

Once great among the nations, now as lonely as a widow, once full of people, now deserted. Once like a queen, now like a slave.

A complete reversal of fortunes, all a bit depressing really. Previously in this series, we've seen that the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt, and

although the Egyptians pursued the fleeing Israelites, their actions were in vain.

But now in verse 3:

“All who pursue her have overtaken her in the midst of her distress.”

And so the exile becomes a period to mourn. Where once there was praise of God, temple worship, there is groaning and mourning. And verse 5 tells us why Judah now finds itself in the exile:

“because of her many sins”

God’s covenant has been consistently clear, blessing will only follow from obedience and the deliberate sin of these people results in the nation in exile mourning for what it had once been.

The exile’s purpose is to bring Judah to its senses, to once more turn back to God. And their rebellion and exile reminds us about our natural human sinful state. It applies to me, it applies to all people. And on this remembrance Sunday there is evidence all around us, there is evidence within us. We turn to war, to conflict and cause human suffering rather than turn to a God that can help us!

True for the people of Judah, and if you’ve looked at the news lately, true today.

But your story, my story need not mirror our society, the world view of war need not be what we’re about. The suffering and pain of Judah’s exile reminds me that Jesus took my exile and rebellion upon himself. Dealt with it, so that I don’t have to face or be in exile. I can have that restored relationship with God. And so can you.

And verse 6 reminds us the lengths Jesus went to.

“All the splendour has departed” Jesus splendour was taken away on the cross, he experienced our exile, taken away from God’s presence, so we don’t have to!

Our lament this morning is for a world, for a community, for someone we know that does not know or trust in Jesus. Because actually although they may not realise it, they are in exile! Only Jesus undoes rebels like you and me.

And you can have confidence that Jesus has dealt with our exile, you can give thanks for what Jesus has we you look at verse 9 and see how

Jesus reverses the situation, so instead of “Look O Lord on my affliction, for the enemy has triumphed.” Jesus would be rejected, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, but what a triumph he would win, what a victory over sin and death. Jesus reverses the exile.

The suffering pain of Judah’s exile, a reminder to all this morning that Jesus went into exile on our behalf.

But just in case you thought I’d finished with suffering, there is worse to come!

Verse 10:

“pagan nations enter her sanctuary”

Verse 11 “All her people groan as they search for bread; they barter their treasures for food to keep themselves alive.”

This is extreme indeed. Not some trivial problem of finding something nice to eat for breakfast like Tigger. This is sell anything, just to survive. And help just seems to pass by, verse 12:

“Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?”

And those haunting words that follow:

“Is any suffering like my suffering?”

What an appropriate passage for Remembrance Sunday!

It is difficult to conceive of anything worse. The bleakest of statements reminding us that war and the effects of war are horrible indeed. For many Christians around the world caught up in wars, caught up in the effects of war, who will look and see their suffering?

Will we simply walk past and ignore? Or will we support organisation like the Barnabas fund as they support Christians affected by war. As they currently work with governments to get visas for Christians fleeing Iraq and Syria.

And that is a challenge to our own walk as disciples following the Lord Jesus. There is suffering on our doorstep, foodbank, family pack are great examples of Christ Church trying to relieve suffering in our community. Nearly 600 years later than this exile Jesus would tell the parable of the good Samaritan confirming that genuine followers of Jesus do not ignore, they do not pass by.

This morning a reminder that Jesus went into our exile on our behalf, and a challenge not to walk by, to weep with those who weep.

But finally, amidst the general theme of this exile period there is real hope in this book of Lamentations. The writer remains confident of God's character, a renewed daily reminder in fact. Exactly what this warring world needs.

Later Chapter 3 and verse 22 we can read:

“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.”

In the midst of suffering, God's promise holds firm. Where the people of Judah had failed, God's faithfulness is not going to fail. Renewed hope, a different perspective. Just like Jesus would challenge his followers to be peacemakers, once more we look at our story and see what hope we hold out to others. Is that a description of you this morning? Relying on God's faithfulness, looking for opportunities to be a peacemaker.

And I think that is key to this exile period for Judah, I think that is the key to our response to remembrance Sunday. God's people should have been a blessing to nations around, they should have been peacemakers. This part of scripture shows me the world through God's eyes. How it refuses to come to its senses – it either turns away from him, or passes by. But it also shows me how to place the world before God. To recognise the kind of disciples he wants. Those not consumed by hate and war, but with renewed faith and a renewed passion to be peacemakers.

That is the Jesus centred alternative. It gives us renewed hope a renewed purpose, relying on a faithful God.

And I guess for each one of us there is a choice. We can leave the rather depressing words of Lamentations in the bible, we can leave the world to suffer, or we can go from here this morning with renewed hope and renewed purpose rejoicing that

Jesus has dealt with our exile once and for all.

We can commit to be those that do not walk by, we will support Barnabas fund globally, and foodbank and family pack locally.

Once more in God's story, my story we can be confident that we have a Jesus centred alternative, which above everything else is what people need to hear and see. Will you keep that to yourself in the week ahead? Or will you like "Look around and see" with a renewed purpose

Let us pray.