

God of the Living

9 April • Wednesday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Matthew 22:23-33

²³ The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, ²⁴ saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.' ²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ So too the second and third, down to the seventh. ²⁷ After them all, the woman died. ²⁸ In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her."

²⁹ But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ³¹ And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: ³² 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living." ³³ And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

Meditation

Jesus addressed the Sadducees' question at two levels: the question itself, and its premise.

As for the question, Jesus taught that the resurrected body is unlike our earthly body, i.e. it will not engage in procreation nor will there be a continuity of our earthly marital commitment. This was a trick question, which also reflects the thinking of the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection and thought it absurd. (Read also Lk 20:27-40)

It became an opportunity for Jesus to correct them. If God is the God of Abraham etc., this implied that these prophets are still alive, as He cannot be a God of persons who do not exist. While by no means an airtight answer, it was a sufficiently quick response to outwit the Sadducees who wanted to embarrass him. The crowd's reaction (v33) confirmed that it worked.

We stand on the other side of this occasion and benefit from a fuller and long-standing teaching tradition on the resurrection and the after-life. But like the Sadducees, we are often affected by the philosophy and reasoning of the day. As we think about life beyond death, we often project and extrapolate from our human experience, rather than rely on divine revelation. While some can imagine a male-centered heaven of concubines; others would find it hard to imagine any semblance of continuity in human or earthly existence. The latter have come to regard the physical world as entirely evil in itself.

Jesus' answer here and in the witness of canonical Scripture, is that creation will be renewed. As glimpsed by the resurrected body of Jesus and the idea of the living

eternal personas of the prophets, life and creation as it is will be renewed and validated, even if some aspects of it cease.

The miracle of the resurrection is not about someone raised from the dead, as that happened to Lazarus too. The miracle is how the new body of Christ points to the new creation.

We await that day with hope in our hearts, to be reunited with the One and through Him, the ones we love. We live each day as good stewards of creation, investing and multiplying resources rather than abusing or wasting it away.

Prayer

Lord, help me to live a life which is inspired by this future vision, bringing it into my relationships, family, work and how I use my time and resources. May You strengthen the recently bereaved or those who still limp from the loss of a loved one or friend with this vision of the eternal future.

Action

Think of a needy person whom you can serve, i.e. an elderly person, someone homebound etc. When we serve Christ through serving a needy person made in His image, we invest in eternity.

*Rev Canon Terry Wong
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The Vital Ministry of Encouragement

10 April • Thursday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Philippians 1:1-11

¹ Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Meditation

Paul's first visit to the Philippians (Acts 16) was divinely initiated, and the events he encountered there (e.g. the conversion of Lydia, the fortune-telling slave girl, and the prison-busting earthquake etc.) were certainly memorable! Here he wrote his epistle to them from another prison. Instead of feeling sorry for himself, Paul's words exuded encouragement!

In his greeting in verses 1-2, Paul addressed himself as a "servant of Christ" and the Philippian Christians as 'saints'. Through this perspective, Paul was encouraging them towards humility, which was needful for a church experiencing conflict.

Paul expressed gratitude for the ministry that he had received from the Philippians' partnership in the gospel. This partnership took the form of the visit of Epaphroditus and the gifts he conveyed from the Philippians. By Paul's thanksgiving and affirmation, the church noted how valuable their support had been, and were encouraged to keep up the good work.

Paul expressed confidence (because of the signs of spiritual progress that he witnessed in the Philippians), that the good work God had started would continue through to completion on the day of Christ. He affirmed his deep affection for them, and interceded for their continued spiritual progress towards maturity, and the "fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ" (v11).

Paul thus set the stage for the rest of the epistle where he would develop these themes. His tone and manner illustrated one primary function of a shepherd – to bring the best out of people through encouragement.

Prayer

Dear Lord, help me be an encourager of others, like the apostle Paul. Please grow in me the virtue of humility, the zeal for ministry and the pursuit of maturity. For Christ's sake. Amen.

Action

May we who have leadership in the church learn from Paul's example to excel in the ministry of encouragement. In this troubled world, a little encouragement goes a long way. May we all be encouraged to grow in humility, ministry and maturity.

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A Servant Keeps Silence

11 April • Friday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Job 13:13-19

¹³ “Let me have silence, and I will speak, and let come on me what may.

¹⁴ Why should I take my flesh in my teeth and put my life in my hand?

¹⁵ Though he slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to his face.

¹⁶ This will be my salvation, that the godless shall not come before him.

¹⁷ Keep listening to my words, and let my declaration be in your ears.

¹⁸ Behold, I have prepared my case; I know that I shall be in the right.

¹⁹ Who is there who will contend with me? For then I would be silent and die.

Meditation

Suffering is bearable when you can find a reason for it. Perhaps you offended God and you are experiencing divine punishment – as Job’s friends suggested. But Job disagreed. As his friends pestered him to repent, their voices became an unbearable torment, for Job could not find anything from which to repent. They were urging him to pierce a non-existent spiritual abscess to find relief! Their initial silence (Job 2:13) was so much better. Their silent presence was more comforting than their judgmental prescriptions. Their words rubbed salt to his raw, deep wounds.

