**30th June 2024
Lamentations 3.22-33**p.687 **Mark 5.21-43** p.33

# Living with Unresolved Cadences

 **Introduction to the Theme**
People greet each other differently around the world and when oversees we can get caught out. Is it a handshake, hug, kiss – on one cheek or two, or maybe even a nose rub?

And the words we use say a great deal too. From the ever so polite *How do you do* to the brusque *You OK?*

I regularly hear younger members of my family answer with a somewhat intriguing *Yeah, All Good, thanks.*

I get it. It’s like saying *I’m fine, actually I’m not really, but this isn’t the time or place to go any deeper.* We all become experts at de-coding what those closest to us are really saying.

Because the response *All Good thanks* is rarely accurate for most of us. Normally life is a mixture of light and shade, joy and sorrow. Never *all good,* and thankfully rarely *all bad.*

I get a similar impression sometimes when listening to friends talk about God. For some God seems very close, for others God is so distant that they barely know if they believe in him anymore. For the first group God seems to make it *All good, thanks.* For the second God’s a *no show* and they are wondering if faith is really worth the effort anymore.

Well, perhaps most of us are somewhere in-between these two points on the spectrum. We have days when faith in God burns bright, yet we also experience moments of twilight with belief difficult to grasp.

Today’s readings cover both bases, so they can help us think this through. The one from Lamentations talks of a distant God. The one from Mark sees him around every corner.

So, our task this morning is to look out for the sacredness to be found in both texts.

**The Sermon: Unresolved Cadences**

*Gracious God, we open the bible and long to receive your word.
Open, we pray, our minds and hearts to receive that word with all
its comfort and in all its challenge. Amen.*

Now, I’m hoping on this Organ and Trumpet Sunday that Hilary will forgive me for starting the sermon with an impromptu music lesson. Because I want us to think about endings and the way a piece of music finishes. That’s sometimes called a Cadence. I was listening to someone recently who said a *Cadence is the way a piece of music comes home.*Some cadences are Resolved Cadences. Everything comes home nicely and seems complete. Some are called Unresolved Cadences – that is the music hangs in the air – still more questions to be asked.

I’m going to ask Hilary to illustrate that now – he’ll play two cadences – see if you can identify which one is resolved and which is unresolved!!

Spot the difference?

By now I suspect you are wondering if I’ve lost the plot and forgotten that I’m meant to be preaching a sermon!

The point is this. Faith may sometimes feel like a resolved and satisfying cadence, yet perhaps more often it means learning to live honestly with unresolved cadences.

We can look at faith as a search for the answers. The answers for all the complex questions life throws up. For some the Bible is a book full of all the answers.

However, that’s not what the bible says about itself. Sometimes, it says, there don’t seem to be any hard and fast answers. Suffering is often inexplicable, and God is frequently mysterious.

Now the book of Psalms, the hymn book for our Jewish cousins, has a whole section of songs that ask questions and lingers in the bleaker side of life. These are called Psalms of Lament. In these hymns the writers are not polite, they even raise their fists to heaven in frustration. I know of one preacher this summer who is going through these psalms with his congregation, and he’s given the series an intriguing title calling it *Rude Psalms.*Yet, it’s a general characteristic of the Psalms of Lament that come the end of each one there is a sense of resolution. The Psalmist has been angry with God and been honest with the situation, yet come the end of the song there has been a reaffirmation of faith and trust in God. A Resolved Cadence.

However, that isn’t the case so much with the Book of Lamentations. The title rather gives it away. It’s not a book we read from much in church and I guess most of us were grateful that we were given the page number this morning!

It's written 600 years before Jesus at a time of total collapse for Israel after an invasion from Babylon and the fall of Jerusalem. Precious institutions were being swept away, and hundreds of years of religious tradition knocked down. The people wanted to trust God, they longed for the old certainties, yet in their new normal everything felt less certain. So, they looked to heaven sometimes trusting yet often shouting. So many questions. And although the middle of the book is less fraught by the end all the worry returns and it all feels like an Unresolved Cadence.

I think the Bible actually asks us to think of Unresolved Cadences as normal in life. Isn’t that why St Paul talks of looking into a glass darkly and not getting the full picture in this life. It’s why Psalm 23 promises us the comfort and strength of God as we *walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.* And it’s surely why, that even on the cross, the Lord Jesus, felt forsaken by God.

An important, actually a crucial, part of faith are those dedicated, conscious and, at times, stubborn decisions on our part to continue to believe in the light even when it is dark, to live with hope even in times of despair and to give and receive love even when hate seems the most obvious response.

