

Thought For The Day Advent 8th December



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Lamentations 3:19-33

19 The thought of my affliction and my homelessness
is wormwood and gall!

20 My soul continually thinks of it
and is bowed down within me.

21 But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:

22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;

23 they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

24 "The Lord is my portion," says my soul,

“therefore I will hope in him.”

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

26 It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the Lord.

27 It is good for one to bear
the yoke in youth,

28 to sit alone in silence
when the Lord has imposed it,

29 to put one's mouth to the dust
(there may yet be hope),

30 to give one's cheek to the smiter
and be filled with insults.

31 For the Lord will not
reject forever.

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

33 for he does not willingly afflict
or grieve anyone.

Thought:

Let me introduce you to Danny. Danny led walking tours around the city. We begin at the Cenotaph, a glorious memorial to those who died in war. Danny points out that he did not die. He suffered post-traumatic stress disorder, left the army and became homeless. He takes us to the artists' part of town; wall-to-wall artisans' shops making everything from jewellery and clothing to bread and yoghurt. But we don't stop there. Behind these shops is a doorway, where

Danny slept for three years until a group of drunken men took exception to him one night, beat him up and left him with broken ribs and lost teeth. Danny takes us to two churches. Outside one is a sculpture of the homeless Christ, a metal blanket, covering a metal body, with nail imprinted feet sticking out. He tells us that he sometimes goes into this church, and they give him tea and biscuits. He doesn't go in when people are there though. They don't like him to be in the services. He takes us to another church too. It's always open, and Danny says he meets God there.

Homelessness, affliction, are personal, even intimate, experiences. Danny writes poetry by the statue of the homeless Christ. He meets God in a church willing to give him tea and biscuits but unwilling to welcome him to worship, or church that is empty of human beings. When the homeless becomes the other, when we feel uninvolved, it can seem sufficient to look down, pat our pockets and sympathetically smile that we have no change. Reduced to newspaper headlines it becomes simply a social problem.

For the writer of today's Bible passage, however, it is much more. It is 'wormwood and gall,' it bows the soul and breaks the spirit, it builds resentment. But, like Danny, the writer meets God. And they do so intentionally: 'this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.'

I do not want to glorify poverty or homelessness or affliction. I do not want to claim that the poor experience God more intimately than those who have enough. Just as we see Jesus in the statue of the homeless Christ, I believe that we can see Jesus in the faces of the homeless and the afflicted, like the one who writes to us through this passage. What I want to ask, as we use this season to dwell on the kingdom of God, is whether they can find Jesus in us. Do we pat our pockets and walk on by, or do we become Christ to those in need?

It is good to wait quietly for the Lord, the writer tells us. How does the Lord come? Will we come to those in need as smiters and insulters, or will we come as those sent by God to show hope for the future?

Danny's words frequently ring in my ears: 'our society has a covenant with the army to remember the dead. It has a covenant with itself to neglect the suffering.' During this time of advent, as we look for God with us, God become flesh, let us remember that it was not flesh like ours God became, but flesh much more like Danny's.

*the walking tour described was booked
via <https://invisible-cities.org/cities/manchester>

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