

Dear friends at KCF,

One of the things that those of us who have come into and enjoyed the blessings of the “charismatic” stream of church life, with its beliefs in blessing, healing, the miraculous, and even prosperity, is that we find it harder to cope with disappointment when we encounter suffering and seemingly un-answered prayer. As you may know, I have been trying to assist the folk in Inverkeithing Baptist as they come to terms with the premature death of their much-loved pastor, Ross Brown, a month ago.

It seems an eternity ago, but when I was with you back in January this year, we began to open up this subject by looking at the perplexity of Habakkuk. Do you remember his tension? He asked, “God, when are you going to sort out those nasty Assyrians who are oppressing us?”, and God has to reply “I’m going to do it in a way that you can’t believe – I’m going to bring in someone even worse to sort them out”!

I’m sorry to have to point this out, but suffering is part of the Christian life. Here are some unpopular verses of scripture that we need to take onboard, if we are to have a balanced faith:

2Tim.3v12: “in fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...”

2Tim.2v3: “Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus”

1 Pet.4v12-3: “do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ...”

Acts 9v13: re Paul, “I will show Him how much He must suffer for My Name”.

Sorry, folks, but the bad news is that we are called to take up our cross in Mark 8v 34-8 and to share in the sufferings of Christ in Phil.1v29 & 2Cor.1v5; note also Phil. 3v10, Col.1v24 & Rom.8v17. We have the strong promise that God will always be with us to the end of the age (Matt.28v20), and that He cares for us and knows all about us, but that does not guarantee us protection from the vicissitudes of this life. I don’t need to remind you of the hardships Paul listed in 2Cor.11v23-8; the apostles were beaten (Acts 5v40 – but note v41!); and in the OT Joseph was falsely accused and put in prison, as was Jeremiah who also shared in the famine during the siege of Jerusalem, while Ezekiel and Daniel were carted off to Babylon among the captives: Ezekiel seems to have ended up as a sort of Chaplain to a slave labour camp, and Daniel the doubtful honour of becoming a palace eunuch. They shared in the sufferings of the people in order both to demonstrate how to live victoriously for God in adverse circumstances, but also as a prophetic sign of what God was saying and doing. Our belief in the incarnation reminds us that our Lord Jesus became a real human being, experiencing hunger, fatigue and suffering as the gospels tell us, or the carol “tears and smiles like us He knew”.

I do believe strongly that God both heals and provides, but that does not entitle me to claim that I will lead a problem-free life. Remember that three times Paul begged for the removal of his thorn in the flesh, and all God replied was that He would give him the grace to cope with it. Let me state quite clearly that I do not believe this was a health problem, and most likely referred to the continual persecution from the Jews (although I have heard a naughty commentator suggest it might have been his wife – in which case Paul could certainly NOT be delivered from her!). God is WITH us in all circumstances, as Hebrews 13v5 teaches us, and therefore we need to discipline ourselves to give thanks in all situations (1Thess.5v18). That does not mean that we are to thank God for evil things that happen, as has occasionally been taught, but that there is no place we can be in where we cannot praise God.

Let me conclude today by sharing a song with you that you may not have come across; I'll also give you the words as they don't appear on the recording: This song below was written and sung by a young woman, Debora Sita, who died on the 27th May at the age of 35 after a long battle with cancer. The song was originally recorded on her phone from her sick bed -- such a testimony of how God can change our thinking- if we let Him.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1mS8IX5qbl>

Come to me in the quiet
Come to me in this moment
I will shut the world out to hear your voice
As your words sink into me, as your love pours all over
My expectant and ravenous heart

{Chorus}

Who would I be without you?
I'd be so lost, I'd be so lost.
All I have is in you
You hold my heart-You hold my heart

Let your truth redefine me
Who you are shape and form me
What you give is good and I won't lack a thing
So I'll stay in this moment
I won't run but trust your word
Jesus you're the one who puts my soul at ease

{Bridge}

Saviour and Friend, King and Redeemer
The only place I seek to rest and hide
Anchor and Hope, Stronghold and Healer
You're the only one who satisfies.