

WELCOME 3rd November 2019 – All Saint's Sunday '19 C

John 8:31-36 & 15:9-7

P1 – “I can't believe it! I don't know how much more of this I can take.”

P2 – “What's wrong?”

P1 – “My mother's had another fall & they're taking her to hospital.”

P2 – “Wow! You've had a rough run...being made redundant, then your son got a DUI, then your husband had his accident...”

P1 – interrupts...“Aannd my dodgy biopsy results & NOW THIS! Sometimes I feel like just walking out into the bush & never coming back. This is truly more than any person should have to deal with.”

P2 – “I know...just hang in there. You know God's got this...as big as it seems right now. Remember When God closes a door he opens a window. He promises to never give you more than you can handle.”

P3 – “Hang on there...excuse me for butting in...but God never said that.”

It can be tough at times to be a follower of Jesus. We so want to be people of hope, people who offer encouragement, support & strength to others...But we sometimes struggle to find the right words and sometimes the words we find are...backed up by nothing but wishful thinking or inspirational calendar slogans. Door...window...vegetables

What **has** God said about those times when we've had more than enough? What **has** God said about our struggles & stresses and the inevitable tragedies & trouble we all face? Well...Paul made this observation about his own situations: *“We were crushed & overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, & we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves & learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead.”* – 2 Cor 1:9

Paul knew no circumstance – no tragedy – no heartbreak or attack of the devil was more powerful than Christ's resurrection. Paul knew that “in Christ” the Father has committed himself to us in all circumstances, to be “*with us always,*” in love, truth & power, even through death into life in the Father's presence & glory forever.

We'll explore & experience that today...remembering today is All Saints' Sunday... when we give God thanks for his faithful people who have lived & died trusting that in all things “*we are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us.*”

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father, in all things & in every season of life we know you never relax your embrace of our lives...Today again speak your promises into our hearts & draw us near to you. Let your life be made real in us in full abundance and give your Spirit free rein over our lives. We pray through Jesus Christ. Amen

ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY '19 C
THINGS GOD NEVER SAID: I WON'T GIVE YOU MORE THAN YOU CAN HANDLE

FAITH CHAT:

1. What's one thing someone's said to you you're pretty sure God never said?
2. What's a good way you have found to encourage & support someone in the midst of their struggles?

Such is Life Que Sera C'est la vie It is what it is... We humans have many ways of expressing cynicism/fatalism/resignation to circumstance... Rubbish happens & you can't avoid it you can't get out of it so you may as well suffer through it... grin & bear it grit your teeth & grind it out... one foot in front of the other... one day at a time... Many around us adopt what I heard described as a "gorilla grimness" to life's unpleasant or painful circumstances... It's that perpetual sense of victimhood that sense that life is unfair & unrelenting & you just have to get through it... muscle your way ahead.

As followers of Jesus we know better... We know we were made for life with the Father for an abundance this world can't offer for joy this world can't provide for contentment & satisfaction & delight in all God gives... but when that isn't what we or someone we love experiences... What do we do? What do we say? How do we give witness to the hope within us in a meaningful context?

We so want to be people of hope, people who offer encouragement, support & strength to others... But we sometimes struggle to find the right words & sometimes the words we find are backed up by nothing but wishful thinking or stuff we find on Pinterest. And we blame God for it... Doesn't the Bible say... Didn't God promise... Aren't we assured... Well-meaning we are... misguided we can be. And we end up with something God never said like: "I won't give you more than you can handle." God Never Said That

How does that happen? Well... most likely because we misinterpret the promise Paul makes about the "comforting" presence of Christ through the Spirit at work in us that we just heard. *All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father & the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.* Now if you've ever read 1st & 2nd Corinthians, you know Paul had some real issues w/ those folks. He had to take them to the woodshed to get some things straightened out... but by this letter... he's drawing them close because he knows they're taking fire from all sides in their community. Here's what that looks like...

Corinth was a crazy place. think Las Vegas & schoolies week in Bali on meth The Corinthian moral compass was crushed under the weight of idolatry & debauchery & rampant "anything-goes-ishness" of that city. The Xn community was growing stronger & engaging people in the name of Jesus; offering real hope & freedom from the sin-sick lifestyle of appeasing the array of gods on offer... & genuine release from slavery to their own desires & worst inclinations. But because the Corinthian Xns were so different from their neighbours they were under persistent attack & had to constantly re-affirm their faith in circumstances that tested & tried them every day. They lived in the faith pressure cooker.

In his 1st letter, Paul had reminded them that the ancient Israelites, God's exodus community, had faced the same situation as they moved through the wilderness out of slavery into the freedom of the land God promised. They too were surrounded by folks who worshipped everything under the sun... who lived on the basis of pagan fertility & animist religions & it tripped them up... But Paul says with absolute conviction, God has given you the power of Christ to stand strong... *The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.* – 1 Cor 10:13

And I think we take that assurance that "in Christ" I am no longer a slave to my inclinations no longer captive to my desires no longer bound to give in to my worst proclivities & tendencies... to go along just to get along... but am empowered & equipped by the Spirit to endure temptation & step out of those self-centred moments allowing Christ to transform them into God-honouring obedient victory... and we read that promise into the promise of God's present active comfort in circumstances that have nothing to do with moral temptation but everything to do with life in a broken world where brokenness tragedy & disaster are always lurking. God promises you won't be tempted beyond your capacity to resist because of Christ in you, but he never says the circumstances & situations that wear you down & buckle your knees won't be more than you can handle. Quite often will be Not alone in that either

