

**Homily, St. Andrew's
Proper 27C, Oct 2, 2016
Lam 1:1-6**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

The fall season of change has well and truly begun. The wonderful green that we enjoyed this summer is well into the process of turning to yellow and red and brown. Leaves are falling as the wind blows and there is that oh so familiar chill in the air... but not everyday. It is not yet winter but neither is it summer. With the fall upon us, we know one thing is ending and another beginning.

The season is also reflected in the life of this community of St. Andrew's. Yesterday many of us gathered in Stephen and Gloria Ford's new home to celebrate and to bless the completion of something they have been looking forward to for years. It was a bitter-sweet celebration because we knew that the fulfillment of this dream for which they've worked so hard also meant we must say good-bye to dear friends. Gloria and Stephen, Jan and Samantha, Mikayla, Gavin and Levi will be sorely missed here and so we grieve this change, even as we celebrate with them. In a different kind of change, just 2 weeks ago we celebrated with little Jack as we baptized him into the family of God, and at the end of this month we will baptize Elise, another new little one among us. Just a month ago we celebrated as we welcomed Melissa among us as our new Music Director and she is already making a great contribution to our community and worship life. New friends come, old friends depart, and people's roles... their seats, in the community change. It is a normal part of the flow of the seasons of life. Real change is upon us, and today we mark part of that change by honouring and celebrating Hugo's great contribution to our worship life. We will do so in a moment but let's first sit for a few minutes with the loss, the hope and the joy that accompanies us through times of change.

Our lectionary-assigned readings in the past several weeks, particularly from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah and now Lamentations, have been addressing the pain and hope inherent in times of change. The historical context of our reading today is the Babylonian exile roughly 500 years before Jesus. In that time, the world as the Israelites had known it had ended with the violent arrival of the Babylonian Empire. The temple in Jerusalem and Jerusalem itself was destroyed and the elite of Israelite society – royal families, priests, scribes and artisans – were taken away from their homeland to live in exile in Babylon. It was the worst of times for the Israelite exiles – not necessarily in the difficulty of their lives, but for the loss of the life they had known and the resulting sense of abandonment by God. God had promised that's David's kingdom would be everlasting and now with Jerusalem in ruins, that promise of God's was broken. And so the community of the faithful sang songs of lament, weeping bitterly in the night.

It sounds morbid, perhaps, depressing... who wants to hear about lament?!? And yet the core of our Christian faith also contains lament within it. We acknowledge it Sunday by Sunday as we remember in our Eucharist - our celebration - that Jesus died cruelly, on a cross. This act of remembrance is not without hope but rather it is the precursor to the hope of resurrection. Indeed, while lament is an expression of the pain of loss, it is also and always an act of faith, for the

paradox at the centre of our faith is that it is through death that we find new life. Lament is how we come to terms with profound change facing us into the present reality, even as it diverges from a treasured past, and looking towards the future with faith and hope.

Poems like the one we hear from the first chapter of Lamentations today demonstrate the tenacious faith of the exiles in Babylon with a bold kind of prayer that calls to a God understood to have betrayed and abandoned his people. The exiled Israelites railed against God, not in the denial of God's sovereignty but in the prayerful hope that God would be faithful again, that Jerusalem would be restored and that life would be good once more. It takes a few chapters, but by chapter 3 of Lamentations, we hear the poet express such hope, writing: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (v22)

This prayer was answered for the Israelites when a new empire rose to prominence and 50 years after being taken into exile in Babylon, King Cyrus of Persia made it possible for the Israelites to return home. Jerusalem was restored and the temple was eventually re-built. It was not as they remembered but still it was good. It was resurrection life – life that is fundamentally transformed, fundamentally different, from what it was before the death occurred and yet true and abundant life nevertheless. In the same way, we celebrate the on-going life of Jesus in the Christian community generally and in this community in particular. It is not the same as when Jesus walked the earth 2000 years ago as an itinerant preacher, teacher and healer and yet still it is good. Jesus lives in and among us – in the beauty of creation, in the bread and wine, in the faces of friends and strangers alike.

In the same way, our worship and our community is fundamentally different with every shift... with Hugo sitting with the choir instead of at the organ. One thing is ending and something else is beginning. And so may we grieve what needs to be grieved and may we turn with hope and anticipation to embrace the new life already within and among us.