

Hope in the LORD

“Our God is good and he has cared for us without fail. His timing is amazing. He is our pilot and we are along for the ride.”

Those words were not written by the person who won the Powerball Megamillions jackpot a couple weeks ago. They weren't written by someone who won a big game or landed a great new job or experienced some great fortune this week. They were written by a man whose family lost everything they've accumulated in life other than the few things he and his wife were able to fit into two backpacks. The man's name is Mark, and I serve with him on our synod's Board for Home Mission's Executive Committee. He's not a pastor, but he is a strong Christian man. Mark and his wife's home was flooded by Hurricane Harvey in Texas this week; they lost everything; their vehicles were lost to the flood waters as well. On top of that his home lies close to the reservoir release point where the corp of engineers is telling them they will be releasing water for months, meaning what's left of their home won't dry out for quite some time. As if that were not enough, their only daughter gave birth to her first child this week, who subsequently had to undergo emergency heart surgery and has a long road of recovery ahead of him.

Sharing both sets of news with us in an email this week, he wrote those words: “Our God is good and he has cared for us without fail through this. His timing is amazing. He is our pilot and we are along for the ride.” He also added: “when I see my daughter's undeniable confidence in her Savior and his hand over her son, I say this is a God thing. . . . [What a] miracle.”

How could Mark express such beautiful sentiments after having gone through the kind of week he had . . . all the loss, the heartache, the frustrations, the tears? God gave Mark a remarkable faith. A faith that could see through the darkness and the thick clouds of the storm and see the sunshine of Christ's love for him and his family.

That's what faith does. Faith, by the Bible's own definition, “is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11). Faith trusts the LORD. Faith hopes in the LORD. It does so I. because of the LORD's great love. And as a result such hope enables us as Christians to II. wait quietly for the LORD's salvation.

Let me share with you a little background to the book of Lamentations. Lamentations was written by the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah had had a tough ministry . . . and things were only getting worse. Jeremiah had spent his entire ministry preaching and teaching and trying to get through to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. The vast majority of the people had fallen far from faith . . . worshipping false gods, listening to false prophets, and committing all sorts of immoral and godless acts. They had no love or regard for the LORD as the true God, as their true God.

Jeremiah, however, as the LORD's true prophet, kept trying. And how was he treated? Listen to Jeremiah himself tell you: “Those who were my enemies without cause hunted me like a bird. They tried to end my life in a pit and threw stones at me; the waters closed over my head, and I thought I was about to perish. . . . LORD, you have seen the wrong done to me. Uphold my

cause! You have seen the depth of their vengeance, all their plots against me. LORD, you have heard their insults . . . — what my enemies whisper and mutter against me all day long. Look at them! Sitting or standing, they mock me in their songs” (3:52-63).

And yet in spite of all of this, Jeremiah loved Jerusalem. And its people! He preached to them. He prayed for them. He wept over them. That’s what the name of the book means, “Lament-ations.” To lament over something means to cry over it/weep over it.

Why was Jeremiah so upset for Jerusalem? Because the LORD prophesied through Jeremiah that Jerusalem was going to be completely and utterly destroyed; its people led off into exile; its temple – Solomon’s stunning temple - stripped of its beauty and brought to the ground. And in fact, Jeremiah was there to see it all happen. In a series of three separate attacks and deportations, starting in the year 605 B.C. and ending in the year 586 B.C., the Babylonians stripped Jerusalem of its people and its wealth and then leveled it to the ground.

Witnessing that tore Jeremiah’s heart out. Listen to just a portion of his lament: “I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of the LORD’s wrath. He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light; indeed, he has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long. . . . He pierced my heart with arrows from his quiver. . . . He has filled me with bitter herbs and given me gall to drink. He has broken my teeth with gravel; he has trampled me in the dust. I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is. . . . [And here’s where our lesson picks things up . . .] I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me” (3:1-20).

Have you ever been there? Feeling abandoned by the LORD? Neglected and even mistreated by him? Perhaps you lost everything, like the people of Jerusalem or the people of Houston. Maybe it wasn’t the loss of a home or a car or any possessions, but the loss of a job, or the loss of love – a relationship gone irreversibly bad; loss of your health to a serious illness or just old age setting in; perhaps the loss of a dear family member. You felt empty; powerless; purposeless; sick to your soul. “I remember my affliction and my wandering; the bitterness and the gall. . . . my soul is downcast within me.”

I pray that the LORD can do for you at such times what the LORD did for Jeremiah. He gave him such a faith that was able to say: “Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (vss. 21-23).

