

PENTECOST 17 Year C

Lamentations 1:1-6 Psalm 137 2 Timothy 1:1-14

St John's Croydon

Luke 17 (1-4), 5-10

'The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. Therefore I will hope in him.' Lamentations 3:1

There are some verses of scripture that just make me want to sing! This is one of them!! These words say so much about the nature of God:

God is a steadfast lover – unfailing and forever.

God is merciful – looking at all of us with love, understanding of our human frailty and always open to us when we turn away from thoughts and actions that have separated us from God.

God is faithful to us; always present, always listening, constant in love and always offering gifts of mercy, grace and reconciliation.

God is a source of hope in life.

I don't know about you – but I think human life is very unpredictable. Things happen. Often they are things that we absolutely can't control. We can't stop extreme weather or natural disasters. We can't stop wars or threats of wars. We can't stop the tensions that emerge when people disagree with each other and don't want to be reconciled and we certainly couldn't stop a Pandemic. What we *can do* is assure ourselves that all is not lost. Like the people we heard about in Lamentations who had turned away from God and were mourning over the destruction of Jerusalem, we have hope because God constantly watches over us with mercy and love. There is such a contrast between the terrible devastation, despair and emptiness of a people who have rejected God, and *'the steadfast love of the Lord that never ceases, (the One) whose mercies never come to an end.'*

We have a source of hope in our life that will get us through all things; that will show us the way forward and bring us love and peace. God, our steadfast, merciful, faithful and ever present loving Father who sent Jesus into our world and into our lives, has given us all a future and a hope.

In today's second reading, St Paul is clear about the gift of faith and hope that we receive as we follow Jesus. Deciding to follow Jesus is a very real choice – and it changes how we live.

I love the way St Paul traces a clear pathway about the growth of the young leader Timothy's faith through that of his grandmother Lois and his mother, Eunice. St Paul's words give me hope that in all the uncertainties of our world, like Eunice and Lois our own sincere and certain faith is a gift of love and hope that we can share with those who are nearest and dearest to us. St Paul's words are encouraging, especially as we face the realities of a time when our churches are so often empty of younger people; when our children and grandchildren are not with us to hear the words of encouragement, forgiveness and love that are God's loving gift. *We* are the ones who are the bearers of hope to all those we love, to our families, our neighbours, our work colleagues and friends.

St Paul's words are also a reminder to Timothy and to us that we should not be complacent when it comes to our own faith and that we would do well to *'stir up the gift of God that is within us . . . (which is) a spirit of power and of love and of self discipline.'*

The reason why we should so do is self evident. It would be easy to be overwhelmed by the seeming failure of the Christian faith in the wider community in our own age; to see a reflection of ourselves and our world in the Godless and deserted city described in Lamentations, to doubt the power of the Christian message we have been entrusted to share or feel threatened by powerful voices of opposition that seek to disparage and reject the very words of hope that we bear. St Paul calls us not only to stir up the gift of the Holy Spirit that is within us but also to persevere:

'Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord . . . , but join with me in suffering for the gospel, in the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace, and this grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Tim 1:8-10)

Like Paul and Timothy, Lois and Eunice, we have more power to bring about positive, real and life giving change than any of us imagine. In the power of the Holy Spirit we can share a message of hope that will renew, reinvigorate and bring peace to our fractured world and its peoples. We can share a message of love to our children and grandchildren, our neighbours and friends that will give their lives meaning and hope and we can bring renewal and reconciliation wherever there is brokenness and despair. The Christian message is powerful. We have been entrusted to share it and the need is urgent.

In today's Gospel, *'the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" Jesus replied, "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. (Luke 17:5-6)*

Do we dare to believe in the power of our faith and witness to bring life and hope?
Do we dare to believe that our church, our parish, *this place* – is a powerhouse of love, forgiveness and reconciliation and that we, God's loved people, can truly show our community the way to life and hope?