

TAKE TIME OUT – *Pastoral Retreat*

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Sunday 21st March – 2nd before Easter: **Passion Sunday**

Luke 17:1-10 *Stumbling, faith, and doing what ought to be done*

¹Jesus said to His disciples, “Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come! ²It would be better for you if a millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea than for you to cause one of these little ones to stumble. ³“Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive. ⁴And if the same person sins against you seven times a day, and turns back to you seven times and says, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive.” ⁵The apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith!’ ⁶The Lord replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.” ⁷“Who among you would say to your slave who has just come in from ploughing or tending sheep in the field, ‘Come here at once and take your place at table’? ⁸Would you not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, put on your apron and serve me while I eat and drink; later you may eat and drink’? ⁹Do you thank the slave for doing what is commanded? ¹⁰So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’”

Reflection:

Jesus teaches about two types of stumbling: firstly our own and then that of others. Those following the example of Jesus in obedience to the Word of God tend to feel guilt at the slightest implication of their own wrongdoing. It is good to examine one’s own thoughts, words and actions but intense naval-gazing is neither healthy nor what Jesus advocates. What Jesus demonstrates and God requires is Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth! If we are truthful with ourselves before God, any wrongdoing will be revealed by the witness of His Spirit within. That is the time for open and honest repentance. The greatest struggles human beings seem to wrestle with is admitting wrongdoing and asking for help. Both denials arise out of fear of being viewed as weaknesses. This is a false fear! To admit one is wrong or has misunderstood is to demonstrate the grace of God and restore oneself to righteousness, irrespective of any response it may incur. To ask for help is to recognise that we are out of our depth or do not have the skills required to do a good job. This allows those God has blessed with the right skills to serve Him and builds trust and harmony in the Body of Christ. Honesty demonstrates integrity and is valued by God as a positive strength. Denial is not Truth and therefore not of God. Yet, how often do we find ourselves stumbling into justifying our thoughts, words and behaviour, instead of being honest? Even when we want to see things change for the better, human tendency is to blame others and expect everyone else to change! But as Mahatma Gandhi said, “Be the change that you wish to see in the world.” So, it is only right and proper that we make the necessary changes to correct our own ‘stumbling’s’ first, lest we cause another to ‘stumble’ and find ourselves drowning!

Truth cannot lie for Truth denotes divine presence but false witness reveals the presence of evil. White is the result of every colour, black is the absence of colour; opposites will always oppose. Martin Luther King Jr expressed this clearly, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.” There is a misconception that challenge is against God, that somehow it is not in keeping with Christian

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love to challenge anyone. How often do we hear the words, 'That's not very Christian' when we challenge inappropriate behaviour. As a result, the devil has managed to sneak in like a thief, gain positions of power, corrupt the Word of God and ravage the flock. This Truth leads us to examine how we are to deal with the 'stumbling' of others. Truth must be told, but there are kind and unkind ways of revealing it. To confront someone in public and by personal accusation is unkind to say the least. I have always tried to stop and ask myself, 'is it Truthful, is it necessary and is it kind' before responding to such attack. I admit I have not always managed to do this, especially if the accusation against me is false. Human nature is most affronted by false testimony, which is why, as God's people, we should never do it! But we should also not allow others to do it! **Proverbs 12:22** *22Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are His delight.* Evil is wrong; therefore, to say and do nothing in its presence is evil's greatest collaborator! To demonstrate the love of God means doing all that is within our ability to save a soul. As a wise superintendent once told me, "Sometimes you just have to be blunt!" We are called to do what is good and right, even when it is uncomfortable to do so.

