

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> October 2009 Christ Church 10.45 am

With Jesus when we suffer – Psalm 13, Matthew 26: 36-46

Let us pray. Our heavenly father, we thank you for your word, we thank you that it is through your word that you can speak to us. We ask this morning that by your holy spirit you will be at work in each one of us, challenging us, changing us, and giving us a renewed purpose to follow you more closely. We thank you for Jesus and we ask this morning and in the week ahead you would help us to call upon you in prayer to help us in our distress and suffering. We ask this the name of Jesus. Amen.

Earlier this year whilst on holiday on the isle of Sark we had to catch a ferry from Guernsey. Just by the main harbour, a liberation monument has been erected to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the island's liberation from second world war occupation. Yes, it is so easy to forget that some parts of our country were occupied during the war and their residents spent a number of years following the rules of an alien army.

The memorial has inscriptions recording the major events of liberation day in May 1945 and I was so pleased to see the politically correct brigade had not been to visit and the monument ends nicely with, "Thanks be to God"

Well this is remembrance Sunday and throughout the country people just like us will be remembering and giving thanks for those who have given their own lives for our freedom. It is during times of extreme suffering, like we see in wars, when we see the best that humans can be, often in the worst possible circumstances, by giving themselves for the sake of others.

Today we remember the sacrifice others have made and it is a time when we, quite rightly, celebrate the godly values we see in others. When we bring them into our present, to shape our future. We look at the past not solely to remember, although that is important, but also to change our future for the better, and to re-dedicate ourselves to a future of prayer and seeking God's will for our lives. In a short while we will be taking communion, remembering the sacrifice Jesus made for us, not solely to remember what Jesus did, but to also renew us and offer ourselves as living sacrifices both today and in the weeks ahead. To ask Jesus to be with us, not just when we are suffering, but in every part of our lives.

So we're continuing our series looking at having a closer walk with Jesus in our daily lives and Jesus being with us when we suffer. I guess we all go through times in our lives when we suffer, indeed part of being a Christian in a fallen world can seem like continual suffering and many Christians long for that day when all suffering will be over forever.

If you were to look at psalm 13, as we did a couple of weeks ago at our 6.30 service, you would have heard about the suffering that David was experiencing at that time. David had sorrow in his heart every day, he felt far from God and lost in his own suffering. He laments "How long, O LORD ? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?"

And whilst we don't know exactly what was happening to David when this psalm was written we can see that is a long lasting problem – every day he has sorrow in his heart! In fact David has *spiritual* suffering – Has God forgotten him? He has

*personal* suffering – wrestling with his own thoughts. And his *circumstances* are causing him distress – he has an enemy that is able to overcome him.

And the passage of a few thousand years, the phenomenal increase in human knowledge, the understanding of how the human body works, indeed the invention of everything from spinning wheels to computers, have done nothing to reduce the suffering that some people still experience. It almost seems at times that the more we know, the more we understand, the more you would think that two world wars would have shown us, and yet, the more suffering we see in our world. One of the most unpopular messages you will hear in church is that being a Christian, that following the will of God, can involve suffering. There is no doubt that David trusted God, in psalm 13 later in verse 5, we read “But I trust in your unfailing love” and throughout the psalms we see David continually expressing his trust in God:

In psalm 4 – trust in the Lord

Psalm 9 – Those who know your name will trust in you

Psalm 20 – Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.

Psalm 21 – For the king trusts in the LORD.

Psalm 22 – He trusts in the LORD.

Psalm 25 – in you I trust, O my God

I could go right through to psalm 143 in the same way. David was a man who clearly trusted God. But that was no guarantee for a peaceful life, for a life without suffering.

David found that God can be at work through his suffering. And in the same way, we can ask Jesus to be at work in us through our suffering. God wants us to put our total trust in Jesus, so that even when we are suffering, we are suffering with Jesus. Just as Jesus took my place on the cross to save my life, there is something about God’s plan for my life which involves suffering for him, and with him.

So to our Gospel reading which is one which many of you will know quite well and is more commonly used at Easter, which Clair will read for us in a moment. We will see Jesus in his last few hours of freedom before his betrayal and his arrest. Its on page 997, if you would like to follow along.

Thank you Clair. What I hadn’t appreciated until I was preparing this sermon is that up until this point in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus had talked about his death but in a very different way. Up until this point, the time for Jesus to die was in the future – in Mark 8: 31 “He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.” And in Matthew 20: 28 “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Up until this point Jesus has been quite calm about his death, but let’s look again at verse 38 from our reading – “Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” His heart is troubled. The judgement of God on sin will soon be upon Jesus. He can now not only see it, he can feel it in his heart.

