

The Lord is Good!

When Pastor Don first asked me to speak today, I told him that I would give it thought, but said yes pretty quickly. I knew exactly what I should speak about, giving thanks in everything and all times. That stayed with me into the next morning. During that day, it morphed into today's topic...the Lord is Good!

The last eighteen or so months have brought many challenges to all of us. No one has been immune to feeling some challenge due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It has impacted every aspect of life as we knew it on March 15 of last year. And yet the Lord is Good through it all and we can always find something to be thankful for.

Shopping and going to the gym were shut down. Coming to church and participating in church activities were shut down. Visiting with our friends and meeting for coffee or lunch was shut down. Support groups such as WW or AA were shut down for in person gatherings. Funerals, weddings, hospital and home visitation, and other such social outreach came to a halt. Perhaps, depending upon your situation, family visits and get togethers were stopped.

Many of us started to feel as though life had changed forever and would never be "normal" again. And that may be the truth. But we are very slowly starting to regain some of our old social, family and church routines. Today being just a small example. Here we are, gathered in this sanctuary, singing and worshipping together. Committees have voted every few months to approve changes and loosening of restrictions as the CDC guidelines have changed. Pastors have done their best to keep up with changing technology to allow this service to take place, not only in person, but continuing to reach out to those at home. In time, more and more has started to seem more routine. It has all seemed easier to go through these challenges because we have the Lord who is always there for us and loves us, even as we feel challenged by what life throws our way.

Let's pray,

Dear Lord, thank you for bringing us here to worship today. We are blessed to be able to worship so openly, many around the world would be punished for worshipping at all never mind so openly. We know that you are a good god. We know that you are the only God. We know that no matter what challenges come our way, you are always there for us and that you love us through it all. You love us on our good days and on our bad days. Sometimes, we forget how much you love us and that we can rely on you for strength and peace when we feel challenged. But there you are, just waiting for us to call on you, lean on you, and walk with you. Open our hearts, minds and souls as your word is spoken today. May we come out on the other end of this message knowing and feeling your enduring love for us, including the gift of your son in whose name we pray. Amen!

Today's reading is found in Lamentations 3: 22-33, 55-61

22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end;

23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

24 "The Lord is my portion" says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

25 The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.

26 It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

27 It is good for one to bear the yoke in youth,

28 to sit alone in silence when the Lord has imposed it,

29 to put one's mouth to the dust (there may yet be hope),

30 to give one's cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults.

31 For the Lord will not reject forever.
32 Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
33 for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone.

55 I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit;
56 you heard my plea, "Do not close your ear to my cry for help, but give me relief!"
57 You came near when I called on you; you said, "Do not fear!"
58 You have taken up my cause, O Lord, you have redeemed my life.
59 You have seen the wrong done to me, O Lord; judge my cause.
60 You have seen all their malice, all their plots against me.
61 You have heard their taunts, O Lord, all their plots against me.
This is the word of the God for the people of God!

How many of you have read from the book of Lamentations? I know that I have, but probably only when I was following some bible reading plan. Not because I was drawn to it. As a matter of fact, I have been known to say that based upon the name, I thought that Lamentations should follow the book of Job. You know, kind of woe is me, lamenting. But then Job isn't really a woe is me book and Lamentations isn't just about lamenting.

Having said all that, I will admit to having done some lamenting over the past few months. Lamenting the loss of church. Lamenting the loss of visiting family in Texas and Virginia. Lamenting the loss of a very dear friend last summer. Lamenting the loss of in person meetings and being able to go to the gym. Lamenting the loss of seeing many of my friends for coffee or bible study. There were a few weeks of woe is me. But something clicked and I remembered that God loved me at all times and in all things. I have looked up lamenting and it sent me to mourning. So I looked up mourning. The short definition is that mourning is the expression of grief, as at the time of death or national disaster.

I also looked up an article in a bible dictionary that went on to say that in Biblical times, the customs of most cultures encouraged a vivid expression of grief. It seems to me that our culture thinks that you are done with your mourning when the casket or urn is placed in the ground and dirt is thrown on top. After that happens, one must put on a "game face" and move on. That is all well and good for some people. But we all have a different journey to travel and we all take our own time to work it out with God. The God who loves us at all times.

