



New Life

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Friday 20 March 2020
**WHERE IS GOD IN
COVID-19?
LAMENTATIONS 3:1-26**

Good afternoon NewLife,

On Wednesday our family car broke down. In this moment I felt personally the impact of a world in the grip of coronavirus. We need a new alternator... which should be an easy replacement for our mechanic. Except the part we need is in Korea, we need to pay for it upfront... and it will take more than 6 months to arrive! I'm glad our mechanic has found a 2nd hand alternator in a hail-damaged car and we'll be back on the road soon.

I feel unsettled when life is out of my control. With each day that passes we're losing grip on our comfort and convenience, when we want to have control.

Long ago Moses stood with Old Testament Israelites on the border of the Promised Land - a land described as *flowing with milk and honey*. It's an ancient and beautiful description of paradise... the Good Life. We know, the true Promised Land is an eternal place - a place that Jesus brings with the new heavens and earth. It's a true paradise and truly Good Life with God and all his people forever.

Right now, we are looking out on a world that is NOT the Promised Land. There is disaster just *behind* us: long drought, intense bushfire, hailstorms. There is disaster *around* us: a new virus has infected 200 000 worldwide and is spreading, 10 000 precious people have died, borders are closed, industries are threatened, jobs are going, people are displaced, isolated and afraid. There is disaster *ahead* of us: we can see with uncertain clarity more death, an unstable economy... perhaps recession or depression.

Here's the unsettling reality:

BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD... that is what he may hand us over to.

Brothers and sisters, the crisis for us right now is not COVID-19; though deadly. The crisis for us right now is not social distancing and separation; though sad. The crisis for us right now is not how to navigate online church; though that may come.

THE crisis is the virus that infects the world and every heart that can not be cleaned up by sanitiser, kept safe by social distancing or secured by a stimulus package. We need Jesus.

So, NewLife we need to STOP... we need to LAMENT and REPENT.

Now is the time to respond with tender hearts to God's unsettling of us. We need to grieve the state of our world and our own lives. We need to be stirred to tears and cry out to him for mercy.

As we embrace social distancing and isolation; now is the time to embrace a sustained season of lament.

I have wrestled in prayer for days about the way ahead for us. I feel strongly about God's leading of us in this.

NewLife will not be meeting this Sunday; or the next; or the one after. Instead we will give ourselves to lament.

Attached to this announcement is a resource for self-guided meditation, discussion in our homes and prayerful lament. Use it this Sunday during our usual gathering times at 10am and 4pm.

No one needs to be alone in this time. There are old ways and new ways for us to stay connected:

- visiting one another while safe to do so,
- connecting online,
- gathering in LifeGroups face-to-face and online,
- making more of the relationships in homes.

Though we are SEPARATED from one another, we will be TOGETHER in a season of lament.

Now remember, our lament is wonderfully hope-filled. Because Jesus has faced the most deadly and contagious virus; and because he has entered into eternal new life we rest our hope even more securely in Christ alone.

Our season of lament will end together on Easter Sunday. On *Resurrection Sunday* we will gather in some way:

- face-to-face,
- an outdoor setting,
- online,
- small gatherings... we don't yet know what it will look like.

But we WILL GATHER and CELEBRATE God's promised salvation.

I pray that through this time of tender-hearted lament we will celebrate and rejoice even more sincerely in what unites us. And that God might be so kind to gather even more people with us in new repentance and saving faith.

Beyond Easter, God-willing, we will look at what meeting together will look like for NewLife.

Please keep looking out for one another. Though we are distant no one needs to be alone. Here are some things that will help us:

- We will make available the NewLife Community Directory to members. You will receive information via e-mail.
- We will be active in home visits to one another, meeting in safe outdoor spaces while we can do so.
- LifeGroups will continue to be connected together by their leaders (face-to-face and/or online)

- Church building will be open for daily prayer times at 7am, 11am and 7pm (remember 7-11-7). There will be a NewLife Elder or Pastor here at each time for 1 hour to pray with you, connect with others who might drop in. There will be Bible readings and prayers displayed on the screens and some of what happens in the room will be accessible through social media platforms. COVID-Care procedures will be in place in the building to keep everyone safe. These prayer meetings will start on Monday (23 March) and continue every day of the week until Good Friday (while ever health advice allows).

You will next hear from me via another video on Friday at 3pm. Again resources will be provided for ongoing self-guided meditation, discussion and prayerful lament.

NewLife... hear God's call to lament and repent.

Lamentations 3:1-26

I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of the Lord's wrath.
He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light;
indeed, he has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long.
He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones.
He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship.
He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead.

He has filled me with bitter herbs and given me gall to drink.
He has broken my teeth with gravel; he has trampled me in the dust.
I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is.
So I say, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord."
I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall.
I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.
Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:
Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."
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.

In grace, peace and hope

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