

<b>Sunday 1 July 2018 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 &amp; 9.30 a.m.</b>		<b>6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year B Festival Sunday (1)</b>
2 Sam 1:1, 17-27	Ps 130	2 Cor 8:7-15
		Mark 5:21-43
<b>FROM LAMENT TO HOPE – INVITATION TO LIFE</b>		

It is always good to welcome another National Arts Festival here in Grahamstown – or Makhanda - and to welcome all who are here for these eleven amazing days. Spiritfest is the Cathedral’s particular offering, together with other churches, as we celebrate the arts in the context of the Christian faith. Thank you, and congratulations, to Maggy Clarke and the Spiritfest committee for the superb programme that they and others have once again put together.

Our scripture readings for this morning take us on a journey from lament to hope. It is a gospel journey: from the death of sin, the end of hopes and dreams, to the life of righteousness and the transforming power and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Lament**

Our Old Testament reading for today, 2 Samuel 1, continues with the stories of the last few weeks of Samuel, Saul and David: the call of the boy Samuel; the request of the people for a king; Saul becomes the first king; David is anointed as his successor; the great battle between David and Goliath.

But now Saul and his three sons die in battle. It is a tragic end to a sad life – Saul, chosen and anointed as the first king of Israel but then ultimately rejected by God.

David intones the lamentation over Saul and his son Jonathan. It is David’s cry, and it is also the cry of the nation. In that lament, there is both personal and national grief and loss, such as we have known in our own country in recent years - the outpouring of grief over tata

Madiba, grief mixed with anger over ma Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. David laments. Let us listen to some of those words again.

“Your glory, O Israel, lies slain... how the mighty have fallen! Let the place of his death become dry and desolate... Saul and Jonathan, mighty warriors, father and son, together in life and in death, swifter than eagles, stronger than lions...weep, O daughters of Israel... How the mighty have fallen and the weapons of war perished!”

Desolation.

There is a time to lament: to grieve, to weep. There is a time for sorrow. We lament when someone we love, dies. We lament and cry out in despair when our world crumbles around us. We lament at times for ourselves, our own failures, our own losses.

But in lament, in that lamentation of David, lies the seed of hope. Somehow, we are given fresh courage and new resolve.

Gladys Aylward was a Scottish missionary in China in the years prior to World War Two and the invasion of China by Japanese forces. She is forced to flee from where she has been living, to try and find safety. With her are some 100 Chinese children, mostly orphans. She and the children flee for their lives, across rivers and through desolate countryside, finding food from helpful households as they go.

She comes to the point of despair. She finds herself weeping: weeping for the devastation, weeping for loved ones who have died, weeping over all the pain and struggle and heartache. And as she weeps, the children weep with her, and their cries of sorrow fill the empty landscape.

But then the storm of grief and sorrow passes. She finds that the tears have washed away something of her tiredness, and given her new courage and new resolve. She gets up. She wipes her grubby face with

the sleeve of her tunic. She summons the children and commands them to stand up. And they continue with their journey.<sup>1</sup>

Tears and lament are part of our gospel experience. Jesus weeps at the tomb of Lazarus. The women weep at the foot of the cross. The disciples weep in despair at what seems like the end of their dreams. In our gospel reading, Jairus weeps when he hears of the death of his daughter, and the woman with the flow of blood must have wept during her twelve years of growing despair and desperation.

But Jesus the Risen Christ comes to the home of Jairus, and says to the daughter of Jairus, ‘Talitha cum,’ ‘Little girl, get up!’ He says to the woman with the flow of blood, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease’. The Risen Christ comes to his disciples, in word and sacrament – the scriptures on the road to Emmaus, the breaking of the bread; he shows them his wounds, his hands and his side; he breathes on them and says, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’.

And some years later, St Paul writes to the church in Corinth and urges them to live out the gospel, to live out their faith in Christ, by being people of compassion. And he urges the Corinthian Christians to share out of their abundance for those fellow Christians who are in need. To be people of compassion. To be aware of the pain and need of others. To hear their lament. And to be a sign of hope.

## **From lament to hope**

What are we looking for as we come to the National Arts Festival? To be entertained; to laugh; to escape; to encounter beauty; and – I suggest – to find meaning in our confusing and painful world; to understand what is happening; to try and make sense of our existence. To find life and light and hope in a world that is filled with despair and hopelessness, lament and terror.

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<sup>1</sup> Burgess, A., 1959. *The Small Woman*. The Reprint Society, London, p 237.

Some of you here may be in your own season, time of lament. The loss of a loved one. Deep personal disappointment. A dream shattered. Beneath the smiles and serene face, there is turmoil and terror and grief. Lament.

And in some ways, as a community and as a nation, we are in a time of lament. The crises do not stop because of the Festival. In these days and weeks leading up to the Festival, there has been this deep sense of anxiety, foreboding. The cries of despair and anger and pain. Of course Germany is in lament following their Soccer World Cup defeat. There is lament all around us – and not only when we go to the petrol pumps.

Nationally, we are engaging in the debate around land expropriation without compensation, and the anger and rage and fear that is emerging. Here in the Eastern Cape we have the two crisis areas of education and health. As a nation, we are struggling to re-establish good governance and honesty at the highest level; people all over continue to live in fear of violent crime; there have been a series of protests in various communities, and I wonder whether they have been planned deliberately in order to destabilise and undermine. There are terrible incidents of gender based violence against women and tiny children, rape and murder. Lament is all around us. The cry of Jairus with his desperately ill daughter. The cry of the woman with the flow of blood. Lament.

Jesus enters into the grief, the lament, of others, in our gospel reading. He speaks words of healing and hope, to the woman, and to the young girl. He restores them to life. He makes new beginnings possible. He speaks words of hope: your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Little girl, get up!

Words of hope to you and me, in our lament, in our searching, in our dark places. Words of hope to all who live in despair. He breathes life into our spirits and raises us up. He feeds us with word and

sacrament, the bread of life. The Lord sends us out in peace to be bearers and signs of hope.

Can you and I be signs of hope? Bearers of peace? Can we build trust?

## **CONCLUSION**

Let us commit ourselves to be carriers of Jesus Christ, the gospel of peace.

Let us be those that speak words to restore and heal.

Let us be those who are prepared to go to the places of death, the home of Jairus, the places of loss and grief and weeping – and bring life.

Let us be those who are prepared to be touched, drained, by those in need

Let us be channels of healing

Let us be signs of God's grace

Let us carry the gospel of Jesus Christ into the world

Let us faithfully proclaim Christ crucified, died and risen for our salvation

Let us be people deeply committed to justice.

Let us be those who protect and defend the weak.

Let us be those who build the nation

Let us be those who hear the lament and the cries of others.

Let us be instruments of healing and hope.

In the name of Christ our Lord and Saviour! Amen!

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