As we see in chapter three of Lamentations, the Lord's love is enduring. He loves mankind, always has and always will. God is the best parent ever. Loving his children unconditionally and yet able to let us know when we need to change our ways. Those of us who know God, who have a relationship with him, are blessed indeed.

Back to Lamentations, it is believed that Jeremiah is the author of this book, although there are some who would argue the point. The book was written right after the fall of Judah and the capture of Jerusalem. The author has penned his sorrow over what has happened to his country and the people's sin that invoked God's severe judgement. And yet the author urges repentance and hope by personally relying on the sure mercies of God.

Verse 22, The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end;
23, they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
24, "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

Not only does his love never cease, it is new every morning. The Lord is a compassionate god. His mercy is more than a one and done kind of mercy. We see that in verse 22 where it states that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. He didn't love for just a few days or a few years, or a few generations. His love never ceases. The Lord has loved all of his people since he created man in the first place, you know, back in the garden. That love is unceasing. He loves the newest being on our planet at this moment. He loves you and he loves me. He will love our children and our grandchildren and our great grandchildren and each generation that follows.

The love and mercies of the Lord are new every morning, on into eternity. He is and has always been faithful to mankind, new every morning. His faithfulness is great, beyond measure.

Do you have a dog? We now have our third dog. All three being very loyal and faithful. Our first dog, Cinnamon, was nine when we needed to put her down. Our second dog, Nola, was seventeen when we needed to put her down. We now have our third dog, Zacchaeus, a frisky little boy. No matter how faithful you may think that your dog is, the Lord is faithful at a level that goes beyond any dog. Do we really have any choice but to trust in him and put all our hope in him?

I don't think so. As seen in verse 24, the Lord is our portion, our inheritance. The author says that he will put his hope in the Lord. I think that we should do likewise. Who else can we trust in the way that we can trust God? Who else will love us the way that he will? We also read in Psalm 100, For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

The title of today's message is, The Lord is Good. I could have added a subtitle and it would have been, His Love Endures Forever. We can see how good the Lord is in verses twenty-five through thirty. We learn what is good for us to experience as we move through life.

25, The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.
26, It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.
27, It is good for one to bear the yoke in youth,
28, to sit alone in silence when the Lord has imposed it,
29, to put one's mouth to the dust (there may yet be hope),
30, to give one's cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults.

There may be times in our lives when it seems like God is just piling it on. I have certainly known that feeling at different times in my life. It's the feeling, "Hey God, I'm done with what you're giving me. Take it elsewhere now. I'm willing to share with others. But it is God who is good and it is God who will see that we get to the other side of our troubles. It is God who has a plan for us and knows that these experiences shape us into mature Christians. We wait for him, we seek him, we wait quietly for salvation, we bear the yoke, we sit alone in silence, we put our mouth to the dust, that is, to submit, we give our cheek to the smiter and we are filled with insults.

We seem to endure so much along our faith journey. Every experience will shape us. And through every experience, the Lord is there with us. The Lord is there and loves us at all times.

Remember the words found in Psalm 106, Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.

We find similar words in Psalm 107, Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.

I hope that my point is being made with God's own words here. The Lord is good and his love endures forever.

Now you like so many others, may wonder about the grief that God may cause us. How is this showing us his love? God doesn't mean to cause us grief in most cases. He doesn't mean us harm or hurtful times. But he does want to show us compassion and use us as an example to others of his eternal love and compassion.

Let's move on,

31, For the Lord will not reject forever.

32, Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love;

33, for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone.

We see in these three verses, that the Lord is always there for us. We may have difficult times. But we also have the most compassionate being in our corner. We have the most loving being in our corner. We have the Lord in our corner. He will show us compassion. He will show us love. And...he will do it forever.

I have had conversations over the years with a couple of people about being a Christian and how I got to that state of being. There are some who seem to feel that the only good way to become a Christian, one who is saved, is to hit rock bottom or be totally against it all, before you become saved. I disagree whole heartedly. I think that you can be fortunate enough to know at a very early age that God is a real presence in your life. And in acknowledging his presence, you get through the tough times with less scarring.

