



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

Handling Trouble and Disappointment

Acts 16:9-15; Revelation 21:10, 21:22 – 22:5; John 5:1-9

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There is so much going on in our world today that it appears more and more difficult to believe that we have a God who intervenes in any way that matters. Why Covid 19? Why the war in Ukraine? Why global warming? Our prayers seem to be unanswered in the face of such massive and heart-breaking problems. How do we maintain hope in the midst of all this?

The book of Revelation was written in a situation that faced different issues than ours but issues that were just as difficult for the faithful Christian to deal with. After challenging the seven churches to examine and correct their way of life and teaching, the Risen Christ then takes the believers behind the scenes as it were to see what is happening from God's point of view. As it outlines what is going on we are invited, no challenged, to continue to trust in the God who is "working His purpose out as year succeeds to year."

By the time we get to the last two chapters we have been shown that God is in charge and that His plan will succeed regardless of the way it looks now.

In the past year we as a family have faced three large disappointments. Each one has been painful to go through and even now are not resolved. What keeps us going? What keeps YOU going when this sort of thing happens to you?

For us there are two main things that keep us putting one foot after another.

1. Looking at the main truths of our Faith.
2. Looking back over our own story and seeing God's faithfulness over the years.

1. The great truths of our Faith have been so engraved into our hearts that you would think that it is impossible to forget them. But it is not so. When trials and troubles come it is all too easy to believe what is happening is truer than things you have been taught. The pain is so clear. The disappointment so real. The grief so acute that there is a strong temptation to wipe out in a stroke the Faith, despite all its wonder.

Now is the time to continue to meet with the People of God, Sunday by Sunday and listen again to the "Faith once delivered to the Saints." (Jude 3). Once more receive the bread and wine that will remind you of what God has done. But even more to meet and share with one or two most trusted fellow believers who will listen and say little but hear your grief, understand the disappointments, and walk with you prayerfully as you go through them.

It will not answer all your questions. That will come later if it comes at all. But it will ease your heartache. It will assure you that there is a way through. That God is in charge

2. The second is to look back at the time when God's faithfulness has been shown to you. It may have come through the stories others have told you or things that have happened to you. Let me tell you of one that happened to us.

A number of years ago, Lorraine and I were given the opportunity to go to a conference in Canada. It was at the time of what was called the "Toronto Blessing", and we were invited and enabled to go to a conference that church. Lorraine discussed the invitation with the Vestry, and they not only agreed but suggested we stay on and take a sabbatical. The bishop agreed. In prayer Lorraine asked the Lord how we should use the extra time and sensed the Lord telling her to go to a retreat in London that would follow on from the Toronto conference but she received a clear sense that we would not get into the retreat initially but that she was to, "hang in there" (not a phrase that she used) and we would get there in the end.

Contacting the people who ran the retreat, she was told that it was fully booked and that they did not have cancellations, so that we would not be able to attend. Just before we left NZ she contacted them again and received more firmly the same answer.

Puzzled we went to the Toronto conference which was a great blessing and encouragement to us.

But now what!?

Just before we left for the airport to fly to London Lorraine, (as she tells it) with great faith, asked ME to contact the people again. Once more we were told that there was no vacancy, and we were reminded that they never got cancellations.

We landed in Heathrow to be met by a friend of one of our parish staff. She was a bit puzzled as she had phoned the conference centre and been told that we were not attending the conference. So together we organised for some accommodation for us.

So now here we were in London with no clear idea as to what we were to be doing. O one person in the world who knew where we were.

We arrive at our hotel and wandered around London until the room was ready for us. When we returned and got to our room, we were to say the least very tired and not a little dispirited. As soon as we lay down for a rest the phone went. I thought it must have been the hotel staff telling me that there was some difficulty with the Visa card, because no one knew where we were. But not so. It was the leader of the retreat with an amazing story.

First, they had had a cancellation for the retreat. secondly the sermon they heard night before was on persistence. So, they said that we had been so persistent that they ought to see if they could contact us. They rang the parish office and discovered that the friend who had met us had left her phone number but that it had been thrown away. A search of the wastepaper basket uncovered the lost number and so we were contacted. Could we come to the retreat straight away?

I have to tell you that I was so tired that as I have often said that if it was the Lord Himself saying that he was about to return I would have asked for a short delay so that I could catch up on some sleep.

The following morning, we went to the retreat, and it turned out to be just as the Lord had said to Lorraine. We were greatly blessed and given real encouragement for the next steps in our ministry.

Now, I can tell you that such stories as that happen to some one else NOT to ordinary folk like Lorraine and me. How can it be that a sermon on encouragement, an unusual cancellation, a scrap of paper with a phone number of the only person in the world who knew where we were, could all be organised to enable God's word to Lorraine to be fulfilled?

Yet that is what happened.

At times when we face disappointments and trials, we are able to lean on such happenings. It still isn't easy to believe but it does give us encouragement.

Listen to Revelation 21:22-22:5 again. God has a purpose for this world, and it is being worked out. We can trust Him regardless of what it looks like.

Then look at 22:6. "The angel said to me, These words are trustworthy and true." They are.

We must do all that we can to bring about His purposes but as St Paul says in Ephesians 6: 13, "Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything to stand."

Stand firm! Stand firm in the face of Covid. Stand firm in the face of global warming. Stand firm in the face of war.

Stand firm regardless of the disappointments and troubles that life throws at us. God is trustworthy.