

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Pentecost 6B - Proper 8B  
June 30, 2024  
Lamentations 3:22-33

### God's Alien Work

For the Lord will not cast off forever, 32 but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; 33 for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men. (Lamentations 3:31-33 ESV)

Dearly Beloved in Christ:

At one time or another in your life, you've probably suffered grief of some kind. Perhaps it was when you were a child and you were sick, or your parents were too poor to provide much in the way of worldly things, or other kids made fun of you. Perhaps it was when you were a bit older and you were sick or injured, or fallen on hard times, were betrayed or abandoned by someone you loved, or maybe it was simply having too much to do in too little time. Perhaps it's even right now and you suffer from the affects of aging - arthritis or some other ailment causes you to suffer great pain, something that happened a long time ago catches up with you, your heart, eyes, and ears don't work so well, you have trouble getting around. Or perhaps you still suffer grief over the death of a loved one. At times it may seem unbearable, as though the world is caving in on you. At times you may be reduced to tears, and simply want to die.

My dear friends, you are not alone. Jarius, too, knew such grief. For such is the lot of sinful man living in a sinful world. But there's more to it than that. The trials and tribulations we suffer in this life are gifts from God Himself. No, you didn't hear me wrong. The trials and tribulations we suffer in this life are gifts from God Himself. Listen, and I'll explain.

Have you ever heard a parent about to spank his child say to him, "This is going to hurt me a lot more than it does you"? Of course, the child doesn't believe it for a moment. But that doesn't make it any less true. If you've experienced that for yourself, you know what I mean. It really does hurt a parent to spank his child. There's no joy and no delight in it. But the spanking needed to be done for the welfare of the child, even if the child doesn't realize it at the time.

Indeed, God's Word tells us, "'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.' It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” (Heb. 12:5-11)

God had called Jeremiah to preach to the Israelites and tell them that the Babylonians were going to conquer them and take them into exile because the Israelites - kings, priests, and people - had abandoned God’s Word and had chased after false gods time and time again. This was not a pleasant message to proclaim, but Jeremiah did it. And he personally suffered a lot for it. Then, when Jerusalem had fallen, once that glorious city had been laid ruin, once the Israelites had been removed from the Promised Land, Jeremiah looked at the scene with deep sadness, and lamented what he saw.

Then, in the middle of Jeremiah’s lament, we hear words of great comfort and faith. “For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men.” Jeremiah, inspired by the Holy Spirit, tells us that God causes grief.

So how are we to understand that? Well, God created us and cares for us without fail. Whatever befalls us in this life does so only at God’s command and will. Now don’t get this wrong. God is not the source of evil in this world. God does not actively cause evil to befall us, though He can certainly allow it and use it to our good. St. Paul, who himself suffered much grief wrote, “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28). Furthermore, God does not at all delight in causing us grief. God does not enjoy seeing the children of men suffer in any way. Rather, He causes grief in order to get our attention. He causes grief to turn our hearts toward Him. He causes grief so we will learn not to trust in ourselves and our own righteousness. He causes grief in order to show us mercy and compassion. So you see, causing grief and affliction is God’s alien work. It’s not what He most wants for us, but it is good for us nonetheless. Causing grief is foreign, or alien, to what God ultimately wants for us.

You see, God’s proper work is to save us from our sins and bring us to everlasting life. It is God’s ultimate will that He “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Through Ezekiel God proclaimed, “‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live’” (Ezek. 33:11). In order to accomplish His ultimate will, God sent His only-begotten Son to suffer unimaginable grief for you. And this is what Jesus did. He suffered extreme hunger and temptation in the wilderness following His baptism. He suffered extreme ridicule from those did not believe that Jairus’ daughter was only sleeping. He suffered extreme animosity and death threats from the Saducees, Pharisees, and teachers of the law. He suffered betrayal, denial, and

abandonment from His closest friends. He suffered the most extreme punishment as His Father forsook Him on the cross. He bore the full weight of the sins of the world as He gasped for every last breath. Yes, Jesus suffered grief beyond measure so that your sins would be forgiven so that you would never have to suffer that ultimate grief yourself. He was your substitute, the atonement for your sins.

So sometimes, God has to get our attention in order to show us His mercy. Sometimes we have to be driven to our knees - in repentance and in faith. And as we are, we pray for forgiveness and relief. No one ever said the Christian life would be easy. In fact, Jesus told us it would be difficult because His followers would suffer just like their Teacher.

Yet, the grief doesn't last forever. You can endure it because you can say with Paul "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). Besides, God promises, "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'" (Lam. 3:22-24). And though we suffer grief, "The Lord will not cast off forever." (Lam. 3:31). That's a promise to cling to.

Again, consider Jarius. First he suffered grief because his daughter was deathly ill. Then, as they were delayed in going to her, he suffered even more grief when he heard the news that she had died. But he was not consumed by grief, for Jesus was with him. Jesus' compassion didn't fail. The Lord was His portion. God showed him "compassion according to the multitude of His mercies." Yes, the Lord's mercies are new every morning.

And though God causes grief, He also grants relief. And as we have also experienced \*that\* in our lives, God makes us more compassionate to others in their trials. Again, Paul writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. " (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

God's alien work is the Law. It shows us our sin and it causes much grief. But God's only purpose in this is that we might see His great mercy and faithfulness. And as we relish His mercy and compassion, we discover the truth of Christ's words, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" ( Matt. 11:28-30). God grant you all such rest in Him, now and forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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