

Sunday Thought

2nd October 2022 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings

Lamentations 1:1 -6
Psalm 137
2 Timothy 1: 1 -14
Luke 17: 5 - 10



Learning Faith

Sharing life in close rural communities and the intimacy of small chapel life meant an old family saying was often in use – *'There's no use in coming home with only half a story!'* It came to mind again as I read today's scriptures. They are about 'faith'. That's a word we use rather loosely to speak of our knowledge of God, our commitment to Jesus and our trust in his involvement with our lives.

Today's reading from Lamentations is 'half a story'! It is the beginning of a series of poems commemorating the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylonian forces in BC586. Our brief look at these verses is so deep in sadness, more easily understood through news and pictures of recent battlefield events in Ukraine and so many other places. It speaks of the empty loneliness of a ravaged city of broken buildings and rubble streets, robbed of human life. It expresses the people's sorrows in terms of a bereaved partner – tears all night and no-one to give comfort – no escape – no singing – prayers which become just helpless groans when life has lost its splendour and purpose. However, that is just part of a story. Read on at chapter three for the rest and hear how *'hope returns when I remember this one thing, "The Lord's unfading love and mercy continue.'* Faith is returning. *"The Lord is all I have. My hope is in him."*

The heartache is repeated in the Psalm which is about the same event from the view of the thousands of Jerusalem inhabitants who have been taken into captive slavery. I always read this with echoes of *By the Waters of Babylon* and the unforgettable *Chorus of the Hebrew slaves* from Verdi's opera *Nabucco*. Don't stop at *'How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange and hostile land.'* Read more of the story – just to verse seven, In faith, *'when we remember Jerusalem and the Lord's care, we'll lift our harps from the waterside willows – and we'll sing!'* – trusting even through our tears.

In the Gospel reading I can understand why Jesus' disciples asked him for *greater faith*. They hadn't the whole picture yet either. Faith is not measured by quantity. It develops by the Spirit's influential wafts of love teaching us the faith story which is not complete this side of heaven.

From years ago I love the story of the elderly chapel organist who had experienced much suffering in her life. A neighbour said to her one day, *'I wish I had a faith as great as yours!'* to which she replied with surprise, *Oh, I don't have a very big faith, but I do believe and trust in a great God!* Jesus speaks of faith as the smallest seed. Like any seed, given right conditions, it will grow almost anywhere it is planted or dropped – like a flower in a war-broken wall.



That's how it was for Timothy, Paul's son-in-the-faith. They met in Lystra on Paul's mission tour and later Timothy became the apostle's companion and helper. Paul was a pastor as well as a preacher and teacher. He soon became involved with all Timothy's family, principally Eunice, his mother and Lois, his granny. Theirs was a Jewish household, even though Timothy's father was a Gentile convert with a Greek background. Together they embraced the Jesus Way. It was in that home where Timothy learned and 'caught' his faith in God, as still is the way in Judaism. His beliefs would be explained, deepened and strengthened by experience in school and synagogue. It was a living 'faith' which made Timothy ready to embrace new life in the Holy Spirit – to share the whole *story of God personally!*

Many of us will have known Timothy's experience of learning and inheriting faith. Mother's, and maybe granny's, bedtime prayers and Bible stories, cemented by a living faith influence of thoughts and decisions in family, church and community life. Of course, the familiar words, *'times have changed'* apply here too. I believe we have to think again about how faith seeds are first sown in young hearts and minds, especially in earliest years, and I am glad to hear how many churches share this concern. I am grateful, like Timothy to look at bits of my family tree and see how faith has been re-sown many times across countries and generations. Seeds have been planted to come alive, often in rough weather and poor soil, returning colour and fruitfulness.

A prayer for deeper faith [based on Psalm 137]

Faithful Lord, you know there are moments in my life
when the splendour fades and the music fails
and I just want to hang up my harp in sadness and defeat.
Sow seeds of faith in me, ready for those times
that with a renewed sense of your presence,
I may be strong, trusting and at peace.
Let faith grow in me till it becomes an aura of love about me,
sowing seeds of faith to bring hope in other lives

