



The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:22-23

Lamentations 3:22-23, declaring God's never-ending faithfulness, is Concordia University, Nebraska's biblical theme for this 2019-2020 academic year. Little did Concordia know how valuable those words God inspired through Jeremiah from Lamentations would become!

Lamentations may seem like an unusual source for an academic theme verse. After all, Lamentations is what its name implies, a lament of deep gut-wrenching grief. Jeremiah likely sang this poem in the sixth century B.C. as he trudged through the ruins of Jerusalem among dead bodies and people in shock, weeping as he looked upon the smoldering rubble that had once been the glorious Temple of God's dwelling among His people. In between sobs, Jeremiah uttered, "My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD." (Lamentations 3:18).

Then again, Lamentations 3:22-23 is the inspiration for the lyrics of Thomas Chislom's well-loved hymn, "Great is Thy Faithfulness". Concordia's choirs, students, staff and faculty have delighted in celebrating their biblical theme by singing beautiful arrangements of "Great is Thy Faithfulness". Concordia celebrated 125 years of mission, opening of the totally donor funded state-of-the-art Dunklau Center for Science, Math and Business, a record setting \$65 million "Answering the Call" campaign that continues to gain momentum of generosity. The joy continued with a new scholars' honor program, full daily chapels, conference and national championship athletes, academic All-Americans, track and field national champions, national competitor wrestlers, men and women's basketball teams both qualifying for the national tournaments. To be sure, Concordia has been joyfully intoning, "Great is They Faithfulness" to the Lord!

However, in the midst of this celebratory singing, Concordia's beloved president of many years was called to another Concordia University and departed. Abruptly, a sister school, Concordia University Portland announced the end of 115 years of higher education mission. And now a pandemic of a virus we do not understand is sweeping across the globe at an increasing pace with an unknown potential result. Like Jeremiah, Concordia is grieving life as it once was. And our campus community is being coerced by the ambiguity of an uncontrolled microscopic disease to unexpected changes. How Concordia relates, works, teaches and functions to implement its plan "to deliver a distinctive Lutheran education that increasingly engages and influences the world."



Indeed, Concordia does not face the devastation that Jeremiah encountered in the ruins of glorious Jerusalem. However, Concordia can shudder at the thoughts of what might yet be in the future. Thus, like Jeremiah the grieving poet-prophet, Concordia needs what God provided so long ago. Jeremiah introduced our theme verses with, “But this I call to mind and therefore, I have hope.” (Lamentations 3:21). And it is this hope our students, staff and faculty want to bring to the world.

Dr. John C. Holbert, preaching professor at Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, Texas, observes that the first word of Lamentation 3:22 can also be translated “the steadfast loving actions” of the LORD never cease. The next verse describes how God’s mercies never come to an end. “Mercies” can be traced back to the word for “womb.”

With Holbert’s observations in mind, one can be reminded of God’s original promise in Genesis 3:15. For, there in the Garden of Eden, when the first human disobedience that brought disease and grief into the world was only hours old, He announced He would provide for our salvation through one born of a woman. And, indeed, He has done so in Jesus Christ!

God has done far more than make promises and offer platitudes in the face of uncertainty and even grief. He provides the real presence of His only begotten Son Jesus Christ who stepped into the midst of disease. He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, opened the ears of the deaf and set the lame free to leap. But most importantly, He forever conquered the sin-disease that afflicts all of humanity with death. He overcame it by His death and resurrection. He comes to us now by the power of the Holy Spirit in this word of eternal faithfulness. He makes Himself present in His Supper to bring strength in forgiveness.

Indeed, as Thomas Chisolm the poet penned and musician William Runyan composed, so the confidence Concordia wants to share with world is in Jesus Christ.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide; Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, Blessings all mine with ten thousand beside!

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see; All I have needed Thy hand hath provided; Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!