

GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS

Lamentations 3:22-24 KJV; Laurita Shelstad Funeral; Dec. 28, 2018

It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not.

They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness.

The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him.

[GREETING]

The verses I just read from the Book of Lamentations are full of hope in God, because God is merciful and compassionate and faithful. But we also hear in these verses that the one who is so hopeful is on the edge of destruction. The situation is at the tipping point. If God were not merciful, he would be consumed. If God were not compassionate, a new disaster would come in the morning. If God were not faithful, the soul would have no hope.

Laurita liked to return to this section of Lamentations and meditate on it, and I'm not surprised. In the face of the many troubles she faced, she turned to the Lord for her hope.

In the verses surrounding the ones I read, the author noted how it looked like God had abandoned His people to destruction. It is possible that they were written by Jeremiah shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem and the people who survived being carried off into captivity in Babylon. Things could not be much worse than they were already, and if you looked for signs of hope in the situation, you could find none. Things look hopeless, yet the author put his hope in the Lord, His mercies, His compassions, His faithfulness. His hope was that his portion in life depended on the Lord, and the Lord would not fail him.

Laurita faced life in this world with such a faith in God. She was a child of God. It was God who had placed His name on her in Holy Baptism. God It was God who redeemed her from slavery to sin and death, washing away her sins in the blood of Jesus Christ. It was God who created in her a great love of God's Word, especially the desire to hold onto words of comfort and hope in the face of terrible losses. She loved to talk to with others about that Word.

Clearly, Laurita was a caring person. More than anybody else I have known at the congregation in the last 12 years, Laurita would ask if she could talk to me after church about something. What she wanted to talk about often was someone she had met, a friend she had made that had troubles and did not belong to a church. Laurita had a heart for the lost and wandering. She did not judge people on their appearance, but saw in them the need for the comforting hope of having a God who cared for them.

She had the ability find people in need, sometimes people who had been abandoned to the world as worthless, but she saw them as children loved by God, saved by Jesus Christ, who needed a church home and family. She couldn't bear the thought that people should suffer without hope. They had a faithful God, even if they didn't know it. So she not only invited those people to come to church with her, but she brought them with her. She knew that if those people could just hear the same Good News in Jesus Christ that she heard, they would want the same things she had.

As a pastor of a congregation, people like Laurita mean a lot time and effort will need to be put in by me. She came with her troubles, but she also brought with her others with even more than she had. She was God's reminder to me that the Church isn't about chasing after the rich and successful because we can get something from them, especially their money to pay the bills. The Church is here so Jesus can care for the poor and needy, the ones needing saving. Laurita functioned with a proper understanding of Jesus' words: **Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest** (Mt 11:28).

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After I heard of Laurita's tragic death I had the opportunity to talk to her mother, Lorna, who told me a little about her last day on this earth. Laurita had been looking forward after struggling with a long list of difficulties: the long suffering of her brother, Cyril, from

cancer, and finally his death; her own health issues that she had been working through; David's health issues; other issues on top of these things that I'm not aware of.

Some people, when faced with these sorts of difficulties, look for someone to blame, even accuse God of being unfair and unfaithful. In the Book of Job, to which Laurita also liked to turn for comfort and strength (I think she could relate to Job and his sufferings), Job's friends encouraged him to look inside himself for the cause of troubles, something Job refused to do. Job's wife encouraged him to curse God and die so he could be through with his troubles in this life, which Job would not do.

Rather, Job in the midst of his troubles looked outside himself to the God who had promised to save him.

**For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at the last He will stand upon the earth.
And after my skin has been thus destroyed,
yet in my flesh I shall see God,
whom I shall see for myself,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.
My heart faints within me!**

Having just celebrated Christmas, we were reminded that Jesus Christ is the world's Redeemer. **For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.** This sinful world seeks to take everything from us, but God gives us a Savior in His Son, Jesus Christ. The little Baby born in Bethlehem came as our Redeemer from sin and death, to die on the cross and rise from dead to raise us from the dead. The joys of Christmas are real because they are based on a real Savior, not the feelings of the season. I keep returning to the words of the Christmas carol, "What Child Is This," for comfort.

*Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,
The cross be borne for me for you;
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
The babe, the son of Mary! (LSB 370.2)*

What were Laurita's thoughts on the last day of her life, after going through so much suffering, not knowing that it would be her last day? Lorna told me that Laurita was excited because she knew that her best days were ahead of her. Like the writer of Lamentations, seeing sorrow and destruction all around her, Laurita saw the faithfulness of God to her and looked ahead with hope.

In the face of the tragedy and loss we face at her death, we need the comfort of having the same Savior she has. She is with her Lord and Savior, along with those who have gone before her in the same faith, awaiting that great Day of resurrection in her glorified and perfected body to live forever. Until that great Day, may we find hope and comfort in the promises of God!

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Amen.