



**A sermon for Choral Evensong at Wells Cathedral,
preached on Tuesday 31 March by the Reverend Dr
Kate Bruce, RAF Chaplain.**

Tuesday of Holy Week

Lamentations 3: 40-51 and Galatians 6: 11-end

The theme of our Holy week sermons is: Moving Deeper into Love.

Holy Week is a great opportunity for a spiritual MOT. Where are we in response to that invitation?

Today's readings from Lamentations and Galatians give us useful ways into this.

The writer of Lamentations, traditionally thought to be the prophet Jeremiah, urges us to '*test and examine our ways and return to the LORD.*' Test. Examine. Think - spiritual MOT.

Starting point: If I asked you to come up with images for God, what would you say? Many of us wrestle with opposing ideas about God. Even Jeremiah seems caught up with conflicting images for God. In our reading, he pictures God as a warrior pursuing his people in anger, slaying them for their sins '*without pity*'. He paints a picture of God wrapping himself in a cloud '*so that no prayer can pass through*' – images of a distant, cold, angry, withholding deity.

Yet, just a few verses before the passage set for this service, we find Jeremiah speaking about how the '*steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.*' He references God's faithfulness, compassion and unfailing love.

How often we speak of God's love, whilst behaving as if God is out to get us. How are our pictures of God formed? Maybe formative experiences and people, along with less than helpful religious teaching can create negative pictures of

God. How easily such negative imagery can be activated – perhaps by our fear, a sense of failure, guilt or shame, which we try to hide from God, or by difficult events that we then attribute to God.

Lamentations is written after the ruin of the Temple and the sacking of Jerusalem in 586BC at the hands of the Babylonian Empire. Exile! The suffering and destruction were harrowing. This disaster is framed in terms of divine judgement.

How are we to understand this? Does God get into a fit of petulance because the people are disobedient –shoving them off the chessboard in rage? No.

Their lack of trust in God means they slide along making poor decisions and unhelpful alliances bringing deep trouble on their heads. What can be read as punishment is inevitable consequence, which God allows to happen – in order that they might wake up, repent and return.

If you step away from sunlight into shadow, the warmth on your skin fades. You will feel a chill. Consequence – not the sun’s raging punishment.

Notice Jeremiah’s deep compassion for the plight of God’s people. *‘My eyes flow with rivers of tears because of the destruction of my people. My eyes will flow without ceasing, without respite.’*

Can God possibly be any less compassionate than his prophet? Perhaps we need to remind ourselves again of the deep and loving compassion of God, and allow that to correct images of a perpetually angry, petulant god. What are the effects of such images? Fear. Cowering submission. Hiddenness. Resentment. Hardly conducive to a movement into love!

We need a governing image to heal our pictures of God. Look to Good Friday and picture Jesus: see again his arms opened wide on the cross in a gesture of agonising love, embracing anyone who turns to him. Remember the penitent thief? Love and grace are freely offered. Not in anger – but in deep, deep love.

No wonder then that Paul got so frustrated with the Galatian Church. They knew of Jesus crucified and resurrected. They received the Spirit of God as gift. They heard the message of faith in the Son of God who loved them and gave himself for them. Love and grace - freely offered. But they replaced this God of freedom, of unity, intimacy, promise and new creation with a demigod of law, entrapment, judgement, and slavery. Like prisoners freed from shackles they strode right back into prison and snapped the handcuffs back on. Let's not make the same mistake.

God invites us today to open our hearts him – trusting in the wild, deep love offered and expressed in Jesus Christ. Love beyond all imagining, beyond all reckoning poured out for you and me.

Come to God – tell God how you are. Whatever your faults or failings – tell God.

Tell God of your struggles, the same old sins that trip you up; as well as deep gratitude for gifts and graces freely given.

Explore with God the distorted pictures that knock us off course.

Trust God's endless love and compassion. Pray for the Spirit to fill you, shape you, recreate you – and crucify all in you that is not God.

Whatever we face today, let us *'test and examine our ways and return to the LORD. Let us lift up our hearts as well as our hands to God in heaven.'*

Holy Week is a good time for a spiritual MOT! Let's move deeper into love – The love of Jesus.

The Reverend Dr Kate Bruce
RAF Chaplain

31 March 2026