

Sunday May 31, 2020

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Welcome & Prayer (Mike P)

Good morning and welcome to church today! We're glad that you could join us, and we hope you are well, and enjoying some relief from the worst of the lock-down. Well, all over the world, people are facing a grave crisis in COVID-19, and everything that goes with it. And yet, around the world, and even in our own backyard, there are so many different reactions to it.

Some people are playing golf, like nothing is going on. Some people are down in their bunkers, and haven't seen another human outside their family for months. Some people are showing their selfish side, while others are opening up their restaurants to make for those in need, they're sewing scrubs for doctors, making face masks, and dropping care packages to the vulnerable. Crises happen in every age, every place, and to every person at some point in their life. Yet, it's not the crisis that defines us, but how we respond to the crisis.

In the book of 1 Peter, the apostle Peter has been speaking to his Christian friends, who have been scattered across a vast region, who have been persecuted for their faith, who have suffered violence and unjust accusation. Some of them are slaves with violent masters. Some of them are wives with not so great husbands. All of them have seen suffering for what they believe. And yet, Peter sees a great opportunity in the time of crisis that his friends face. He calls on them not to give up, but to be hopeful and holy!

In Peter's mind, there is no greater thief of hope than sin and death, yet he reassures his friends that they have been born into a new hope, because Jesus has defeated both sin and death. And because of this amazing hope, he calls his friends to live differently, to live holy lives in the face of all that confronts them. Today we continue to see that Peter sees all of life as an opportunity, whether suffering or not, whether in crisis or not. All circumstances are an opportunity to grow in holiness, and to glorify God through Jesus. But the question is, are we up to the same challenge as the early Christians Peter first spoke to? Will we let the same words speak a challenge to our hearts today? Let's pray

Father God, we praise you that you are the God of all hope. We praise you that you created a good world of great blessing, and that you sent Jesus to set things back to how they were in the garden, in fact, to better than they were. Thank you that from the moment Adam and Eve sinned, you spoke of the hope Jesus would bring, that he would come and crush the head of the snake. Thank you that you promised Abraham that his offspring would bring blessing to all nations. Thank you that we are able to partake in that blessing today, through your risen Son, who defeated sin and death on the cross.

Father, just like Peter's friends, help us trust wholeheartedly in Jesus, so we may experience the same new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, a new birth into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade (1 Peter 1:3-4). Help us to know that, through Jesus alone, we can greatly rejoice, though now for a little while we may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials (1 Peter 1:6). Though we have not seen Jesus, help us to love him; and even though we do not see him now, help us to believe in him and be filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for we are receiving the end result of our faith, the salvation of our souls (1 Peter 1: 8-9).

And we also pray that we will make the most of every moment we have, and set our hope on the grace to be brought to us when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, help us to not conform to the evil desires we had when we lived in ignorance. But just as he who called us is holy, so help us to be

holy in all we do. (1 Peter 1:13-15). Speak to us today, through your Word and by your mighty Spirit. Challenge us, change us, mould us, make us your people, enable us to make the most of this and every crisis. Amen.

Song **Blessed be your name** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rw4H5t3TwHM>

O for a thousand tongues <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2e475ww32Jg>

Bible Reading – 1 Peter 4:1-19 (NIV)

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. ² As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. ³ For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. ⁴ They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. ⁵ But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

⁷ The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" ¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Testimony – An interview with Josh Montzka <https://youtu.be/1mpsRgLzOxM>

Kids Song **His mercy is more** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGj8gu9T37Ae>

1. What love could remember no wrongs we have done	Chorus
Omniscient, all knowing, He counts not their sum	Praise the Lord, His mercy is more
Thrown into a sea without bottom or shore	Stronger than darkness, new every morn
Our sins they are many, His mercy is more	Our sins they are many, His mercy is more

2. What patience would wait as we constantly roam	Chorus
What Father, so tender, is calling us home	
He welcomes the weakest, the vilest, the poor	
Our sins they are many, His mercy is more	

Song. O the deep, deep love of Jesus <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqTMJxSA7EM>

Sermon <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXdPfMM0Cwk>

Or <https://www.facebook.com/Charlestown-Presbyterian-Church-113127747005906>

I am sure you have read or seen similar stories but a week ago the ABC news interviewed a 29 year old builder from Sydney. He was young, fit & an active sportsman. He had a physical job. He was full of life until he was hit with a crisis. A COVID-19 crisis. It made him incredibly ill. Unable to do anything at all. And even now 5 weeks after recovering he doesn't have the energy to get back to work or even take the dog for more than a short walk.

