

Greetings:

Good Morning everyone. God's blessings and peace be upon you. I greet you in the matchless name of Jesus Christ our Lord and savior. I am honored to be here. And I pray the Lord will speak a word of life and hope through me in our time together. I thank you all for being here. I am blessed by your presence. Please let us go to the throne of grace.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, we come before you, thanking you for your love and grace. We thank you for waking us up to a new day. Thank you for allowing the sun to shine upon our faces and greet us with a beautiful, glorious morning.

Lord we have had many days of trouble and grief, so for some of us, it has been a chore to get out of our bed and start this day. But please, help us all to rejoice in the Lord and embrace the potential and blessing of this new day.

Lord help this Great Church do the work you have called us to do, to further the cause of Christ, blessing your people, to make disciples of Jesus Christ, for the transformation of the world.

In the blessed name of Jesus we pray, Amen!

Background of Lamentations:

The book of Lamentations is a book of sorrow and grief. The author details the destruction of Judah after the fall of Jerusalem. Babylon had destroyed the city and left her deserted and bare. The author gives an eyewitness account of the devastation. Lamentations does not identify an author, but most scholars attribute this book to Jeremiah, the "Weeping Prophet". This book consists of 5 beautiful poems which fit together to tell the story.

In the first two chapters the author feels God has deserted Judah and allowed Jerusalem to fall. In these first two poems the author seems to have lost all hope. War and famine have decimated Judah and brought Jerusalem her knees. When we get to Chapter three, the author tells us, the horrors he has witnessed. He is broken, hurting, wasting away from hunger and grief. He feels God left him to die. But then, around verse 20, he has a flash back to the good old days. The days when God was near to them. His soul begins to remember the true nature of Yahweh God. He realizes things could be worse. It is then he writes our Scripture for today:

Lamentations 3:22-23. Because of the LORD's great love, we are not consumed, for God's compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.

This is our Really Good News this Morning, God is Faithful. No matter what is devastating your life and causing you to waste away, let your soul remember, we serve a Faithful God. This scripture has had such a great impact on many of our lives because Chisholm and Runyan turned it into a Christian Hymn titled: "Great Is Thy Faithfulness". This is also the title of my sermon for today: "Great Is Thy Faithfulness".

This morning I am going to share a bit of my own story. You might say it is my Lamentations. But rest assured, although my first chapters are difficult and often sad, I have made it to my Chapter 3, verse 20, and I can say without a shadow of doubt, Great is God's Faithfulness, Lord unto me.

I. Introduction

I am the Rev. Dr. Jacqueline M. Davis-Gines. I was born and raised in Seneca, SC. I was an active member of St. Matthew Baptist Church. I am the baby of 15 children, the daughter of a sharecropper, the great granddaughter of a slave, and a Living witness to the faithfulness of God.

II. Knee High to a duck

From the time I was "knee high to a duck", I was singing with my dad from church to church. I loved church, the music, and most of all I loved my Daddy and I followed him everywhere. I followed very closely, and I would walk right in his footsteps. I followed him to the fields. I followed him from the fields. I even got hit in the head with his mallet one day, because I was following so closely, watching so intently, being so quiet, he did not remember I was there. When he took his mallet off his shoulder to rest it on the ground, it hit me in my forehead. It didn't knock any sense into me, but it changed my father's life.

I loved being in the Presence of my Father and I was determined to follow him, even if it killed me. It was that day my Father came to this realization, He said, "Watch how you walk J.C., watch how you walk, she's watching everything you do." Little did I know, walking in my Father's footsteps, would bring me face to face with God and a calling it has taken me years to answer.

III. 12 years old

At 12 years old, the Lord began to tug at my heart. I was baptized.

IV. 13 years old

By the time I was 13 years old, I fully understood my baptism and accepted God's gift of Salvation. God pulled me close to God's bosom and began to teach me the Holy Word. I loved reading the Bible because it came to life for me. I could see it like a motion picture, as if I was right there amid the action. God grew me in wisdom and knowledge, far beyond my years. Oh! How I loved my Father. How, I loved being in his Presence and I desired to follow, even unto death.

But it was this year, at 13 years old, I found out my mother had a deadly disease, with name I was not allowed to repeat, a shame I could not share, and a pain I could not carry alone. What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. Take it to the Lord in Prayer. And I did. I prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed. I believed as only a child could, that my mother would be healed.

V. 15 years old

At 15 years old, I was called to ministry. I was called to preach and teach. Like a Blinking Billboard. Preach Teach, Preach Teach. I acknowledged my call before the church with these words, "I have been called to the Preach and Teach. I will not preach from a pulpit, but I will preach by the life I live, and I will teach young people everywhere I go. But God has Not called me to pulpit ministry." Then God laughed.