In fact... almost every character in the Bible, faces situations that are more than they can handle. Abe – "God... you promised children, but I'm 100 & Sarah's still pretty hot for a lady of 80... but no way she's having kids. 'father of a nation' is beyond me. More than I can handle." Moses – "God... pick someone else. I'm a lousy public speaker. I'm not a leader. In fact, I'm wanted for murder. More than I can handle." Gideon – "I'm the weakest in my family & my clan is the smallest in the smallest tribe. I don't have what it takes." Esther – "God... nobody just goes to talk to the king. I can't do that." David – in one of those moments when his sin is grinding him into a paste... Ps 38: *My guilt overwhelms me—it is a burden too heavy to bear. I am exhausted &*

completely crushed. My groans come from an anguished heart. I'm just going to let this one stand... "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death." – Mk 14:33 & 36 – Jesus in the garden ^{b/4} his crucifixion sweating blood praying for 1 outcome... "I want your will to be done, not mine." Let's hear that this way, "Father I can't handle this except that I know your will will be done in me through this." Only 2 questions really... 1 Why would God allow us to experience more than we can handle? Why wouldn't he just put up a big ol' angel wall around us to prevent heartache & tragedy & misfortune & cancer & divorce &... 2 - How do we reach that place where we say with Jesus, "Father I can't handle this except that I know your will will be done in me through this."?

Let's go back to Paul for a minute: In 2 Cor, Paul shares his rough journey: *Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night & a day adrift at sea... I have faced danger from rivers & from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, & on the seas. I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not... I have been hungry & thirsty & have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.* – 2 Cor 11:24-27 We started this morning with a list any of us could have experienced: job loss, medical uncertainty, family distress, legal hassle... throw in an emergency for a loved one & it's more than you can handle *this* quick.

So let's acknowledge up front we live in a sin-broke world. We exist in sin soup. Everything is tainted twisted distorted... all of it. In this world beautiful things happen. (Purple house purple sky story) But in this world that the Father crafted for beauty; sin invaded & horrible things happen. God permits in this sin-infested universe beauty & horror to co-exist. We're not immune... walled off... Scriptures testify to that truth. *We think you ought to know, dear brothers & sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed & overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, & we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves & learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. Only in that world of complete freedom where we sinners freely choose our own way against the Father's desires is redemptive love possible. Into this sin-corrupted wholly busted mess that wears even the strongest of us into expecting to die, Christ bears the weight of that corruption & destroys it once for all forever. So Paul reminds us that the presence & power of the storm should **NOT** cause us to doubt the presence & power of the Father. Never let the presence & power of the storm cause you to doubt the presence & power of the Father... Never.*

More than we can handle calls us to trust more than we can imagine in the one who will not let even death separate us from his love & presence. More than we can handle is God's invitation to pray w/ the Psalmist: *I cry to you for help when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the towering rock of safety, for you are my safe refuge... Ps 61:2-3.* You & I were built to trust the Father. We were created needing to trust God... with a DNA-level need for his hand to hold & his wisdom & Word to lead us... We were created by him for him & sometimes more than we can handle is how we remember that on our own we're sunk... on our own strength we're exhausted... on our own energy we're toast... on our own we're lost. And maybe it's only in the middle of more than we can handle that we hear clearly, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."

So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses & in the insults, hardships, persecutions, & troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong. I mean that's just nutso right? What's up with that? Paul says when I'm operating out of Paul it's just Paul & that runs out fast, **BUT** when I am absolutely convinced I'm about to get pulled under & there's nothing left in me but Jesus raised from the dead, it's precisely **AT THAT MOMENT** that I discover the power of the resurrection erupting through me like a giant volcano... I have the same Spirit in me that raised Christ from the dead & I have to make sure Paul is dead so that Spirit of Christ can live through me & that happens best when it feels like the house has fallen on me like the wicked witch of the east. Why would God allow us to experience more than we can handle? Maybe so that we can experience the power that raised Christ from the dead & pours out every blessing heaven holds in real time...

Now the 2nd question? How do we reach that place where we say with Jesus, "Father I can't handle this except that I know your will will be done in me through this."? *All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father & the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.* Paul knew no circumstance – no tragedy – no heartbreak or attack of the devil was more powerful than Christ's resurrection. Paul knew that "in Christ" the Father has committed himself to us in all circumstances, to be "with us always," in love, truth & power, even through death into life in the Father's presence & glory forever. In that assurance, we can pray with Christ who lives in us that in every circumstance his power would prepare us to give precisely what we have received from the Father. Father I can't handle this except that I know you're going to use this hellish moment – this season that has buckled my knees to prepare me to stand alongside someone else... to be the comforting presence of Christ for someone else assuring them that in all things "we are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us."

Let's pray with that in mind... Lord Jesus because you have suffered death & torment for our forgiveness and were raised to life again for our salvation, we know there is nothing that can tear us from your hand or steal us from your love. When the storm comes, draw our eyes to you alone and call our hearts to cling to you. Be our strength and comfort so we can offer your loving embrace to others...Jesus in your Name we pray...Amen.