

21 June 2020

West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Reading: Matthew 10:26-31

Hymn:CH4 641 Seek ye first

READING

Matthew 10:26-31 (Good news translation)

26 “So do not be afraid of people. Whatever is now covered up will be uncovered, and every secret will be made known. 27 What I am telling you in the dark you must repeat in broad daylight, and what you have heard in private you must announce from the housetops. 28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell. 29 For only a penny you can buy two sparrows, yet not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father's consent. 30 As for you, even the hairs of your head have all been counted. 31 So do not be afraid; you are worth much more than many sparrows!

MESSAGE

If I have to think of an expression to describe what the last 3 months felt like to me, the words “emotional rollercoaster” comes to mind...

I know a lot about rollercoasters, actual rollercoasters, because my eldest, Henro, loves living on the edge, and one of his favourite places to go is an amusement park. His dad is way to scared to even go on any of

the rides with him, so since he was a wee boy, I've always ended up being the one sitting next him in one or another thrill ride.

Luckily Henro is now old enough to go on rollercoasters by himself!

Some would say it's scary, irresponsible even; while others just can't get enough of that adrenaline rush.

Before the ride starts and you queue up, you feel excited and scared at the same time. Then, when you get strapped in, you can't wait to get going, while at the same time wondering what on earth you were thinking to get in that line in the first place! And then, while you are flying through the air, the wind through your hair make you feel more alive than ever, while the cramps in your hands remind you that you are holding on for dear life. Scary and exhilarating all at the same time.

And you know, that's exactly what's been happening with my emotions during lockdown.

- Because one minute I'm loving all the time I have to spend with my 3 boys, and if it's nice and sunny and we can be outside, I can't be happier. But then I sometimes feel as if the walls are pressing in on me and I feel so stir crazy.
- We've discovered so many new paths and our long walks in nature became the highlight of my day, but if I watch the news and see what Covid19 is doing to the world, I want to cry.
- I'm delighted with the huge positive reaction we've had to our online services and Kid's Kirk, but at the same time I desperately miss going to church and seeing all of you.

- Surprise phone calls, messages and cards cheer me up, while I also feel worried about members who are unwell, bereaved or depressed, and of course about my family in South Africa too.

And I'm sure I'm not alone in this! Has lockdown been an emotional rollercoaster for you too? Good things and bad things, happy times and sad times, things you are excited about and things you dread, filling every hour of each day?

Emotional rollercoaster indeed.

Something we have to keep in mind though, is that if an actual rollercoaster is not serviced frequently, and complying to all the health and safety standards, it can be extremely dangerous.

And the same is true for us. We have to take care of ourselves, especially now that we have been strapped into this 'Corona-Rollercoaster' without having a say in it at all.

But how can we do that? Take care of ourselves during this time of ups and downs, sometimes suspended in mid-air, and other times brought safely to a halt – just for a minute, until it all starts again?

Well, I think the most important thing we can do, is to keep reminding ourselves that we are not alone. Firstly, God is always with us; and secondly, everybody else around us are going through the same thing. It of course affects us all differently, but still, it's a shared journey.

And then we need to talk. To the other people in our household, to our friends and family over the phone, and now we can even meet up with others outside. It's important to talk about how we feel, because bottled up emotions only cause explosions, and that's not good for anybody.

The passage we read from Matthew this morning, forms part of a larger section where Jesus tells his disciples to go into the world and share his message of love with all people.

And Jesus is quite frank with them – he says that it won't be easy. That they will be persecuted. By the government and by others who disagree with them. They might even be treated badly by their own families.

Now, today we live in a culture where we can agree to disagree, but in Biblical times no individual could survive without the rest of their extended family. They couldn't even *imagine* a world where their family members would think differently about something than they did.

Yet Jesus is saying that this *will* happen, because not all people will *want* to hear the word of God. But he assures them that no matter what they have to go through for him, in the end, it will be worth it.