No one likes a crisis. When you lose your job. Or there is a pandemic. Or you are stuck at home for weeks on end. And we have all faced over the last couple of months an unprecedented crisis. But what if there is worse to come? What if the second wave is worse than the first wave? What if around the corner we are still facing an ecological disaster? A nuclear world war? What if the end of the world is near?

Peter says in the 4th chapter of his first book that the end of the world is actually near. That the ultimate crisis is coming & you and I need to be ready. We need to live today in the light of what will happen tomorrow. So he says to the Christians who are reading his letter in the 1st century, don't waste your crisis. Right now you are being persecuted, treated unfairly because of your faith but use this crisis to be ready for the crisis at the end of the world.

And today he wants to say the same thing to us. Don't waste this crisis! COVID-19 came out of nowhere and it has changed everything! But don't forget you are living in God's world and he will end this world at some point in the future. So be ready. Be prepared for the

1. Challenge (verses 1-7)

"Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin". Peter says the challenge for you and me is to get our attitude right. Get our thinking right. Christ suffered in order to die for the sins of the world. That 29 year old suffered in order to get rid of his COVID-19 illness. And we need to be ready to suffer in order to live for the will of God. God's will is not a life of ease. He hasn't made you and I for an easy life where there is no suffering. But suffering does have a real cash value. Suffering can help you with your battle with sin!

Peter is not saying that when you become a Christian you completely get rid of sin. I have met people who claim that is true but I am yet to meet someone whose wife or husband or kids would agree that this person is now free from sin themselves! But what he is saying is that when we suffer for Jesus we have chosen to follow him over following the crowd, so we know that suffering for Jesus in the short term is still better than sinning in the short term.

² *As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires but rather for the will of God.* ³ *For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do: living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing & detestable idolatry.* ⁴ *They are surprised that you do not join them in their wild living, and they heap abuse on you".*

The challenge that Peter is putting before us is that we need to repent from the way we used to live. Stop living the sort of life that others around us are living. Put sin in the rear view mirror not in the boot of your car and carry it wherever you are going. Why? For ⁵ *they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead".*

Because one day we will all stand before God. Who will see through all our feeble excuses. Who will know exactly what happened. Who is aware of how each one of our actions either helped the people around us or was harmful to them. You see that's the ultimate crisis. That's the day that you and I need to be most aware of. And personally that will be a very uncomfortable day for me and I suspect for you as well.

Because I know I have hurt the people I love. I know I have made many wrong decisions. I know that I have been selfish and mean. I have ignored the plight of others. I have blood on my hands. And I won't be able to hide any of it before a God who knows & sees everything. Everything. And it is for this reason, *"the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit"*.

That's why God wants the good news of forgiveness of sin is to be preached to everyone, to those alive today & those who are alive in the past. That's why Jesus' death on the cross gives hope to all who will believe. That's why Jesus swapped my sin for his righteousness. My death for his life. So I could say no to sin & yes to living in the power of God's Holy Spirit! And that means that what Jesus has done for me should change every aspect of my life.

Augustine, a great saint of God had lived with a prostitute before his conversion. After he was wonderfully saved, he was walking down the street and this prostitute saw him. She shouted his name and he kept walking. He saw her, but he kept his eyes straightforward and walked. She continued crying after him and ran after him. And finally, she said, Augustine, it is I. To which he replied, I know, but it is no longer I!

The crisis of the end of the world leads you and I to the challenge of faith. Are we willing to put God first before anything else? Are we willing to repent from our old way of life that didn't please God? Would we be willing to suffer rather than sin? And so the crisis we are facing today should help us to ask ourselves the same questions.

