

## **SERMON Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020**

I was only 12 or 13 when I woke up one evening hearing a noise from downstairs; I struggled out of bed half awake and went to my bedroom door. Opening it I was suddenly surrounded by thick black smoke, which I inhaled before I knew it. Without thinking I shut my bedroom door and coughing as I went I made my way to my bedroom window which I opened to drink in some fresh air. Even as I began to feel better thoughts were flying through my head, the house is on fire **so what do I do now...?**

I would guess that many of us have been shocked by how quickly and powerfully the present crisis has hit our everyday lives. Yes on this Sunday when many of us were hoping to celebrate Mother's day with our families we find ourselves more physically isolated from each other than we have ever been. Indeed it feels like our world has changed beyond recognition within a few weeks. And so many of us are now asking **...so what do I do now?**

As God's people let's be honest and say that many of us feel that way too! We are in a state of shock... what should we do? Well perhaps we need to begin by just taking a long slow calming breath, like I did at my bedroom window those years ago. Let's not try and pretend that these aren't anxious times.

In this Sunday's bible reading from 1 Samuel 16 we find that the Bethlehem elders and yes, even the prophet Samuel were frightened. God had rejected Saul as king (1 Sam 16:1) but for now Saul remained on the throne and he naturally wouldn't be happy if he heard about a rival king being anointed! The point is, if God's prophet Samuel felt fear then we too should expect to feel at some point. Whether you have already reached that point, or it comes to you later remember to take a deep and be honest about that. Indeed even as Samuel did (1 Sam 16:2) let's talk to God about where we are and how we are feeling. This is really important and we find it time and time again in scripture most noticeably as the psalmist so regularly shares his fear and confusion with God. For example Psalm 22 begins with God crying out with the words '**My God my God, why have You forsaken me? Why are You so far from saving me?**' Ps 22:1.

So in the days ahead let's be honest with God, but also with each other. The truth is that none of us knows how long this present crisis might last and given the necessary realities of social distancing and isolation many of us may experience low times in the future. I know that most of us normally hate to ask for help, but let's swallow our pride, be brave and tell others how we are feeling for we are in this together.

So there I was catching my breath with my mind racing, what should I do to escape this fire? I was still young and a bit naive, so ideas of climbing out the window after tying my sheets together or just jumping like some comic book hero were the options I was thinking of. But thankfully at that point I heard my mother's call from downstairs. She shouted instructions to me, hold your breath and step out into the smoke and make your way down the stairs and out the front door. Looking back I'm very glad that I heard her shout before I tried climbing down the drainpipe or anything even more dangerous and ridiculous!

As the prophet Samuel nervously steps out in obedience to God and goes to Bethlehem to look for God's chosen new king he quickly thinks he has found the right man when he sees the impressive Eliab, Jesse's oldest son. (1 Sam 16:6) However God reminds Samuel that we human beings, including even God's prophets, don't always see things right. As the NLT bible puts it '*The LORD doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*' This idea of seeing properly is also found in this Sunday's gospel reading as

Jesus heals a man born blind but the Pharisees and others show themselves to be blinder than that poor man ever had been ( John 9:39-40).

In times like these, when we can easily begin to feel overwhelmed and the future is obscured like a hallway filled with smoke, it's vital that we listen for our Good Shepherds voice. It could be all too easy at this moment to get caught up with nothing but the virus and forget the other more positive news that is occurring all around us. Of course I'm not suggesting that we aren't in a deeply troubling situation but I reminding myself daily that I, that we, aren't alone. So we need to ask God to help us see everything from his clearer longer perspective. And perhaps we need Him to stir our minds with questions. Could it be that we personally, and our world as a whole, can learn valuable lessons from where we find ourselves? Will we allow this time to challenge and change our priorities? Will we allow God to turn our vision outwards so that we spend more time considering Him, and others, and not just ourselves?

I for one have been humbled and encouraged by the simple stories of neighbourly kindness and care that I have already heard during the past days. Let's continue to share those stories and even more importantly through our prayers and actions let us be good neighbours to others (Lk 10:36-37)

So across the hall I went, frightened by the smoke that filled my vision, but I had been prepared, I had taken a deep breath & now I knew the way to go even if it was daunting. So I made my way down the stairs with my vision beginning to clear and I knew then that the fire was in our kitchen and the way to safety, out our front door, was clear. I was safe, all because I had followed my mother's voice.

I hesitate to say it on Mother's day, but there is a voice that is even more dependable and loving than even our mothers. As today's Psalm reminds us ***'The Lord's my shepherd ... He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;***

The path is dark at the moment but we don't have to walk it alone. During the days ahead let's take time to really listen for God's voice and really stay in contact with each other. No doubt we might feel fearful at times but let's not give in to fear but rather help each other to keep trusting God and keep going, knowing that His ***goodness and unfailing love will pursue ..us ... all the days of our lives and we will live in the house of the LORD forever. (NLT)***

By the way, the fire destroyed our kitchen, but everyone was safe and my parents had the opportunity to renovate! Let's keep praying that God leads us all safely through this and that we see and take in the days ahead all the opportunities for good and for the gospel.

Yours in Christ

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