We see Jesus struggling to accept the will of God. Jesus prays “My father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.” Jesus is asking “Does this have to be?” “Is there not some other way?”

And I guess like me, it will be same for many of you. We try and find some alternative path for those things we face each day. Life can be so easy when what we want matches up with what God wants. We fall in love with someone, we imagine they would not be interested in us, but it turns out they are, so we fall in love and eventually get married. Or we apply for a job, we go for the interview and see other people that have applied, we imagine that they will be better suited than we would be, and we are amazed when we get the job! Or just in case you've started to think none of those apply to me, your football team goes through the whole season winning every game and wins the trophy.

But the will of God isn't always so attractive. Even Jesus asked for this cup to be taken from him, but he did recognise "yet not as I will, but as you will." Yes the will of God is not always what we want. We remember today the thousands of soldiers that have been involved in two world wars and in the 22 conflicts since 1945. And just this week I was discussing remembrance Sunday with Paul, one of my colleagues at work who used to be in the army. Yes it was quite exciting for him to be thinking about travelling around the world and being involved in some action, to finally put all that training in practice. But its a very different thing when you're in the front line exposed to risk and danger, when missiles are whizzing past you.

And so it was for Jesus. It was one thing for Jesus to talk about his approaching death from a distance but now in Gethsemane, he confronts the reality of what it would mean – mockery, torture, humiliation and end in the brutal death on the cross. Jesus suffered for me and he also suffered for you. He took on our sin and paid the price so we could be saved.

If anyone wants to know that we have a God that can help us when we suffer, that we have a God with compassion for his people, then look at just what lengths God went to, in order to save us from an eternal death. Whatever you go through in life, Jesus has already been there and can share your load. Jesus faced and endured, being wrongly accused, unjustly treated, was discriminated against, humiliated, rejected, tortured, let down by his closest friends, and suffered an agonising death. When I am suffering and I look at the cross, I see a Jesus that can help, a Jesus that can share my load, a Jesus that has felt my pain.

So before I send you into some kind of deep depression, let us remember that through all Godly suffering there is gain and victory at the end. The cross is not the end of the story. A war is not the end of the story. Jesus overcame death and his resurrection, the empty tomb, are the victories and the triumphant conclusion to the suffering of Jesus. That should affect our lives both today and in the future, just as the actions and sacrifices made in wars past affect our lives today and should shape our future.

The events in Gethsemane help us to understand the will of God, and also show us how to respond when we are suffering. So what did Jesus do? And what should we do when faced with a future of suffering?

Well firstly Jesus resorted to prayer.

Although Jesus went into the garden with his twelve disciples and then chose his favoured three, it was God that Jesus turned to when his sorrow was so great, in verse 36, "Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

Prayer is the most important thing we can do, both individually, as a church and with our prayer ministry team. And Paul echoes this instruction in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 17, “pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”

What can we do when we are facing or going through a tough time? Pray and keep praying.

What did Jesus do next?

Jesus still called God his father. No matter what human suffering we might experience, God remains, will always be, always has been, our father. Though everything around us might be falling apart, God is the same consistent, everlasting, ever loving, ever caring God, who wants to be our father.

And what happened to Jesus next?

Well for some reason Matthew does not mention the special help Jesus receives at this point, but in Luke 22: 43 “An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.”

And Paul also reminds us of the promise God gave to him in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 8, “Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

When we are suffering and pray for God to take it away, we are reminded that God is with us all the time, that Christ's power can be ours and that we do have each other. If we are God's people, we have received that commission to pray for each other, to support each other, to encourage one another and to look out for each other.

And finally, Jesus submits to God's will.

When Jesus said, “yet not as I will, but as you will”, and then at the end of our reading, “Rise, let us go” Jesus was speaking of not leaving or running away, but facing what he knew awaited him. If anything can give us the courage to face the road ahead no matter how hard we think it might be, we have only to look at Jesus facing a future not of his choosing, but facing it with help from his father.

Our challenge this morning and in the week ahead through the uncertainties of our lives is to commit ourselves to prayer, to remember we have a heavenly father, to ask for help, and to remember those words of Jesus, not as I will, but as you will.

Let us pray. God our father, we ask you this morning to renew our purpose in living our lives for Jesus. We know that in our strength we will fail and we recognise that it is only through Jesus we can look at the road ahead and proceed with confidence. So as we remember the past this morning, we ask you to look at our future, and shape it in accordance with your will for our lives. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.