For this is God's world & God didn't promise us a world without pain or suffering. Did you know that in January this year the Doomsday Clock, the clock set by the Board of the Atomic Scientists which measures their view of how close we are to the end of the world was set at just 100 seconds to midnight. That's the closest it has ever been since it was created in 1946

They believe that due to the ecological damage that we have inflicted on our world & due to the tensions between nations with a nuclear capacity our world is currently on a knife edge! They are also saying, the end is near. And COVID-19 would be making things worse! So the challenge is what are we going to do about it? Are you and I going to change our ways? Are we going to repent before God's judgement day? We must make the most of this crisis.

2. Challenge, Church (verses 7-11)

For in the midst of this crisis, the people of God must stand up and be counted. The Church must act in a way that is counter cultural, completely different to everyone else. And that is what Peter says next. ⁷*"The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray."* Don't panic. Don't get out your bucket list & one by one tick things off. Connect with God, talk to the one who has all things in His hands, rely upon Him completely.

Prayer is not the last thing we should do in a crisis when everything else has failed. It's the first thing we are called to do. And maybe that truth might need to hit all of us. Sin is not just the things we choose to do, it can also be the things we choose not to do. Like prayer.

When we fail to pray we displease God. When he promises to help us and we say no thanks I am fine, we are showing our independence from God. When we spend more time on the internet, playing sport, watching TV than being with God we are showing Him that he is not the most important thing in our lives.

So the people of God, in a crisis, but really at all times, need to be people of prayer. And we need to be people who are alert and of sober mind. We need to think clearly. How did Rudyard Kipling's famous poem begin? *"If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you..."* That's what a crisis can do to us? We can lose our heads. But those in the Church shouldn't behave like that. They will pray & they will love.

⁸ *"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins"*. God is love & so it naturally follows that those who want to follow God will not live a self-indulgent life they will actually care for those around them. They will put others first.

They will love others because love covers over a multitude of sins. And I think that means that when we love others we don't go around looking for faults in others, we don't nurse the hurts that others have given us in the past. We don't perpetuate the cycle of tension and division and strife by responding to hurt feelings with still more wounding words, and round and round we go. Love says, "I will be patient. I will be kind. I will keep no record of wrongs." So practical, pastoral care of those around you is not an optional extra. It's a must!

And one of the ways that you can show that sort of love is by practising hospitality, without grumbling; to open up your homes & your lives to your Christian brothers & sisters. Help one another out, by inviting them in. In Albania, there is a saying "an Albanian's house belongs to God & His guests." If where we live is God's house, if what we eat is God's food, then we need to be ready to share this house and this food with others.

And lastly we are to use our spiritual gifts. ¹⁰ *"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms"*. Each Christian, each member of the church has been given a gift by God. Given God's grace to be shared with others in various forms. We all have a ministry. We all have a role, a vital part to play. And Peter says that role will be either to speak or to serve.

¹¹ *"If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."*

That's also a challenge for us all, for speaking and serving is never easy. So if you are speaking be careful, as if you are saying the very words of God. And if you are serving remember serving requires patience and perseverance. Serving can be exhausting. So ask God for his help and his strength. So whether you speak or serve do it for God and his glory.

In 2006 a book "Eat, Pray, Love: One woman's search for everything across Italy, India and Indonesia" was written by American author Elizabeth Gilbert. Gilbert had what most people would have considered everything in life, a husband, a good career, and plenty of money but when her marriage broke down she was devastated and spent a year finding herself.

Eat, pray, love was her recipe. Funnily Peter 2000 years before says Pray, Love, Eat, Speak, Serve is a way not only of finding yourself but finding God's will for your life, finding true and deep relationships with

others. Living in the light of a crisis should lead you to finding God's way. In it we love God and others, rather than love ourselves.

