

Fourth Sunday of Easter

“Morning People”

Our Redeemer Dallas 2020

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning” (3:22-23a).

Are you a morning person? Do you enjoy getting up early and getting an early start to your day? Or are you more of a night owl, preferring to stay up late and needing several cups of coffee in order to function at even a reasonable hour in the morning?

Mornings can be hard, and not just because you’re sleepy. Whether you enjoy waking up early or prefer to sleep in late,

The morning often brings with it the darkness of yesterday.

This is something that God’s people of old knew well. The words of our text from the book of Lamentations were written, perhaps by the prophet Jeremiah, some time after the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of her people into exile in Babylon some six hundred years before Christ. They are comforting words, and yet they were written in very dark times. Not only had the people of Judah lost their home, but, since that home was connected to the presence and promises of God, they had to wonder if they’d also lost their status as God’s chosen and beloved people.

After all, it’s not as if they were innocent. There is no attempt whatsoever in the five poems that make up this book either to excuse the people’s behavior or to accuse God Himself of injustice. Rather, in verse 18 of chapter 1 we read, “The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against His word.” The people had sinned, and they knew it. Though God had promised to be their God, saying, “You shall have no other gods before Me,” they had rejected that promise, rejected Him, in favor of other “lovers,” like Egypt and Assyria. And God, who is a jealous God, had not let them get away with it. He had punished them, sending the very nations whose help they had sought to oppress and afflict them.

And so, as the book begins in chapter 1 verse 1, “How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become, she who was great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave.” Very haunting stuff.

And each and every morning, they were reminded of it by virtue of the fact that they were *still in exile*. The dark night of their affliction did not simply and miraculously fade away with the dawn, but time and again, for days, weeks, months, years, decades, they awoke to another day of captivity.

We read something of their situation in Psalm 137, which begins,

By the waters of Babylon,
 there we sat down and wept,
 when we remembered Zion.
 On the willows there
 we hung up our lyres.
 For there our captors
 required of us songs,
 and our tormentors, mirth, saying,
 “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”
 How shall we sing the Lord's song
 in a foreign land? (verses 1-4)

How could they rejoice when nothing ever seemed to change? When day after day the darkness remained, the failures and doubts and disappointments of yesterday? How could they ever be morning people, when not just their nights but their days were spent mourning?

What about you? Are you a *mourning* person? Are you lamenting something in your life? Some guilt you can't shake? Some circumstance you can't change? Maybe it's your fault. Maybe *you're* the reason the darkness is there. After all, it's not as if any of us is innocent. We all have guilt, which, as I heard on a podcast this week, and I think this is right, “is a discrepancy between where we are and where we ought to be.”¹ We ought to be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48). We ought to have no other gods before Him. But we do. We, too, have other “lovers,” anything and everything upon which we set our hearts and put our trust. And so, we're not perfect. And there are consequences.

But maybe the darkness is not your fault. Maybe you're stuck in a situation that's beyond your control. But that doesn't change the fact that it's there and that it continues to weigh on you. Day after day, the darkness remains, and you wonder when or even if you'll rejoice again.

¹ Michael Horton, host. “What Shall We Then Preach?” *White Horse Inn*, 29 April 2020.

“But,” writes the author of Lamentations, “this I call to mind, and therefore I hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.” It may bring with it the darkness of yesterday, but

The morning also brings with it new mercies from the Lord.

We’re in the season of Easter, which means that we are especially focused on the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. I know I quoted him last time, but Dietrich Bonhoeffer also points out in his book *Life Together* that the early morning is a special time for the church. As we read a few weeks ago on Easter, it was then, at early dawn, that the women went to the tomb with their spices and discovered that the stone had been rolled away. It was then that they heard the angel announce, “He is not here, but has risen” (Luke 24:6). It was then that one of them, Mary Magdalene, saw the risen Jesus, who said to her, “go to My brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God’” (John 20:18). *Your Father. Your God.* “The early morning belongs to the church of the risen Christ,” writes Dietrich, because that’s when “death, the devil, and sin were brought low in defeat, and new life and salvation were given to human beings.”²

And so, as Jesus told His disciples on the night when He was betrayed, “You will have sorrow, but your sorrow will turn into joy” (John 16:20). Or, in the words of Psalm 30, “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning” (verse 5).

The sorrow of those who went into exile was turned into joy when God redeemed them from their captivity and brought them home to Jerusalem. It may have taken seventy years, but the point is, during all that time, the steadfast love of the Lord never ceased; His mercies never came to an end; they were new every morning. For day after day, God remembered His Word. He did not forsake them, but in mercy forgave, so that one day, things *did* change, and the darkness abated, giving way to the dawn of a new day of freedom.

Now, ultimately, what happened to these people so long ago happened as an example for us and was written down for our instruction. That’s what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10 (verse 11). So, what are we to learn from this? What’s the lesson?

First, sin is a serious thing. The darkness is real. There’s no use denying it. In fact, it is written, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). When we consider our place in life according to the Ten Commandments, we can only conclude that we are sinners and that we justly deserve

² Chapter 2, “The Day Together,” par. 35.

God's wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation (Rom. 6:21, 23). "The Lord is in the right." We have sinned, and we know it.

But, second, even in our darkness, there is light. For Christ was born, a light in the darkness, to bring life and immortality to light. In His mercy, Almighty God has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins. Not only that, but Christ is risen! (He is risen indeed! Alleluia!) The temple of His Body, which was destroyed, has been raised up again. He lives, and, as we sang on Easter, "*I shall conquer death*" (LSB 461, st. 7). Because He died and rose again, because *His* sorrow was turned into joy, we too have confidence that there is a bright new day for us, a day when things will change, when sin and death will be no more and every darkness will give way to eternal light.

Yet *even now* the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; *even now* His mercies never come to an end; *even now* they are new every morning for you. Day after day, He remembers His Word. He remembers the promise He made to you in your Baptism: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). God has promised to be *your* God, putting His holy name on you and adopting you as His own child in Christ. You were buried with Him by baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead, you too may live a new life (Rom. 6:4).

Which means that the darkness of yesterday has nothing to say to you today. Your guilt may still linger, your circumstances may be unchanged, but the mercies of the Lord are new every morning. In Christ, today is a brand new day. Whatever darkness you bring with you from yesterday, whatever failures, doubts, and disappointments remain, as a Christian, you wake each morning as one who is baptized. You are one with the Lord. So, before you know it, before you doubt it, before you confess it, you are beloved by God, not by what you've done but because of what Christ has done for you. You are marked from your first waking moment, whenever that may be, by His steadfast love that never ceases, never is forgotten, but is as sure and certain as the sunrise.

So, whether you enjoy waking up early or prefer to sleep in late, in a way,

We are all morning people.

We are people of the resurrection. We believe in Jesus Christ, who was raised, and who will one day give life to our mortal bodies. We lament, but not as others do who have no hope. We have sorrow, but our sorrow is turned into joy by Christ, who carried our sorrows to the cross (Isa. 53:4).

Mornings can be hard. The darkness is real. But so is the light. So is Christ. We are morning people, and what we *will* be has not yet appeared (1 John 3:1). But that day

is coming. The Son approaches. Great is His faithfulness. “Therefore,” says my soul, “I will hope in Him” (Lam. 3:24).

In ☩ Jesus’ name. Amen. The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria