

29 February 2012
Lent 1 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Misery of Fallen Zion”

Text: Lamentations 1; Hebrews 3:7-14; Luke 23:32-38

It has been quipped that the Lord gave us two ears but only one mouth for a reason! So that we will listen twice as much as we speak. For with God, listening is important. We need to hear His Word. We need to hear what He has to say to us. And so if Lent is about repenting, even more is it about listening. Listening to the Word of the Lord.

In the first chapter of the book of Lamentations, we hear that God’s people have now been completely conquered. The words of this first chapter painted a very dark and desperate picture. The Assyrians and Babylonians had come against them in battle and won. First the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and now the Babylonians had come in and conquered the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Instead of living in the goodness of the Promised Land, God’s people were now prisoners of war.

Why? Beause they would not listen. Verse 18 said: ***“The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word.”***

This is not what God wanted. He sent the prophet Jeremiah to them, and Jeremiah called them to repentance for forty years! Sometimes they listened, sometimes they didn’t. Sometimes they made changes, but even when they did, things soon went right back to the way they had been before. Because they didn’t listen. They didn’t listen when God said trust me. They didn’t listen when God said I want to forgive you. They didn’t listen when God said those nations and false gods you are trusting in cannot help you. *They didn’t listen.*

And without the Lord, they were no match for the Babylonians. And now, the Promised Land was no longer a land flowing with milk and honey, but a land flowing with blood and tears. In love - yes, in love - God let His people be defeated, that they might turn back to Him. For that is all God wanted. For His people to return to Him - to listen to His Word, repent of their sin, and hear His Word of forgiveness. Because the alternative is not just expulsion from the Promised Land of Canaan, but without His forgiveness, the alternative is exclusion from the Promised Land of heaven.

But that is not what God wants. And so to us He sends His Word, that we would

return to Him, repent of our sin, and hear His Word of forgiveness. So if we have two ears and one mouth, let us first hear His call to repentance [ear], confess our sin [mouth], and then hear His word of forgiveness [ear].

And the people of Judah can be an example for us here. They show us that our sin is no small thing; that God takes sin seriously. Because it is serious. It may not always seem that way to us, but that is because sin prevents us from seeing rightly. It is God's Word that teaches us the truth. If we listen.

The people of Judah didn't. They trusted in other nations for their protection instead of God, who had promised to fight for them. They loved what they had instead of the One who gave it. And they feared not God, but the people and nations around them, and worried what they could do to them. And with this wrong fear, love, and trust, they forgot the One who was a Father to them, who led them by the hand and brought them out of Egypt, and who had wonderfully given them this land. They believed what they saw instead of what they heard. You and I know all too well how easy that is to do.

Judah needed a Saviour. Yes, they had always needed one. But especially now. The Temple was no more. Jerusalem was no more. Their nation was no more.

One of the early church fathers, a man by the name of Clement of Alexandria, writing about this chapter said: **we too**. We, too, he said, are sick with shameful lusts. We, too, gorge ourselves with reprehensible excesses. We, too, who follow our passions and impulses, instead of living soberly and steadily. We, too, need a Saviour. We are sick and need healing. We have wandered and need guiding. We are blind and need the light. We are thirsty and need the living water. We are dead and need life. We are sheep who need a Shepherd.

And we have one. We have One who took the place of sinful Judah under the wrath of God. That first chapter of Lamentations sounded pretty bad, but it was all that - and more - that our Saviour endured on the cross. For them, and for you. He was the One abandoned. The Prince who became a slave. The One with no one to comfort Him. Whose friends became His enemies. Who had no resting place, no place to lay His head. Who was afflicted for our transgressions. Who looked anything but majestic on the cross. Who was gloated over and mocked. Who became filthy - with our sins. Who looked so gory that people turned away. Who groaned and sorrowed. And then bowed His head in your death.

What we succumb to, the sin and weakness and temptation, He did not. And what He succumbed to - death - He did so that you may not. That though your body die, your soul will not.

How do you know this? . . . Listen! In the last verse of Lamentations chapter one, Judah cried out for vengeance to those who did this to her; that they be dealt with the same way as her. But listen to what Jesus cries out: **Father, forgive them.** His blood cries out not for vengeance, but for mercy. Forgiveness for you. Mercy for you. Life for you.

And if there's one word your Saviour wants you to hear this Lenten season, it is that one. His word of forgiveness. Judah would not listen; she would not repent. But this is the only word that really matters; the word that gives eternal life.

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts . . .
Listen to your Saviour.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.