So friends don't waste this crisis. Pray, love, eat, together as brothers and sisters in Christ. Be the Church that God has called us to be. For in a crisis the Church isn't to shrink back but step forward. It is to model to the world, the love of God. Show the world how important prayer is. Invite the world into our homes and our lives. Speak God's word to God's world and serve others, in the same way that Christ has served us. That's the challenge of this crisis. To be the Church and lastly to learn from

3. Christ (verses 12-19)

Don't forget Jesus didn't waste his crisis. He was rejected by others and he continued to love, even his enemies. He was sentenced to die on a cross and he used his death to die for our sins and offer us eternal life. Jesus suffered so that we could receive God's blessing. So ¹² *"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed"*.

Jesus life is the model that we need to follow. The pattern we need to copy. Suffering gives us a greater understanding of what God is doing in the world. And just as the sufferings of Christ led to glory so our sufferings will lead us to that same glory. So the key to suffering is to find the truth that Jesus suffered even more for you than you will ever suffer yourself.

So this crisis should help us to see Jesus suffering as well as help us to hold onto the name of Christ. ¹⁴ *"If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you"*. Insults and suffering can lead to blessings. When a woman goes through child birth she's goes through very painful suffering but the source of her suffering becomes the source of her joy. In fact God transform her suffering into joy!

And that's what happened also to Jesus. He was separated from God. He endured the pain of crucifixion but God used that pain, that suffering to offer you and I his free gift of salvation. We get to experience the joy of the Lord because our Lord suffered. But it is not just any suffering that will bring this joy & blessing. So ¹⁵ *"If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler."* ¹⁶ *However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name"*. Praise God that you bear the name Christian. Rejoice then that you are a follower of Christ.

¹⁷ *"For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"* ¹⁸ *And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"*

Judgement, God's judgement is coming. No one will escape. Christians will firstly be judged by this world & its values and found wanting. But that is better than God judging the people of this world and finding them wanting and so they have to deal with the consequences for all eternity! ¹⁹ *"So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good"*. They should commit themselves to Christ. Commit themselves to the cross. Commit themselves to living God's way.

Peter then is telling us that Christ is to be found in the crisis. Use the tough times to think clearly. To pray. And to cling to Christ. As the poet Ella Wheeler once wrote *"All those who journey, soon or late/ Must pass within the gardener's gate;/ Must kneel alone in darkness there/ And battle with some fierce despair/ God*

pity those who cannot say. / "Not mine but thine," who only pray/ "Let this cup pass" and cannot see/ The purpose in Gethsemane."

Joni Eareckson Tada was a young girl in the prime of her life when she dived into water and hit her head and became a quadriplegic. She wrestled for many years with the fact that God could have healed her injury but instead of healing, all she received was chronic pain. Many years later she told a reporter. *"What I discovered was that God still reserves the right to heal or not to heal as He sees fit. And rather than try to frantically escape the pain, I relearned the timeless lesson of allowing my suffering to push me deeper into the arms of Jesus. I like to think of my pain as a sheepdog that keeps snapping at my heels to drive me down the road to Calvary where otherwise I would not be naturally inclined to go."*

What Eareckson would say to us is the same as what Peter is saying to us today. Don't waste this crisis. Allow it to push you deeper into the arms of Jesus. Let it clear your mind and see the truth that on your own you can't make it to God on your own but that Jesus suffered & died to bring you to God. That after Christ went back to God Himself he left the Church in this world & called it to pray, love, eat, speak and share so that when the crisis hits the people around them, the work of God can still clearly be seen by those who want to see.

So that is the challenge all of us face. Don't waste this crisis. Are you a Christian? Have you received God's grace? Have you put your trust in Christ's death? Have you faith in what God has done for you? Or are you following your own will, your own plans and your own desires? For we will all have to one day give an account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. The mother of all crises is coming. And none of us will escape. So let's be ready for that day today. By committing ourselves to our faithful creator and continuing to do good.

Church Engagement

To help us know who has participated in today's service would you please either

- Like the sermon on Facebook OR
- Share the sermon on Facebook with someone that you believe would benefit from it. OR
- Fill out a two question survey (approx. 1 minute) at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6D9VPZK>

Song Amazing Grace (my chains)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrwkCOUOlil>

OR Amazing Grace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDdvReNKKuk>

Benediction.

⁷ *The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.* ⁸ *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*