Thankfully, Jesus has given us clear instruction on how to correct the 'stumbling' of another. First, speak to the offender one to one in private; second, discreetly with one or two witnesses and third before the Body of Christ. The fourth step, to turn one's back on them, is a last resort applied only if all else to bring the offender to repentance has failed (**Matthew 18:15-17**). Jesus is at pains to direct us in the ways of grace, as both the first two steps are private and discreet. However, He is also at pains to point out that challenge is both necessary and unavoidable to maintain the family of God in a right relationship. Augustine of Hippo wrote, "Right is right even if no one is doing it; wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it." This is the challenge of claiming to be Christian, life is not always easy, it is messy, complicated and faces us with dilemmas that we would really rather not tackle! But if we truly seek to demonstrate the love of God, we must challenge all that is contrary to His Word, just as Jesus did. It does not matter what anyone else thinks, says or does; to quote Leo Tolstoy, "Wrong does not cease to be wrong because the majority share in it." As the children of God we are required to revere Him, serve Him, and love Him with heart, soul, mind and strength. We are to do good by living in Truth, doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with our heavenly Father (**Deuteronomy 10:12-13 & Micah 6:8**). The world would reason us out of our faith; even the disciples asked of Jesus, 'increase our faith'! If we claim to be Christian, then we have signed up to a lifetime of doing good, that is, what is right according to God's Word and the example of Jesus Christ. We will not be excused for doing what is reasonable or even considered responsible by the world's reckoning if it is against the Word of God and contrary to the example of Jesus. Winston Churchill came up against a great deal of criticism, and it would seem, still does by some today. However, he was the one who led the way against world domination by an evil dictator. He said in reply to his critics, "Perhaps it is better to be irresponsible and right, than to be responsible and wrong." Jesus calls those who would follow Him to do 'all that we were ordered to do!' By our fruit we will be known and by their fruit so others will also be known. Do we first recognise our own 'stumbling's' and repent? But do we also, in faith and love, rebuke others in their 'stumbling's' as the Lord instructs? Today is Passion Sunday, are we willing to mirror the passion of Jesus and witness without fear or favour? Let us pray for the Truth and faith to do so. **Amen!**

Hymn/Song: Speak O Lord by Keith Getty & Stuart Townend

CD: The Best New Worship Songs...Ever! **Disc 3 Track 14:** Speak O Lord

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Speak O Lord as we come to You
To receive the food of Your holy Word
Take Your Truth and plant it deep in us
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness
That the Light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith
Speak O Lord and fulfil in us
All Your purposes for Your glory

Teach us Lord full obedience
Holy reverence True humility
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of Your purity
Cause our faith to rise
Cause our eyes to see
Your majestic love and authority
Words of power that can never fail
Let their Truth prevail over unbelief

Speak O Lord and renew our minds
Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity
And by grace we'll stand on Your promises
And by faith we'll walk as You walk with us
Speak O Lord 'til Your church is built
And the earth is filled with Your glory

Poem: STUMBLING ©Janice Morgan 2021-March

If I stumble who will catch me and save me from a fall?
If I shout in fear of falling who will hear my panicked call?
Will a friend who walks beside me
Grab my hand or simply flee?

When life is good I'm full of joy and generous with my giving
But when things turn bad I'm full of woe and not very forgiving
Will those I trust to hold me
Hold me up or simply flee?

As I read the Word of God my mind is calm and full of grace
But then I deny mistakes and justify so I can just save face
Will love come to correct me?
Or will lovers simply flee?

When I live and work for Jesus, my soul seems full and complete
When I live for selfish desires my heart grows dark and full of deceit
Will those who truly know me
Help me change or simply flee?

Will all my life be lived in wrestling with the devil's deceptions?
Will I ever be able to break free from all life's subtle temptations?
What faith is there in me?
Will I trust or simply flee?

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There are so many things in life that cause my feet to trip and stumble
In all life's snares and cares and tares, only One can save me from a tumble
Jesus has come to save me
And God will never ever flee!

Prayer: Father God, we thank You for Your Word, a constant that never changes or shifts no matter what the world may say. Lord Jesus Christ, we thank You for Your testimony of Truth, a firm foundation to test the devil's deceptions against. Holy Spirit, we thank You for Your presence, within us and without, a light that shines in darkness and a guide to lead us home.

Amen!
