

2019-02-17 ... 10am Sermon ... Revd Canon Judy Hunt
Jeremiah 17: 5 – 10; 1 Corinthians 15: 12 – 20; Luke 6: 17 – 26

'Coping with Hardship'

Introduction ...

As some of you know, one of my roles at the Junior School is to be the Link Governor for Maths. Perhaps not what everyone might expect from the Rector ... but I love maths and so I volunteered.

One thing that has cropped up time and time again with maths in the school is that children have to be secure in their knowledge and understanding of one aspect before they can make use of it in another aspect.

So back to the importance of times tables ... for example if you don't know your times tables it's hard to do division ... or fractions ... or decimals.

There's a need for firm, secure foundations. And this is true too in terms of faith.

Questions ...

Some of the 'faith questions' you asked at the end of last year - of 2018, link into this:

How do I retain faith when confronting illness – illness in myself or a loved one?

How can we be helped in our faith when there are difficult issues around us?

How do I deal with my 'bad days'?

Some of the answer lies in this idea, this reality of being secure ... before such times come which stretch us to a different level ... without this we can flounder as much as children do in maths without a secure understanding of times tables.

So we need to avoid the view of God ... or prayer to God ... that we only turn to God, we only try and relate to God when we're desperate for help ... and we need to educate and influence others so that they don't regard God solely as some kind of Divine Paramedic.

Jeremiah ...

Look back at the passage we heard from Jeremiah:

**Blessed are those who trust in the Lord
they shall be like a tree planted by water.
It shall not fear when heat comes
and its leaves shall stay green.
In the year of drought it is not anxious
and it does not cease to bear fruit.**

This tree has prepared well in 'ordinary conditions', it is well nourished and healthy, it has reserves.

That has a spiritual message for us. We need to live well, prepare well in ordinary times ... we need to resource ourselves spiritually ... deepen our relationship with God so that ... when difficult times come ... we too have reserves ... **we don't become anxious**

we don't cease to bear fruit ...

PTO

I wouldn't say **'It's too late to start when trouble strikes'** because God is more gracious than that but if we haven't got a depth of relationship with God ... we're likely to struggle more.

An example that comes to mind for me relates to the reading from **1 Corinthians 15** that we had :

If Christ has not been raised – your faith is futile

... those who have died in Christ have perished

and so on ...

I went, many years ago, on a funeral visit to a church member – she was in the church almost every week, on the PCC, involved in various ways – and a relation had died ... part way through she said to me: **'Well, is it ok for Christians to talk about life after death ... isn't that a bit "iffy" ...'**

I tried not to show what I was thinking on my face ... but it was clear for this person, that decades of church services had not helped her to understand the core Christian message of Easter... and so she had no real resources of faith to help her in bereavement ... actually she was struggling a great deal. The building blocks were not in place.

And when we look at our Gospel reading Jesus pushes us even further. This is Luke's version of the

Beatitudes ...

And they are topsy-turvy, paradoxical ... we might think that they are the wrong way round.

But one way to understand them comes from this context of ensuring that our faith has firm foundations ... built in the ordinary 'ordinary' times of life. We could view the second half as being a sadness for those who are fine when life is good – but who have not built those faith reserves for when times are tough.

Whereas the first half speaks of blessings for those going through tough times who have the reserves of faith to turn to God in those tough times ... and who then recognise how God is with them, sustaining them, helping them, blessing them.

Conclusion ...

Let's use, and help one another to use, our 'ordinary' times of life well spiritually – so that we are well resourced and healthy.

That's one of the key ways in which we can answer those questions with which I started and which some of you were asking a couple of months ago.

Amen.