In one of the most repeated phrases in the Bible we hear over and over again: “Give thanks to the LORD for he is good; his love endures forever.” Jeremiah knew that enduring love of the LORD. That’s what faith and hope offer us believers. It’s easy to “believe” in God when everything is going well. When your bank account is flush with cash, your family’s all healthy and happy, you’re surrounded by good friends and good times. Who wouldn’t believe in God and his love at such times? But it takes faith to believe in God when there’s no evidence of his love. It takes faith and spiritual hope to trust that God is love when you sense nothing of the sort. When it seems God is not answering your prayers; that he’s not paying attention or acting on your behalf in your life. My friend Mark started his email out with these words: “It’s times like these that we cling to our faith.” Again, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

Faith is sure of the fact that the LORD is a God of his word. That he in essence is love and that he can't go against his nature or be unfaithful to himself. Faith looks back to the cross of your Savior Jesus and knows what God's love looks like, how it acts and what it's done for you. Faith knows that God's love means forgiveness; that his love is unconditional and eternal. That "he who did not spare his own Son, but gave himself up for us all, how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things? . . . "that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8).

Faith "call[s] to [our] mind[s] and therefore [we] have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." Because of the LORD's love, we have hope. Hope is faith in the future. Hope is a sense of peace and security, confidence and even joyful anticipation in the good things the LORD has in store for us in the future. In his love he's promised to work all things out for our eternal good. So even in the dark and troubling days, we still have hope . . . we still can be at peace and look forward to how the LORD will graciously work even this out in a good and loving way for us.

Will you still have days in which you feel rather down . . . down on the circumstances, down on life, even down on God a bit? Sure. Even the prophet Jeremiah confessed to having a downcast soul with him. But call to mind the LORD's love and enjoy the hope his love creates within you.

And in that hope wait patiently on the LORD.

In the midst of his pain and his deep sorrow, Jeremiah confessed: "I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.' The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD" (vss. 24-26).

Listen to the words of my friend Mark again: "Our God is good and he has cared for us without fail through this. His timing is amazing. He is our pilot and we are along for the ride."

Mark knows what Jeremiah knew . . . the LORD's timing is amazing. The LORD knows where he's taking us; what he has in store for us; where he wants us to be . . . further down the road in our lives and ultimately one day with him in heaven. And he knows how to get us there. So trust him. Place your hope in him.

Think of the last time you took a plane ride . . . one that didn't have the flight tracker on the screen or on your laptop. Unless this is a route you've taken a few times before, for most of the flight you had little idea of where you were at or exactly where or how far away your destination was. At best you could see a portion of just one side of the plane. Where the airport was or what you had to do to get there you had no idea about. That was the pilot's job. In fact, you so knew that when you flew that you probably didn't even give it a thought (other than when you got to wondering, "how much longer 'til we land?"). You read a book, watched a movie or played on your computer. And waited quietly and patiently as the pilot flew the plane and got you to where you were going.

“The Lord is our pilot and we are along for the ride.” Trust that he knows what he’s doing. That his plans for you are perfect and loving. Place your hope in him and “wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.”

God’s people in the days of the Old Testament waited thousands of years for the LORD to provide salvation in the person and work of Jesus Christ. God’s people of this New Testament era have waited now nearly 2000 years for the LORD’s salvation in the sense of full and final release from this world of trouble and sin and taking us by his grace to be with him in heaven. But we know and believe that he will come . . . and at just the right time.

And the same is true for all the other forms of rescue or salvation the LORD provides. With such hope and patience and confidence, trust that the LORD will rescue you. Your Savior, Jesus, who has already rescued you from the just wrath of God against your sin; Jesus, who has delivered you from Satan, death and from hell – if it is his will – can and will also deliver you from the other losses, sorrows and sadness you feel in this life. “The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast” (I Peter 5:10).

Let me leave you with this final encouragement. How does a person come to have such a strong faith? How could Jeremiah look at Jerusalem lying in ruins and still have any hope for Israel and its future? Harvey has left many, many people in Texas this morning devastated and hopeless. How can someone like Mark have so much hope and peace and trust in the LORD when he’s facing such tremendous loss? It’s because in the good times he took advantage of the opportunities he had to strengthen his faith by being in the Word – going to Bible study, reading the Word, worshiping regularly. A lot of people turn to the LORD for help in difficult times, but when things get better, they wander away again. Only to find themselves beside themselves in grief and hopelessness the next time life gets difficult. But the person whose equipped to weather the storms of life is one who uses the breaks in the clouds to soak up the Son (capital “S”-on).

Next week is Christian Education Sunday. Commit yourself and your family to investing in your faith, being in the Word of God, and strengthening your hope in the LORD. Amen.