And the one thing that kept them all going, was his words at the end of our passage: That not even a sparrow, which was so cheap it was almost worth nothing, will fall to the ground if God doesn't want it to. (The poor people, who couldn't afford expensive animals to be sacrificed to God, could buy sparrows for next to nothing for this purpose.)

But God doesn't stop there. He says that he loves them (and us) so much that he even knows exactly how many hairs they have on their heads.

Which of course is an expression to indicate that God loves them so much, that he knows every single thing about them. And that every wee thing that is a part of a child of God, is important to him.

So, although this task would be really hard, they could do it confidently, in the knowledge that God would give them the strength to do what they had to do.

And we know that the same is still true for us today. God has proven his love for us when Jesus died on the cross. And when he sent his Holy Spirit to be our guide and comforter.

We are in this together. And we are not alone.

At the moment our mission is looking different to that of the first disciples. We can't go out to tell others how much God loves them. But what a better time to show the world how faith can help you to cope with hardship, than now?

That even in devastating circumstances, we *know* that we are not alone. That even though we sometimes feel happy and sometimes sad, through all the ups and downs of lockdown, we know that God has counted every hair on heads. And he won't let go of us on THIS journey, or any other, for that matter!

We might all be on an emotional rollercoaster at the moment, but that will just make us appreciate the solid ground under our feet so much more once this ride ends.

3 times in our reading we are told *to not be afraid*. And if something was said 3 times over in Biblical times, it was an indication that the speaker really meant it. God is unequivocally telling us to NOT BE AFRAID on this 'Corona Coaster'.

We are still on a mission for God. And our mission at the moment is just as important as the mission Jesus sent his disciples on all that years ago. Let's do the God who knows exactly how many hairs we have on our heads proud, by growing closer and closer to him in a time where we have to stay far away from everybody else.

May God be very close to every one of you in your up and your downs.

Amen

PRAYER

Written by Rev Alison Quilter

Gracious God, Lord of all, we thank you that we can come to you in prayer, that for all your greatness, and wonder, and holiness, we can speak with you as to a friend. We thank you that we can open our hearts to you, that we can pour out our innermost souls and share our deepest thoughts in the knowledge that you are there, always ready to listen and understand.

Gracious God, we thank you that you are always with us, in the bad times as well as the good, the difficult as well as the easy, the sad as well as the happy. Loving Father, each of us has experienced our own roller coaster of emotions during these past weeks and months and we give you our thanks for your guidance leading us safely through a time where the future seems dark and the present uncertain.

Though we have sometimes been unsure of the way ahead, you have always been there for us, though we have felt discouraged, you have offered us fresh inspiration, though we have been in despair, you have given us hope. Lead us forward we pray and help us to continue in the path you set before us, secure in the assurance that, whatever we face, your grace will be sufficient for us. Because whenever we have needed you, you have been there for us.

Loving Lord, we not only pray for ourselves but for the world and its peoples: We pray for those who face the future with uncertainty or anxiety – those who fear it or feel they have no future.

We pray for those in the troubled places of our world – those who long for peace and an end to conflict and a time of harmony, but who in their hearts have given up hoping.

We pray for those who face trauma or upheaval in their lives – what seemed secure swept from under them, what they had hoped for denied them, what they had trusted in – proven false.

We pray for those facing sadness, those who have lost loved ones and who are striving to come to terms with the emptiness and heartbreak they feel. Ever-present God, reach out to them in your love.

We pray for the Church – for the great community to which we belong, and above all the friendship here in our gathering, even though we are at the moment physically apart from one another, help us to discover new avenues of service to one another, new opportunities to further your kingdom, new ways in which we can make known your love. Let us bring light to the glory of your name. We ask these things through Jesus our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

HYMN

CH4 641:1-3

Seek ye first the kingdom of God
And his righteousness;
And all these things will be added unto you;
Allelu, alleluia.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

Ask, and it shall be given unto you,
Seek, and ye shall find;
Knock, and the door shall be opened unto you;
Allelu, alleluia.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

You shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word
That proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;

Allelu, alleluia.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!