

Sermon – Sunday 5th October (16th after Trinity)

Readings – Lamentation 1:1-6 & Luke 17:5-10

Our reading from Lamentations begins with a raw cry of grief: *“How lonely sits the city that once was full of people!”*

These are words written after Jerusalem had been destroyed, the people carried into exile, their hopes in ruins. It is poetry that doesn't shy away from sorrow - naming desolation, loneliness, and the sense of God's absence.

What is striking is that the Bible makes space for this kind of language. These are not polite prayers. They are words of despair, loneliness, anger, and confusion. This reading shows us that faith is not about having all the answers but about daring to bring our questions to God.

Here we see that scripture gives us permission to be honest about such moments. That faith does not mean pretending everything is fine; faith makes space for lament.

We don't often talk about lament in church, but we need to.

Lament is not the opposite of faith. Lament is *faithful speech in hard times*. It is saying: “God, we don't understand. God, this hurts. But we will still speak to you.”

Some of us may know exactly what it feels like to say, “How lonely.” Maybe it's grief after the loss of someone we love. Maybe it's the feeling of emptiness after change or disappointment. Maybe it's looking at the wider world — war, injustice, hunger — and feeling that things are broken beyond repair.

The Bible does not silence that cry. But it gives us permission to bring it before God. That is the gift of Lamentations.

And in our Gospel we hear the disciples' plea: *“Increase our faith!”*

They too felt overwhelmed — following Jesus was costly, the road was hard, and their own resources felt small.

They have been listening to Jesus teach about forgiveness, about not causing others to stumble, about the cost of following him. And they feel inadequate. “Lord, it's too much for us. We can't do this on our own. Give us more faith!”

I wonder if you've ever prayed something like that? I know I have! “Lord, I don't have enough faith to face this situation. Lord, I can't cope with what lies ahead. Lord, help me!”

Jesus' answer here is most surprising at first glance! He doesn't give them a ten-step programme for spiritual growth. He doesn't criticise them for being weak.

Instead, he tells them, and in turn us, that it is not about how much faith you have, but **who** your faith is in. Even faith as tiny as a mustard seed, a speck of trust, a whispered prayer - is enough when placed in God's hands.

A mustard seed! One of the tiniest things you could imagine. I don't have any mustard seeds in my garden box at home, but I do have cress seeds – these are tiny too. I love cress, not just because egg and cress sandwiches are one of my favs – but because – take these small seeds, sprinkle them onto wet cotton wool or kitchen roll and in days, just days you have cress – growing in abundance! Not much time, effort, space needed – just trust, hope and light.

Faith doesn't have to look like this fully grown pot of cress - vibrant, flourishing, impressive. Sometimes it looks more like this - a seed so small you can hardly hold it in your hand. But in God's hands, even the tiniest seed of faith is enough, and it grows.

In other words, faith is not measured by its size, but by its object. It's not about how much faith we can muster, but about who we place our trust in. Even a mustard seed of faith - the smallest prayer, the faintest hope, the quietest act of trust - is enough, because it rests in the God who is faithful.

Jesus then moves on to talk about servants doing their duty. At first, his words sound harsh: "Does the master thank the servant for doing what was commanded?" But his point is simple. Faith is not about chasing greatness. It is about humble service. It is about living daily with trust in God, carrying out the ordinary acts of love, kindness, forgiveness, and patience that he calls us to.

Faith is not a spiritual badge to be earned, but a way of living daily - simply, humbly, faithfully. Like servants doing their work, disciples are called to trust that their ordinary acts of love, kindness, forgiveness, and patience are precious in God's sight. We don't need to impress God. We don't need to achieve spiritual stardom. We simply need to walk faithfully, step by step, day by day, offering the little we have - and trusting God to work with it.

So, what do these two readings say to us today?

Perhaps this: there will be seasons of lament, when life feels like ruins around us. There will be times when our faith feels far too small. But God is not asking us for greatness. God simply asks us to bring what little we have, and to keep walking in love, one step at a time.

The Bible doesn't deny hard times – we are none of us immune to it, and neither should we. But by having the small seed of faith - we are given words to cry out in the midst of struggles.

Luke reminds us that when we feel overwhelmed, when our faith feels tiny, when we wonder if we can carry on - God says, "A mustard seed is enough." Faith is not about bravado or certainty. It is about turning towards God, however falteringly, and allowing him to hold us.

Because the promise is this: from the smallest seed of faith, God can bring new life. Out of lament, God can grow hope. And in our daily service, God's kingdom quietly, steadily comes.

What might we take away from this? What can do this week?

- For those carrying grief or worry: remember that God accepts your lament. You don't have to tidy up your prayers. You can bring your tears, your questions, your anger. That honesty is itself an act of faith.
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- For those who feel their faith is too small: take heart. A mustard seed, (or cress) is enough. God is not asking for more than you can give. Offer what you have - and trust that God can do more with it than you imagine.
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- For us as a community: let us not chase after greatness or success but let us be faithful in the ordinary - in loving our neighbours, caring for the vulnerable, worshipping with joy, praying even when it is hard. These small acts of service are precious in God's sight.

So, my friends, let us take heart. Our faith, however small, is enough. For we all have the God whose love never fails, and who can make even tiniest mustard or cress seeds flourish into fullness.

Amen.

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