

Sunday Sermon Notes – 29th March 2020

From Rev'd Jilleen Chambers

What a strange week we have had - and a very confusing one.

Last Sunday seems almost a dream. Has it only been a week since our last church service? So much has happened.

I don't know about you, but at times I have been feeling overwhelmed and maybe a little punch-drunk by the deluge of information about COVID-19 and the resulting restrictions to our ordinary lives that we are now living with. No gatherings, no church services and now we have had to shut the Op Shop.

There has been something new coming at us every day.

Today is Saturday evening. It feels very strange.

In normal times, earlier in the week I would have checked over the PowerPoint for the Sunday service and adjusted as necessary; completed the Pew Bulletin; and copied and printed them both for distribution. Today, I would have been completing sermon preparation and getting ready for the Sunday services.

The question we all have to consider: How do we be the church and stay anchored to our faith in a strange time?

People are feeling fearful, cast adrift by what is going on around us. Many are facing isolation through government edict; or fear for their health and of the unknown. What lies ahead for us, how will we survive this time? Will I/we survive may also lurking in the recesses of the mind.

In times like this, we can draw comfort from the assurance that God never lets us go - we are held in his hands. Jesus never, never leaves us even when we walk through the shadow of the valley of death - he accompanies us - have a look at Psalm 23. A favourite Psalm for many of us.

The people of ancient Israel also faced a strange and unknown future. They had been conquered by the armies of Babylon and the people forced into a long march and exile in Babylon. We hear some of their confusion and sadness in Psalm 137.

Psalm 137

1 By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept: when we remembered Zion.

2 As for our harps we hung them up: upon the trees that are in that land.

3 For there those who led us away captive required of us a song: and those who had despoiled us demanded mirth, saying 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.'

4 How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

Yes, **how can we continue to sing and tell God's story in this strange time?**

In **Psalm 31** we read these verses that remind us that our hope is in a mighty God and we are indeed in his hands.

1 To you, Lord, have I come for shelter: let me never be put to shame.

2 O deliver me in your righteousness: incline your ear to me and be swift to save me.

3 Be for me a rock of refuge, a fortress to defend me: for you are my high rock and my stronghold.

4 Lead me and guide me for your name's sake:

5 Into your hands I commit my spirit:

16 But in you, Lord, have I put my trust: I have said 'You are my God.'

17 All my days are in your hand:

As we face this time together,

keep praying for one another, for your friends and your family;

for our Church family that we will come through this time maybe a little shaken but not downhearted.

Pray for protection and for God's peace to be in our hearts and lives;

for the doctors and nurses who daily put their own health and lives at risk;

for the light of Christ to show us the way forward as the people of God in this place;

and that we may faithfully show Christ's love to one another and to all whom we shall meet.

Remember the reading from Romans 5 we had a few weeks ago:

Romans 5: 3-5

And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,

⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

The readings for tomorrow: Sunday 29th March:

Ezekiel 37: 1-14 - Very appropriate - The valley of dry bones that God promises to resurrect

Ps 130 - Out of the depths have I called to you, O Lord: Lord hear my voice

Romans 8: 6-11 - The mind set on the Spirit is life and peace

John: 11: 1-45 - the raising of Lazarus A reminder that it is the Lord who raises us back to life.

Blessing:

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord;

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, our Creator, the Son, our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit, our Guide and Comforter be with you and keep you now and always. Amen.

Keep safe, and Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Jillien