I believe that I am one of those people. Now don't get me wrong, I don't think that my life was horrible. But it certainly had periods of not being easy. I know that my relationship with our Lord is what kept me headed in the right direction at all times. As stated in the passage for today, our Lord is compassionate and loving in a way that no one else is or can even possibly be. That would be my testimony to you or anyone who listens. This is what came to my mind as I read more into Lamentations.

55, I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit;

56, You heard my plea, "Do not close your ear to my cry for help, but give me relief."

57, You came near when I called on you; you said, "Do not fear!"

We see in these verses that we need to call on the Lord, no matter what is going on in our lives, even in the darkest of times. The Lord will hear our pleas. He will give us relief. Now, having said that, the relief may not be what we wanted or when we wanted it. But the relief will come. The Lord is good. The Lord is compassionate. The Lord's love endures forever. The Lord tells us, "Do not fear!"

The Lord sees and knows what goes on in our lives. We see this in the last few words for today.

58, You have taken up my cause, O Lord, you have redeemed my life.

59, You have seen the wrong done to me, O Lord; judge my cause.

60, You have seen all their malice, all their plots against me.

Remember that our God is omnipresent, having the ability to be everywhere at all times and to see all things. Our God is also omniscient. In other words, he has a superior knowledge and wisdom. He has the power to know all things, including our thoughts, our ways, and even our words before they are spoken. He does this for everyone and so knows what we all do and what we will do to others. He sees the good and bad. He will forgive and love us when we wrong someone and is compassionate towards us when we are wronged.

I would like to share the following lyrics with you. You may have heard this Matthew West song on the radio over the last eighteen months.

"The God Who Stays"

If I were You I would've given up on me by now
I would've labeled me a lost cause
'Cause I feel just like a lost cause
If I were You I would've turned around and walked away
I would've labeled me beyond repair
'Cause I feel like I'm beyond repair

Oh, but somehow You don't see me like I do
Somehow You're still here

I used to hide
Every time I thought I let You down
I always thought I had to earn my way
But I'm learning You don't work that way

'Cause somehow You don't see me like I do
Somehow You're still here

My shame can't separate
My guilt can't separate
My past can't separate
I'm Yours forever
My sin can't separate
My scars can't separate
My failures can't separate
I'm Yours forever
No enemy can separate
No power of hell can take away
Your love for me will never change
I'm Yours forever

You're the God who stays (You're the God who stays)
You're the God who stays (You're the God who stays)
You're the one who runs in my direction

When the whole world walks away
You're the God who stands (You're the God who stands)
With wide open arms (With wide open arms)
And You tell me nothing I have ever done can separate my heart
From the God who stays
You're the God who stays
You're the one who runs in my direction
When the whole world walks away
You're the God who stands
With wide open arms
And You tell me nothing I have ever done can separate my heart
From the God who stays

I first became aware of this song by Matthew West back in late February /early March of last year sometime just as I started to struggle with the coming pandemic and how it was starting to impact my life. The refrain is what most spoke to me. If I just trust my God and his love and compassion for me, I will always come out on the other side of any challenge, any trauma, and any scary or dark time. For he is the God who stays, who stands with wide open arms. He runs in our direction when others run away. Our God is good. Our God loves us.

We will get through the current pandemic. It probably won't be on the time line that we would like. But life will get better. Keep relying on God, keep praying, keep focused on the good around you, look for ways to help others who need help, and keep looking for the good in every day.

Let's pray,

Dear good and great God,

We thank you for this time together today. We know that fellowshiping together and hearing your word are just some of the ways that we can be close to you and show our faith and trust in you. We do acknowledge that there are times that we think, "Wow, this is a really tough thing that I am going through right now." But we know now that you will be compassionate with us and get us through it. Whatever "it" is. Loss of a loved one, loss of a job, not being able to travel or being shut in due to the pandemic. We thank you for your goodness, your compassion, and your love. In your son's most precious name we pray, Amen!