



Ade writes...

23 December 2020

As 2020 comes to an end few will be sad to see it go. It has been an extraordinary, unsettling and very difficult year. The pandemic has had a huge impact and many of us have faced, trials, tests and temptations we could never have imagined. And the continued restrictions mean that the challenges continue. Not just in the visible areas like our health, jobs and finances but in the hidden areas which we often don't speak about; and the pressure piles on as we try to cope with struggles in our emotional lives, difficulties in our relationships and battles in our spiritual lives. This Christmas many of us will face the pain and frustration of not being able to see loved ones. We have not seen some of our church family for months - and we long for the time when the pandemic ends and we can gather together again.

And that longing should be grounded in our faith. A faith that says God is in control. A faith that persists even though the waves of increasingly bad news. As Habakkuk prayed:

**Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.**

Why? Because God is on the throne. And in these difficult times we should take our eyes off the many obstacles and disappointments that surround us and keep our eyes fixed firmly on Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.

This morning in Church, as I was rummaging in the Vestry in between praying and asking the Lord how I could encourage and strengthen you, I came across an old order of service from December 1987 which contained four things which speak powerfully in to our situation.

First Jesus' words of comfort to his disciples in John 14 1-14 **'Do not let your hearts be troubled, he said. You believe in God; believe also in me.'**

Second the opening words of that famous old hymn - To be a Pilgrim.

**He who would valiant be
against all disaster
Let him in constancy
Follow the master...**

Third the responses in the liturgy where the people declared:

**We believe verily to see the goodness of the Lord
In the Land of the Living
O Lord hear our Prayer
And let our prayer come unto thee**

And finally words from the hymn The Lord is my Shepherd

**Yea, thou I walk through death's dark vale,
Yet I will fear no ill
For thou art with me and Thy rod
And staff me comfort still.**

The words remain as true now as they were 33 years ago, and speak powerfully into our situation. No matter what we face we should remember to trust in Jesus and follow him steadfastly believing that He will hear our prayer and knowing that He is with us.

Good evangelicals that we are we rarely read from Ecclesiasticus. But the powerful poetry and truth of the following verses from the second chapter are perfect for this time

**You who fear the Lord, hope for good things,
for lasting joy and mercy.
Consider the generations of old and see:
has anyone trusted in the Lord and been disappointed?
Or has anyone persevered in the fear of the Lord and been forsaken?
Or has anyone called upon him and been neglected?
For the Lord is compassionate and merciful;
he forgives sins and saves in time of distress.**

God is the God of all comfort, who is compassionate and merciful. And as we are reminded in Hebrews 13:5 ... **For God has said, "I will never, never fail you nor forsake you."**

Have a safe and blessed Christmas and I look forward to seeing you in the New Year as we look forward with hope and anticipation to all that God will do.

Ade