

Luke 23:39-43: “One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, ‘Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?’⁴¹ And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.’⁴² Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’⁴³ He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’”

During “these troubled days” and especially during Lent, we find much over which to lament. We weep over wars, disease, political divisiveness, poverty, the death of friends. We worry about our personal issues, finances, jobs, retirement. We suffer along with our friends, children, and loved ones who struggle. We pray for Ukraine and its people.

Biblical people lamented: Moses, over the hard job of leading Israel; Job, who lost everything; Rachel, who endured her sister marrying her beloved and then who died bringing forth a son for him years later; the women of Bethlehem whose babies were slaughtered by Herod. Jesus lamented over Jerusalem, that they would not embrace his teachings, would not let him love them into wholeness.

And we lament, on this **Good Friday**, the torture and death of our beloved Jesus. Jesus prayed Psalm 22 which begins with “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” But that psalm ends like this:

“To [the Lord], indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and *I shall live for him*. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.”

I like to think that Jesus prayed that psalm all the way to the end!

William Sloane Coffin (1924 – 2006), chaplain, peace activist and great preacher, whose death date was this past Tuesday, lost a son, Alex, in a tragic car accident. He bravely delivered a eulogy for Alex a few days later. You can google it. The final paragraph is fitting for us today. We may not be used to the “thees and thous” of his language, but may his words also comfort us in our hours of lament and as we remember God’s beloved son’s death and ponder our own mortality.

"And of course I know, even when pain is deep, that God is good. "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?" Yes, but at least, "My God, my God"; and the psalm only begins that way, it doesn't end that way. As the grief that once seemed unbearable begins to turn now to bearable sorrow, the truths in the "right" biblical passages are beginning, once again, to take hold: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord and He shall strengthen thee"; "Weeping may endure for the night but joy cometh in the morning"; " Lord, by thy favor thou hast made my mountain to stand strong"; "For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling"; "In this world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world"; "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

And finally I know that when Alex beat me to the grave, the finish line was not Boston Harbor in the middle of the night. If a week ago last Monday, a lamp went out, it was because, for him at least, the Dawn had come.

So I shall -- so let us all-- see consolation in that love which never dies, and find peace in the dazzling grace that always is."

We pray, "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom."
And we hear his answer, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

Therein lies our hope in the face of lament.

Beth Orling