

Theme: God's loving-kindness

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, we are gathered together this day to remember the life of Fred Wentz: may his patient faith be an example for us all – in our good times and in our bad times, in good health and in bad health, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Jim Taylor muses about time. “Time flies by so fast. Just yesterday, it seems, we had Valentine’s Day, Ash Wednesday, St. Patrick’s Day, then Palm Sunday... During this few weeks, the Hindu, Sikh, Baha’i and Zoroastrian faiths squeezed in their New Years celebrations... And then here come Holy Week and Passover, Good Friday and Easter -- like a runaway train bearing down on a hapless victim strapped to the tracks...

“The question is not whether we have that time, but what we do with it. When I was younger, I filled every moment with activity. I hated to waste a second. At the other end of life, in my father’s final months, he could spend most of a day doing nothing and barely recognize that a day had passed. Time became meaningless.

“Maybe there are two kinds of time -- objective and subjective. Objective can be measured; subjective can only be felt. Time can seem to stand still in your lover’s arms, or when you’re waiting outside the principal’s office. It can race when you write exams, or you’re late for a job interview.

“A friend was riding his bicycle along a city street, blissfully unaware of time at all, when the front wheel jammed in a sewer grate. As he vaulted over the handlebars, he recalls, he had time to marvel at the colors of the lichens growing on the concrete sidewalk -- just before he ran into them with his face.

“At Easter, Christians around the world affirm, Jesus Christ ‘descended to the dead; the third day he rose again...’ Do the dead still experience time? How did he know when the third day was dawning? Or was his time in the tomb a momentary blank, a blink, a blip? And how did he experience time after his resurrection? When time is no more, what happens to it?”

The last year or more of Fred's life was one of time never seeming to end. It was a long death.

How appropriate it is to celebrate Fred's life during Easter. On this Friday in Easter Week, we still hear the stories of Jesus' resurrection. It is now the day to celebrate Fred's passing from this life to the next. Fred is in a place of eternal love. And where he is, we will one day be. This makes our reading from Lamentations appropriate for this day.

The Book of Lamentations was written about the time of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. It is very good Hebrew poetry. Its name betrays its content. The fall of Jerusalem was calamitous. Since God lived in the Jerusalem temple, the fall of Jerusalem meant that God was gone. The poet tries to make sense of this horrible realization in the midst of grief.

This is why Lamentations is appropriate for times like these. When a loved one dies, it is a grief-filled calamitous event. The way we live our lives changes when someone dies. We see the world differently when someone dies. We may even question our faith in God when someone dies.

In our portion of Lamentations, we first hear comfort that God's love is infinite and has no end. God's love never wavers. For the original hearers, God may be gone from Jerusalem, but God is not gone from us. God never abandoned Fred. God never abandons us.

In a way, hospice acts out God's mercy and faithfulness. During Fred's long decline, their ministrations never came to end until Fred needed them no longer. Because Fred was on hospice for so long, some mornings were the same – some were different. Time must have been different for Fred. Yet hospice's mercies were new every morning to meet Fred's needs and Beth's needs. God was present in hospice's ministrations.

In response, our soul, our very being, affirms God's loving-kindness. It is in God that our everlasting hope lies. God's loving-kindness transcends this life. God's love never falters and is there for us in the next life.

We all wait for God. After Fred was bed bound, he knew that his time had come. He was ready to join the Lord. Even though he expressed a desire to leave this life, it continued to be a long process. Of course, it is possible that

God called Fred home some time ago, but he never heard it. After all, it was only recently that Fred got a contraption that allowed him to hear people talk around him.

But Fred did experience a sense of the holy. He saw angels. I don't know if he heard them, but he saw them.

In any case, Fred was an example of patiently waiting for the Lord. Jesus was ready for Fred. Fred was ready for Jesus – yet there was this great wait time. In this way, Fred was an example to us of holy patience.

No matter what we do. No matter what we say. No matter how bad we get, God does not give up on us. We can walk out on God, but God never walks out on us. God is always ready to welcome us.

God does not enjoy making life hard. God does not wish to afflict us. We may sometimes think that God afflicts us, but that is not the case. The story of Job is an example. Job's friends insisted that Job was being punished for his sins. But Job maintained his faith. Job knew that his misfortunes could not be punishment, because he did nothing to deserve it.

But you know . . . life ain't easy. Because life isn't easy, God's loving-kindness becomes even more important to us. When everything seems doom and gloom, God is there to be with us. God is also with us in our joy, but we often forget that. We look inward and give ourselves the credit for our happiness. God's love even transcends our egos.

The plain fact is that we will all one day die. We will grieve for those who go before us. We will rejoice for those who arrive after us. For those of us left temporarily behind, we will grieve. Our bodies are designed to relieve the stress of deep loss. Grieving is normal. This, too, is a gift from God. Grieving allows us to survive a loss. It gets better with time, but never goes away.

We lament the loss of a loved one. But the loss is only temporary. We will be reunited with those who go before us in God's total love. God is ever faithful. Jesus' resurrection is the great sign of that faithfulness.

We now pray: Gracious God and giver of all good gifts, we give you thanks for the gift of patience: may we see the holiness of waiting, of seeing time slow down, and by this may we see the joys of your creation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Text: **Lamentations 3:22–26, 31–33** (NRSV)

<sup>22</sup> The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,<sup>b</sup>  
his mercies never come to an end;

<sup>23</sup> they are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.

<sup>24</sup> “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,  
“therefore I will hope in him.”

<sup>25</sup> The Lord is good to those who wait for him,  
to the soul that seeks him.

<sup>26</sup> It is good that one should wait quietly  
for the salvation of the Lord.

<sup>31</sup> For the Lord will not  
reject forever.

<sup>32</sup> Although he causes grief, he will have compassion  
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;

<sup>33</sup> for he does not willingly afflict  
or grieve anyone.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>b</sup> Syr Tg: Heb *Lord, we are not cut off*

<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (La 3:22–26, La 3:31–33). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.