Life is full of unresolved cadences. Coping with that can actually be made harder if we believe that God will always intervene to shield us from harm or that the Bible has the answer to every question you or I may ever ask. Our sacred scriptures do not make that boast. Instead, they say that God walks alongside us in the suffering and that light, love and life are always stronger than night, hate and death.

I was never much good at maths at school. Yet I always remember the encouragement our maths teacher gave us telling us we must show how we came to an answer. You may not get the right answer, he would say, but show me your workings out and you’ll get points for that. How we got there – that was deemed important.

We may not find all the answers to life – why is there so much suffering, why did someone I love die, why does violence seem to have the upper hand? We live life with unresolved cadences. Lamentations teaches us that. Yet faith is about the workings out. It’s making sure, in our attempt at finding the answers, we live with love, dwell in light, decide upon forgiveness and take the next step with hope, kindness and service in our hearts. Faith isn’t just about arriving, it’s about the way we get there. We need not just to believe – but to actually practise our faith. Faith is a verb. It’s in the doing of it that we often discover more about God, life and ourselves.

So how do we make any connection between Lamentations and Mark this morning?

If Lamentation’s cadence is unresolved, Mark’s stories of two people being healed by Jesus strikes us more as a resolved one.

And such moments of finding wholeness, peace and new beginnings do come our way and for such moments *Thanks be to God.*However, conscious of my Math’s teacher’s dictum that it’s how we get there that’s important I believe today’s gospel has much to teach us about Jesus’ view of faith. And today, even when a healing may not happen or a resolution come our way, it’s still important to hold on to the way Jesus lived and the motivations he displayed as he served. The question always is *what was important to Jesus, especially about people,* because we want those things to become important to us.

So, today’s gospel begins with the news that Jesus is returning from the other side of the lake, the Gentile side. He’s been preaching and healing there too. And now, once more on home turf, he’s making time not just for the Synagogue President but also for this unnamed woman who courageously reaches out to him and touches the hem of his garment.

The social divide between those involved in these two miracles was extreme. The man in today’s story is a religious professional, named with a property. The woman, through her bleeding, is thought of in those far off days as religiously unclean, she is not called by her name and the only place in which she seems to belong is as one of the crowd. On this day it’s as if Jesus is meeting people from both above and below stairs yet he treats each with dignity, offers both his time and blesses both with love and life.

We often think that all Jewish religious leaders had a vendetta against Jesus, but that wasn’t really the case.

In this story it is exactly such an individual, Jairus a Synagogue Ruler, who turns to Jesus at the greatest moment of crisis in his life, the death of his daughter.

Jairus seems to be open to both the message and person of Jesus.

But it’s not just Jairus who is dignified in this story.

Jesus also honours the two women at the centre of the healings.

Unlike Jairus, the woman with the flow of blood isn’t even named in the narrative, and the girl who has died is merely identified as the daughter of a powerful man.

Calling someone by their name is to honour a person in their own right – yet neither women were accorded such a validation in the society of their day.

However, Jesus breaks through, as he so often does, these social barriers. He honours the woman who has touched him saying how much he respects her faith. And he refuses to accept that the death of a twelve-year old girl is the end and in raising her to renewed life he offers her the future her family thought she had lost.

In these acts of compassion Jesus deepens and dignifies the lives of those around him. He shows them love, kindness and respect and they feel the presence of God resting upon them.

We sometimes miss the significance of why events unfold in the narrative. Mark is making a point: Jesus preaches on both sides of the lake; Jesus blesses people on both sides of the social divide. This is the inclusive Jesus who deliberately reaches out and touches those often shunned and excluded by others.

Both these people, Jairus and the woman in the crowd felt as if their world was collapsing. One with a medical condition that was making life impossible, the other facing the awful prospect of losing a child.

W.B. Yates, in his poem, written just after World War One, entitled *The Second Coming* has a line which runs: *Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.*

That theme unites both our readings today. It’s the thought behind Lamentations that the world has imploded, it’s the fear in a woman whose body is broken and in Jairus whose daughter lays dying; *Things fall apart: the centre cannot hold.*Most of us can identify such phases or moments in our own lives.

The message of Lamentations is surely that we can be honest about faith. We don’t always have the answers. Yet we choose to practise our faith, to live it out, even in the bleak moments when life has its unresolved cadences.

And the message from Mark is surely that the way to live a life of faith is to believe in a God who walks so close alongside us that he, as it were, calls us by name. And that such a God showed us that loving service should be offered to people on both sides of the lake.

Such a way of believing blends both lament and honesty with faith and service without seeing either as a contradiction of the other.

May we be given the strength and grace of God to live such lives of honesty and faith. Amen

*Ian Green, Amersham, 25th June 2024*