

02.04.2021 Good Friday



Dear friends

The Ground of all hope 2: There is Always Hope (Luke 22.39-46)

Last Sunday I talked about the three directions to look at in times of trouble. Look upward with gratitude. Look outward with grace. And look forward with faith.

When Simona, my wife, listened to that sermon on that Sunday afternoon on Youtube, because she was a bit busy with children in the morning, she said, 'Jun, I loved your sermon. What a lovely message.' Then she said, 'I was just wondering. How do you live out your sermon?'

Do you know sometimes God speaks to you through your spouse or your partner? He does. Because they are the ones that know you sometimes even better than you do. When she said that, I thought to myself. 'That is so true. Only if I could live just as I preach.'

Because my friends, I must confess to you, even though I preach about all these things, I must confess to you, I have days when I just don't get it right. I try my best. I really do. But sometimes even at my best, some days, I just lose the fight. When I see that I talk a talk that I don't walk.

During this week, someone reached out to me, saying, 'Jun your sermon last Sunday, really struck me. It made me think of people around me, my family and how I sometimes treat them.' I said, 'You know. I am the same. One of the reasons why I chose to preach that sermon was because I felt that I have been very irritable person over the last few weeks. Especially to my family.' There were days when I was an irritable husband, an irritable dad to my children.

Friends, the reason why I am telling you about all these secrets (this kind of things are the secrets that priests would say to their confessors. So you know what it's like now when a priest go on to a retreat or to see a spiritual director). I am sharing this with you because, although we know and we keep reminding ourselves that we should look upward with gratitude, outward with grace and forward with faith, the question still remains. How can we live like that? We know that, we know we should do that but how? I mean, if the preacher cannot live as what he preaches at his best, is that even possible? And you know we all have limits. We try to be patient, we try to stay positive, we try to stay sober, try not to go into addiction but there are moments

we know we are coping very well.

So this is what I want to talk to you about today. And I am not just talking to you but talking to myself. I want to talk about finding faith and hope in times of trouble, particularly when we feel like we are at our limits; when we are losing the fight, when we are afraid.

I want us to take a good long look at the time that Jesus faced the same. When he faced something so difficult, painful and fearful that his soul was troubled. When he faced his limits. When he was afraid. He did. Even Jesus did.

In the garden of Gethsemane, here is the expression of Jesus that really in a way can puzzle us. We have never seen Jesus' face like this. Cheeks streaked with tears, face flooded in sweat, even blood dripping through his clenched hands. You remember the night.

The Scripture says, *'On the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane. He went there and he prayed.'* And you recall his prayer. He said, *'Father if you are willing, take away this cup of suffering. But do what you want, not what I want.'* And then a beautiful moment is described, an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened him. And then being full of pain, Jesus prayed even more, prayed even harder. The Scripture says, *'His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.'*

What do we do with this image of Jesus? Simple. I believe we turn to it on times like these in which we feel the same. We read it when we feel the same. We read it when we feel we are at our limits, when we are afraid. For isn't it likely that that was what Jesus was facing? Desperation, fear, a breaking point.

On the evening before his crucifixion Jesus saw what was coming that was so fierce and fearful that he actually begged for a change of plans. He begged for a reprieve. 'Father, if you are willing, please take away this cup of suffering. Please just take it away.' What causes you to offer a similar prayer? Maybe it's the pandemic. Maybe it's your mental health or health of someone you care. Maybe its talking to somebody with whom you are angry. Whatever it is. It makes your heart pound. It causes the blood to rush to your face. And that what happened to Jesus. And consequently you can be assured that he understand. He was so afraid. He was so desperate on that night, that he sweat blood. But he didn't let his fear, his anxiety, his desperation control him.

Now I think it's remarkable that Jesus felt such fear and desperation. But I think it's even more remarkable and comforting that the Scripture told us about it. Because we tend to do the opposite don't we? We tend to cover up our fears at least that is what I do. Put on the mask,

act tough, keep our sweaty palms in our pocket, cover our dry mouth. It's a secret, tell no one. Not so with Jesus.

He placed no mask. He didn't pretend to be tough. Instead he offered a prayer that has been heard to the ages. 'Father if you are willing, take away this cup of suffering.' 'Father' he said. And this is the point I want us to focus. The first one to hear his concern, his fear, his pain was his Father. He could have gone to others. He could have gone to his mother Mary. He could have confided with his disciples. He could have assembled a prayer meeting. All would have been appropriate. All would have been helpful. But none were his priority. He went first to his heavenly Father.