Amid this, I found out my mother was dying from this horrible disease, whose name I could not speak and whose pain was unspeakable. I shook my fist at God, but soon learned – in the words of James Weldon Johnson, "my arms are too short to box with God." My mother called me to her bed, and said, "Jackie, it is not a time for crying, it is a time for praying." So, I fell to my knees, angry and broken, "though you slay me, yet will I serve you". Because I love you and I will follow you, even if you do not heal her, but please heal her, please. A little white bird sung by my mother's window all night long, by the next afternoon she was gone. They told me to get my pillow, because I would be living with my sister from that point on. I lost my mother, my home, and life as I knew it, in a blink of an eye.

But, the calling of the Lord is without repentance, so I became the children's Sunday School Teacher. I didn't have students, so I drove around the community, picking up children and bringing them to church. I taught the children; my father taught the adults. I never would have thought following in my Father's footsteps would be such a treacherous journey. I went on to college, to earn an undergraduate and master's

degree and a PhD. No money, just a belief that God had his hand on me, and angels strategically placed to bless me. Because Great is God's Faithfulness.

VI. 30 years old

By the time I was 27 years old, I was Dr. Jacqueline Davis and 6 months after graduation, I added Gines. I was teaching at the University, sitting comfortably in my Ivory tower. By 30, I was glad to be a new mommy. So glad, by 33, I was filled with glee again. Man, life was good, until my nephew, whom I loved dearly died, at home alone in SC, while the entire family was in Memphis, TN with me.

Then God called to me, Jackie, Jackie come down from there. The Lord called me out of the University into a homeless ministry I was to do for free, for the next 8 years of my life. And I said, "No way Lord, you see I am a new mother, crazy man's wife and you took my nephew's life. I don't have time to follow you this time." I almost lost my marriage, my mind, and my life. But Love said not so. Limping, I followed. It was a long hard road. Little did I know following in my Father's footsteps would be such a difficult journey.

At Thirty-five years old, God called again, like a mighty rushing wind. And God wasn't kidding. Preach Teach, Preach Teach, Lord just let me sleep. Preach Teach, Preach Teach. I got too much on my plate. Preach Teach, Lord it's too late, Preach Teach, just let me wait until my kids are older, I am bolder----Trust and obey there is no other way...OK, Ok, Ok. I will Preach, I will Teach, just let me sleep. A hard head makes a soft behind and I am still rubbing mine.

VII. 45 years old

When I was 45 years old. In a 6-month span of time, death took 13 close family members and friends. It was then, I finally came know, God always calls me close, when I need the Lord the most. God never needed me but knew how much I needed God. Great is Thy Faithfulness.

VIII. 52 years old

At 52 years old. I finally started seminary full-time. I had grown in the Lord and finally trusted God with my whole life.

IX. 55 years old.

I stand before you today at 55 years old, bearing witness to the Faithfulness of God.

I have graduated with my Master of Divinity from Gammon Theological Seminary at the ITC. I graduated with honors, at the top of my class. I have been approved as a provisional elder, appointed to this great church and will be commissioned in August. This is Really Good News! Great is Thy Faithfulness, Lord unto me.

(Sing the Course Here Please)

In our current world and culture, it is often difficult to focus on the faithfulness of God. Everywhere you turn there is something cruel and unusual being reported on the news, in the paper and online. It seems just when we think things are about to get better, something more sinister than the last, raises its ugly head. We feel surrounded by Shootings and killings and Covid-19, it seems like death and dying is all we hear about these days.

In this day and time, When the media and the world is continually drawing our attention and our focus to the craziness of life, we can find ourselves caught in a sea of anxiety, depression, and anguish. Some may even begin to question the Faithfulness of God.

In this, “What have you done for me lately” culture, we are always looking for our next fix, instead of fixing our eyes on God. When we live in a world with a “Cancel Culture”, we often forget that the Culture of Christ is Grace. When we live in a world pledged with an “Insurrection mentally”, we often forget the “resurrecting reality” of Christ. This reality says, regardless of what is tearing us down, regardless of what is holding us down, God will raise us up. I am a living witness. Great is Thy faithfulness.

(Sing verse 1 here please)

Unlike this fickle, fluctuating society we live in, Our Creator is steadfast. This is Really Good News. “God Knows Your Name” and “God Loves You, just as you are.” Although we might refuse to follow the first time, “God gives us second chances” and God Never Gives Up on Us, because God is Faithful. Great is Thy Faithfulness.

(Sing verse 2 here please)

This morning, I want us to focus on the true nature of God. I want us to release those things which are holding us captive. I want us to open ourselves to the unfailing love of Our heavenly Parent. Let us join with all nature in manifold witness, to God’s great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

I want this song to ring in your hearts and minds all week long. I want this to be your mantra and your song. And once you take hold, I want you to call someone today and remind them of the faithfulness of God. I want you to let them know, you are a witness to the faithfulness of God. And most importantly, OUMC, God is still in the forgiveness business. God is still bringing Peace, Guidance, Strength, Hope and Love. God is with us, Ooltewah.

(Sing verse 3 here please)

Let's stand and sing the course together. Great is God's faithfulness.