

Talk 2

***Cease not, wet eyes, his mercies to entreat;
to cry for vengeance sin doth never cease.***

In verse two, the poet again addresses his eyes, more forcefully this time. Having given his tears permission to fall, he is now exhorting them to never stop, and perhaps behind them there is a trace of anger. 'To cry for vengeance' seems to sharpen the response as we transition from sadness to rage, the second stage of grief.

For onlookers, the disciples who had spent every moment of the past 3 years with Jesus; those who had walked with him in the way of love, who'd glimpsed his vision of the Kingdom of God, who'd begun to experience the Shalom offered by the Prince of Peace, who had witnessed his sham trial, for them, his innocence was never in doubt. As we will sing later in the hymn My Song is Love Unknown, we can imagine the disciples crying in exasperation: 'Why, what hath my Lord done? What makes this rage and spite? He made the lame to run, he gave the blind their sight.' For his followers, this execution was gravely unjust. Whatever other questions his death might have provoked for them, they knew he had committed no wrong. He did not deserve to die, especially not by crucifixion, the most shameful death of all. They were crying a different type of tears now - tears expressing angry disbelief, frustration. Tears articulating a deep sense of injustice - that this is wrong, that this wrong must somehow be made right. That vengeance must somehow be sought.

As we and Christians everywhere stand gazing on the cross today, I wonder if we share something of this feeling, a growing anger that all is not right with the world. We can trust that those tears that rise up at odd times are discerning a sad truth about reality – that all is not as it should be. When one war bleeds tragically into the next, when victims of abuse are denied justice, when rich and powerful men get away with unfathomable crimes, when greed for profit dominates over care for the planet or fair treatment of workers, when AI threatens previously stable jobs, when we can't afford the basics, when another friend faces a scary diagnosis, or we experience loss upon loss... Still, it seems, sin doth never cease.

We look upon Jesus wondering if we were ever right to hope that he would bring peace, that he could make things right. We cry alongside him with legitimate anger, My God, My God, why have you forsaken us? It can feel like we are abandoned in a dark place where help never comes. And we begin to doubt. If God is as God says he is, why doesn't he intervene?

For the poet, the only thing to do is appeal to God's mercy. In the face of unending sin, 'cease not wet eyes, his mercies to entreat'. His use of the word entreat; underscores the seriousness of what is being asked, and perhaps what has made his own tears keep falling – his conviction of his own part in humanity's collective sin. Fletcher is daring to acknowledge that, as a more recent hymn says, 'it was my sin that held him there'. His tears function as an embodied prayer

of penitence and petition. A plea to a God who might be able to do something about it. An offering when there is nothing else to offer. When we've come to the very end of ourselves.

Yet in his utter despair, in verse two the poet remembers he believes in a merciful God. Whilst sin, even our own sin, may seem never to cease, as Lamentations tells us:

The *steadfast love* of the Lord *never ceases*,
his mercies *never come to an end*;

They are new every morning;
great is His faithfulness.