

**Title:** God's *Hesed*

**Scriptures:** Lamentations 3:19-26 and 1 Corinthians 12:26

Is there a more relevant Biblical text for our world today than the Book of Lamentations? Comprised of five short poems and written to the survivors of the destruction of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 586 BCE, the authors of this text vividly portray the pain, grief, and despair suffered by the Judean community in the aftermath of this devastating military siege.

Our country is experiencing a different kind of siege, a siege perhaps not so much from an external force but from within. Today marks the 258<sup>th</sup> day since Donald Trump took office. Less than a year into his presidency, the Trump administration and the Republican Party are waging attacks on just about everyone: immigrants, student protestors and protests, DEI, higher education, the LGBTQ+ community, cities across the country, the environment, the media, books, healthcare, the list goes on. In such times, I often find myself wondering, as did our faith ancestors more than 2,600 years ago: Where can we find hope?

Our Scripture today offers some clues, as it the only chapter in Lamentations to contain any admission of hope. But first, let's turn to the beginning of chapter 3 where we are introduced to an anonymous narrator, most likely a survivor of the siege. They are brutally honest about the pain and suffering

Church, how are we making God and God's love present? Collectively, I don't think it's controversial to say that Christians have not been good at honoring the *hesed*, the expression of God and God's love in our relationships. I remember staying up late last year in November as the election results came in. I am a pretty avid watcher and reader of the news, and one of the most talked about outcomes of the elections was the number of Christian who voted for Donald Trump. According to statistics, the majority of Christians in three categories voted for him: Protestants, Catholics, and evangelicals. Trump won the majority of the Christian vote in spite of the fact that he ran a pretty divisive campaign.

As I see and hear the suffering around us today, I am reminded of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12:26: "if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." What makes Lamentations such a powerful and relevant text is that it serves as a witness to suffering. The value of Lamentations is that it evokes compassion in response to suffering. At times, we may be tempted to turn off the news, detach, or take a break from what's going on in the world. And we should. It's healthy for all of us to do so. But also as our faith ancestors showed us, we must witness the suffering around us. We cannot and should not shut it out entirely. When we offer God's *hesed*, God's active compassion to our

ministry could look like not just here in the Pacific Southwest Region, but nationally for events such as our biannual NAPAD Convocation.

Unlike National Convocation or Obra, which are united in a common language, NAPAD has more than 18 different linguistic groups. Perhaps due to this diversity, NAPAD is unique amongst the three groups in that non-Pacific and non-Asian Disciples who have an abiding affinity for NAPAD are granted membership. I will be the first to tell you that NAPAD has a lot of issues, which I'll briefly touch on, but in one of the smaller ministries of our denomination, we are seeing a more global, faithful expression of our Church.

I value and honor the need and desire for spaces in which everyone around me looks like me, and we all share a similar cultural background. There's safety, there's security, and there's comfort there. And I have always been inspired by NAPAD's open membership policy and felt strongly about creating what we're celebrating during communion today: the diversity of God's Church. From the beginning, when I was tasked to lead the NAPAD Young Adult ministry, I sought to create a multi-cultural faith space in an effort to connect, share, and empower young adults from across BIPOC (an acronym for Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities.

encouragement to this current generation of leadership. Because they experienced some of these challenges in their own ministry, we are coming together in witness and lament, facing the struggles together, and God willing, building a more inclusive future for our communities.

Church, I have the enormous privilege this morning to share with you that God's *hesed* is not conditional. And today, more than ever, we must make God's *hesed* present. I have been very blessed to feel God's *hesed* with you today. I did a little bit of research on Vista La Mesa before I came, and there is a lot of incredible work being done here thanks to you and the leadership of Pastor Rebecca, who I am often inspired by her tireless activism not just on issues affecting the local community in La Mesa and San Diego County, but nationally and globally as well. But the one I want to highlight is that this church is an Open and Affirming congregation. And as a queer Christian, that means so much to me, and I express my gratitude to you for making this space not just a safe space for people like me but a space for all. Thank you. Let's continue doing this work together. May it be so. Amen.