Oh how we tend to do the opposite! We go everywhere else. First to the pub, first to the counsellor, first to the self-help book, first to the friend next door. Not Jesus. The first one to hear his pain, his fear, his concern was his heavenly Father. So how did Jesus endure the terror of the crucifixion. He went first to his Father with his fears. He was honest. Could it be that we do the same today? Could it be that instead of trying to avoid the life's garden of Gethsemane, and it feels like we have been in one for a long time now, we enter into it but not alone. Go into your garden of Gethsemane with your heavenly Father and while you are there, be honest with him. Tell God what's really in your heart. Tell him that you are afraid. Tell God you need help. Tell God that you are not coping well at all. He already knows. Tears are permitted. If you sweat blood, you won't be the first. Just do what Jesus did. Open your heart and talk to your heavenly Father. And be specific. Be specific. Jesus was. He said, '*Take this cup. Take this cup away please.*' Give God the specifics of your troubles, of your fears. Share the details of your source of anxiety. He has got plenty of time. He also has got plenty of compassion and mercy. He doesn't take your fears foolish. He doesn't think your anxiety and concerns are silly. He is not going to tell you, 'Man up' or 'Get it together' or 'Get tough'. He has been where you are. He has been where we are. And he knows how you feel. He does. And he knows what you need. That is why we see Jesus saying, '*If you are willing.*' He submitted himself to the will of God. Was God willing? Well in Jesus' case, yes and no. He didn't take away the cross but he took away the fear.

I want to share a short story with you that I heard from a captain of a cargo ship that I met when I was an intern for the Mission to Seafarers as a conclusion. When he was crossing the Pacific, the ship was caught in a storm. There were about 15 members of the Crew on board plus the Captain himself and they happen to be all Christians. So they would regularly gather to pray together. But when the storm hit everyone was just terrified. He said, 'I have never seen

bigger waves in my life. The height wave was almost a 70 foot.' 'How did you survive?' I asked. 'We prayed.' he said. 'And when we prayed do you know what happened?' I was so curious. 'Did the storm miraculously disappear?' or 'Did they see a rescue helicopter appearing out of the blue?' 'Well', the captain said. 'God did not still the storm. But he calmed the sailors. And we were able to get through the storm.'

He will do the same for you my friends. He will do the same for you.

Philippians 4:6, *'Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.'*

There are moments in life, when we feel like we are facing a mountain that is just too high or too rough or too overwhelming. Don't measure the size of the mountain. Instead talk to the one who can move it. Instead of carrying the world on your shoulders, talk to your heavenly Father who holds the universe in his hands. Hope is a look away, a prayer away, a conversation with your Father away. He gives us a new hope, a new day and a new life in Christ Jesus who died for us, rose again for us, who is alive and reigns today.

May God bless you and all those whom you care this Easter. May he give you and fill your heart with a new hope for the days to come. There is ALWAYS hope, my friends. Because our hope is in Christ Jesus who is the Alpha and Omega, who conquered the death. Amen.



Easter Art and Easter Trail

Our Easter Art and Easter Trail is appreciated by so many in the community. There are a lot of positive and encouraging comments made by the public. Let me share with you one or two of the comments we received.

'How absolutely lovely of the Church to once again provide a seasonal story trail around the churchyard, with prize egg for decorating at the end. Lovely gesture to the public. Here's one of mine decorating hers when we got home; she was excited to start straightaway!'

'I took this photo outside the church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Abington Park. I think it is a lovely sign and represents Easter and also the Covid-19 situation. I have been shielding for the last year and it was lovely to see this display on my first outing. The words were particularly appropriate to me just now.'

Thank you to all those who made this possible.

Easter Sunday

Please note that our Easter Sunday Service will be inside the church building. The weather is going to be cold in the morning although there might a sunshine. Please remember that we are required to follow the social distancing measures which includes wearing face coverings, distance, one-way system and so on. There will be ushers who will help you as you arrive the church. If you have any concerns please do talk to our Churchwardens. If you have any of Covid symptoms then please stay at home and let Dianne know. I look forward to being together with you on Easter Sunday.

I am delighted that Alison, our Reader, is going to preach for us on that day. Occasions like Easter or Christmas have been deemed to be reserved for the Clergy to preach. I do appreciate and understand the reason behind it. And I will continue to preach on those occasions. However it is my hope and vision that our lay ministers should share with me that privilege to preach on those important occasions upon invitation. I am confident that we will all be blessed by their preaching ministry on those occasions as well as other occasions.

Booking your seats for Sunday Services onwards

Please book your seats in advance with Dianne, one of our churchwardens, by giving her a ring

between Thursday 9 am to Saturday 1 pm. If you don't have Dianne's number then alternatively you can contact Liz, our Pastoral Minister, by sending her an email at lizmk@outlook.com.

Faculty Proposal for Screens and Audio-Visual Upgrade

As many of you may know, we have been developing our abilities to embrace the technology for our worship and livestreaming of the worship. It has been appreciated by many.

The PCC has now applied for a faculty for screens for the Chancel and to upgrade the audio-visual equipment. This will allow us to make our service even more accessible and engaging for those in church and online.

The two proposals can be found on the church website(abingtonchurch.org.uk) and the Church Notice Cases.

If you wish to make a contribution toward this project then please do use the give button on our website or have a word with our Treasurer, Damian (abingtonchurch286@btinternet.com), who will be more than happy to assist you.

Bishops' Adviser Role

I have been recently asked to be Bishops' Adviser for the National Selection Process. I will be part of a bigger team that will advise bishops across the country with regards to the national selection process for ordained ministers. Please pray for me as I take on this important responsibility for the wider Church.

I wish you all a very joyful Easter with a renewed hope in Christ who is risen, who is the ground of all our hope.

With love in Christ

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