

Having the Same Mind as Christ Jesus

5 April 2020

Palm Sunday

Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

In a weak moment I said I would help the vicar of Akaroa walk around his parish. He had a special name for it, “beating the bounds,” I think it was. Anyway, he was to walk all the way. I just walked one Monday. The scenery was breathtaking and the people that joined us were very interesting. You get to know someone really well walking with them, especially going uphill - I didn't have enough breath to do anything but listen. This one walker had been an air traffic controller. In between gasps for air I asked what was the highlight of his career. “That's easy to answer,” he said. One night he was on emergency duty in the North Island. It was usually pretty boring but suddenly a call came through from someone who had been blown off course. This person was a leaner pilot. They were running out of fuel and had nowhere to land. With a calmness that comes from years of training, my walking companion was able to remotely turn on the landing lights of a standby airport, call up the crash tender, and talk this person down. He said “Suddenly I was called on to be peace and calm for this pilot. I knew without me they would crash and die.” He talked them in, giving them directions, and landing them softly. He concluded that was easily the highlight of his career because he saved a life that night.

In what is thought to be an early Christian hymn, Paul is inviting us to have the same mind as was in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:5). At this time in history we face a perfect storm of anxiety. Kept in our bubbles for days on end and fed news of impending death and economic disaster it would be very easy to give in to anxiety. But Paul is urging us to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus.

So, let's have a look at Jesus' mind. Today is Palm Sunday and we are given a glimpse into the mind of Jesus by Matthew. Matthew tells us the whole city is in uproar. They are ripe for revolution as they see Jesus as coming to

overthrow the Romans. But Matthew is at pains to point out that he comes in peace. He rides not on a war horse but a donkey. He comes humbly and in poverty.

We see Jesus as the embodiment of peace throughout this holy week. Knowing his death was to come he calmly washes the disciples feet, falsely accused before Pilate he keeps his peace, even on the cross cruelly dying he has the peace of mind to remember his mother's need, to forgive those who murder him and to offer hope to the criminal beside him.

We can claim for ourselves this peace at such a time of anxiety as we face with Covid 19. To have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus is to know that even if we are a little fearful (and it's okay to be) we have in Jesus a source of eternal peace.

No virus can take Christ's presence from us.

One of the great advances in counselling over the last few decades is a modality called cognitive behaviour therapy. I can't claim to be an expert but in essence the cunning scientists have discovered that we can be the air traffic controller of our own mental airport. We can direct the mental traffic of our world.

When we find ourselves getting anxious, we can claim God's peace. When we find ourselves getting fearful for the future, we can claim the calmness of Jesus before Pilate, when we find ourselves getting upset or troubled, we can claim the peace that Jesus came to give us. That is a peace which passes all human understanding. In short, we can have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus.

This was the choice that Kent Brantly took in July 2014. Kent was a medical missionary in Liberia. He was part of the team waging war on one of the cruellest of viruses - the Ebola virus. The epidemic was killing thousands.

Kent knew the risks he faced. He had treated hundreds of people. So he knew exactly what he had when the symptoms hit him. He took the test and put himself in isolation to await the result. He was literally alone. His wife and family were far across the seas. Alone he opened his Bible. What passage could he find to sustain him. His Bible opened at Hebrews, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace in our time of need” . The next three days brought unrelenting discomfort and the test came back positive. He phoned Amber his wife. She began to cry. They talked for a while, but Kent had no strength to carry on the conversation. Amber went to her room and wept. She could find no words to pray so she simply used a hymn she had learnt as a child.

*There is no shadow of turning with thee
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not
as thou hast been thou forever will be.*

Kent was returned home and within a few days his strength began to return. Within a week he walked out of hospital much to the rejoicing of his family. Amber wrote later in her diary that they had won their battle with Ebola but just as importantly, by putting on the mind of Christ, they had won another battle too. They had won the battle with another virus. The virus of anxiety and panic. Of course, they were fearful, but they had claimed the peace of Christ.

Today in this extraordinary time we are invited to be the air traffic controller of our own mental airport. We are invited to put on the mind of Christ Jesus and to claim the peace which is his gift.