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Pentecost 6

Lamentations 3:22-33

WE ARE NOT SPENT BECAUSE GOD'S COMPASSION IS
NOT SPENT

Jeremiah composed this book of songs called "Lamentations" during the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Babylonian armies left behind the smoking piles of rubble and carried off most of the citizens as captives of war. Yet in that devastation, the Spirit of God caused Jeremiah to write, *Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed for His compassions never fail.* There is actually a parallel play on words here. Another way to read it is: *Because of the Lord's great love we are not spent, for His compassions are never spent.* Today as we focus on the blessing of prayer may our hopefulness in God as well as our confidence and eagerness to pray be energized by this truth: We are not spent, because God's compassion is not spent.

God's compassion is not spent. This song in Lamentations 3 continues: *[His compassions] are new every morning, great is your faithfulness.* The sun coming up this morning is evidence that God's mercies haven't run out, that His tank is still full.

If we tried to write down every way that God showed us compassion today –and that would only be a list of things we were aware of –we'd find that list building and building. The flow of new items being added to the list wouldn't slow down throughout the whole day. It would keep increasing endlessly. And that would happen every day. His mercies are new every morning!

We are not spent because God's compassion can never be spent. Sometimes we are only able to begin truly appreciating this truth when we do feel spent. The more helpless we feel, the more we are forced to rely on Him. The more we are at a loss, the more full of

good things His promises are to us. The more we suffer, the more He comes to our defense. Jesus did not say, "Blessed are you who are fat and happy." Rather He said, "Blessed are you who mourn for you will be comforted."

We are not spent because God's compassion is not spent. But how can we know God will be compassionate with us? Listen carefully to Lamentations: *I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."* The Lord is my portion is like saying that's my piece of the pie. But God doesn't give you a piece of Himself. He gives you Himself, entirely. Is there anything more that He could give us? No wonder His compassion to us is not spent. God is infinite. His compassion is infinite.

We consider nothing more romantic than when a groom promises his bride not money, not a house, not the good life, not world-travel, but himself. The bride wants nothing else. God gave us Himself, first in the form of a baby, nestled in a feedbox in a barn in Bethlehem. He gave Himself to us by everything Jesus did throughout His earthly life, gave Himself to us in death and in coming back to life. He even gave Himself to us in His ascension as He governs all things on our behalf. He gives Himself along with all His deeds, His righteousness, His victories, and His power to us in His Word and in Baptism. He gives Himself to us, body and blood, in the Lord's Supper. He is your portion.

If that's the case, then let's humbly wait for His compassion even when we can't seem to sense it. Sometimes the temptation is to ask, "What did I ever do to deserve this?" or "How could a loving God let this happen?" From our perspective we might think we are innocently asking such a question, God doesn't consider it innocent. Our very inclination to think that way is a symptom of an ugly, hate-filled rebellion against God that lurks in our heart of hearts. It was there from our birth. It sees itself as being right and therefore God must be in the wrong. God must owe the apology. It sees itself as being right so we don't imagine that we are in any way being offensive to God. We're just asking an understandable question, "What did I ever do to deserve this? Why would a loving

God let such and such happen?” We think it’s an innocent question, but it’s unbelief, the opposite of trust.

To this God coldly and damningly answers, “And what do I owe you?” The Bible says God rejects the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

The fact is, sometimes God sends suffering on us to crush our prideful and rebellious spirits so that we recognize we really are at His mercy. Perhaps we will desire mercy from Him –something we would hardly desire if we didn’t suffer. And mercy is exactly what God loves to give. In giving us Christ, He gives us all His forgiveness and mercy to save us, a forgiveness earned to cover even what has been in our hearts. Then we can trust that no matter how things look, no matter how it feels God is showing us compassion. For if He forgives us for Jesus’ sake, He cannot be withholding His compassion from us.

It’s good if we can learn this lesson early on. Lamentations 3 says, *The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust –there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him and let him be filled with disgrace.*

God teaches us humility. But do believe this: that work is actually foreign to Him. It’s not what he loves to do. He does it only because our sin makes it necessary. In the same way, loving parents don’t enjoy punishing their children. They wish they never had to. They do it only because their child’s misbehavior makes it necessary. But they also do it because they love their child.

If you have any doubt about God’s love for you, then look again to the way God has given Himself to you in the person of Christ. Look at Christ on the cross.

So what do we do when we suffer? Well if you can relieve suffering in any moral way, then, of course, do. If you cut your

finger put a band-aid on it. But otherwise, what do we do? We wait. We wait for God to rescue and relieve us. He promised He would. Even if we can’t seem to perceive God’s compassion right now, we can be assured that His compassion is not spent. Lamentations 3 says, *For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is His unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.* No, God’s will is to save us. Not punish us. He wants us to be disciplined, not damned. He never tires of seeking us out, of doing what’s necessary to bring us closer to Himself –no matter how unpleasant a task that may be, of forgiving us and making us new, of providing us what we need even when we don’t think to ask for it.

Left to ourselves we would have no way of getting into heaven, or even getting ourselves through a single day. Everything about us would be spent in an instant. But trusting in Christ we are not spent. Our constant supply is God’s compassion. God’s compassion is everything we need. For Jesus’ sake, God’s compassion is never spent.