Job begged his prosecutor friends to be silent. He would then speak in defence of himself. No guilty man could stand before God and survive. Being sure of his integrity, Job decided to defend himself before God. If he survived, that would vindicate him. He took his chances with God because he was innocent, and more importantly, because he knew his God. "Though he slay me, I will hope in him..." Job then begged God to explain what was happening. But there was silence from heaven - until God spoke to him much later. God never gave a direct answer except that Job could trust God's wisdom and love. Suffering cannot always be explained or fully understood.

The opening and closing text of the book reveal mysterious heavenly conversations and surprising conclusions, which demonstrate that Job rightly trusted God, even though he could not find direct reasons for his sufferings. God has His purposes and even in our darkest night, He is present. If His sword falls on us, it may not be to kill us, but to heal us. Even if this does not seem clear, we can still trust Him - silently and deeply. We feel His presence in silence. Words often get in the way in such situations.

Prayer

Dear Lord, though I cannot find answers to all my questions about suffering, help me to trust You deeply, knowing that You are working all things together for the good of those who love You (Rom 8:28).

Action

Pray for someone who may be going through inexplicable suffering. Offer him or her your loving presence in a way that would strengthen his or her trust in God.

*Bishop Emeritus Dr Robert Solomon
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The Methodist Church in Singapore*

Faith vs Fear

12 April • Saturday of the Fifth Week in Lent

Lamentations 3:55-66

⁵⁵ "I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit;
⁵⁶ you heard my plea, 'Do not close your ear to my cry for help!'
⁵⁷ You came near when I called on you; you said, 'Do not fear!'
⁵⁸ "You have taken up my cause, O Lord; you have redeemed my life. ⁵⁹ You have seen the wrong done to me, O LORD; judge my cause. ⁶⁰ You have seen all their vengeance, all their plots against me. ⁶¹ "You have heard their taunts, O LORD, all their plots against me. ⁶² The lips and thoughts of my assailants are against me all the day long. ⁶³ Behold their sitting and their rising; I am the object of their taunts.

⁶⁴ "You will repay them, O LORD, according to the work of their hands. ⁶⁵ You will give them dullness of heart; your curse will be on them. ⁶⁶ You will pursue them in anger and destroy them from under your heavens, O LORD."

Meditation

On 14 February 2013, my wife and I were about to go out for a double celebration. First, it was Valentine's day. Second, our application for a bank loan was approved, after being rejected by several other banks. We were ecstatic as we could buy the dream house that we prayed for. Just as we were about to leave the house, I received a call from the agent saying that he had made an error on the forms which resulted in the bank rejecting us. In a split second, my joy turned to distress. My dreams crumbled.

I was supposed to minister that evening in our Valentine's Day Service at church. I didn't feel like going or even ministering. Many questions ran through my mind, "Did God forsake me? Why did God allow this to happen? Where is God when I needed Him?" Regardless of how I felt, I knew I had to minister and I pulled myself together. I led the congregation in a time of praise and worship. My mind turned from my situation to God's ability. Fear left and faith grew. After the service, as I was heading home, my agent called to inform me that another bank had granted me a loan that was more than the amount offered by the first bank. Hallelujah!

It is easy to have faith when everything is fine. But there are times when life throws us into mires of difficulty. We often wonder if difficult times are meant to break us or test our faith and trust in God. When we find ourselves in situations without hope, it can feel more crushing than challenging. Though we have been faithful in following the Lord, we can be tempted to question our circumstances.

Perhaps today you are like Jeremiah. He was a faithful and God-fearing man, but he went through countless difficulties. The God who commissioned Jeremiah rescued him from his difficulties. God who knows all your circumstances is able to rescue you. Today, just like the prophet Jeremiah, we can either respond in faith or in fear. Faith pleases God and activates your breakthrough.

Prayer

Lord, help us to live a life of faith and not fear, for faith pleases You and You reward those with faith. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Action

Speak words of faith and do deeds of faith.

*Rev Samuel Gift Stephen
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Death on a Cross

13 April • Sunday of the Passion (Palm Sunday)

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Meditation

“He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross...” (v8).

It is one thing to be willing to die for others, it is another to be willing to die a painful, humiliating, horrible death for them.

The cross is considered the most cruel instrument of death known to man. Suspended between heaven and earth, nailed to the cross, the victim of the cross waits helplessly for death. A death that is slow in coming. The very thought of having to endure it would strike fear in any heart. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus pleaded with the Father to “let this cup” pass from Him. Nevertheless, He submitted to the will of God the Father, and for the

joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame..." (Heb. 12:2).

For the joy of seeing you and I free from sin and eternal death, Jesus endured that cross. Because of Jesus' death on that cross, you and I can now face death without fear. Because of Jesus' death on that cross, you and I can rejoice in God's love and hope for heaven's joy.

Each time I think of this, I cannot help but sing the wonderful hymn of Charles Wesley:

"Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"

What about you?

Prayer

Dear Jesus, let me take this moment to consider Your love. Help me thank You for Your willingness to suffer and die on that cross for me. Help me to respond to Your love with love and to what You had done for me with gratitude. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Action

Jesus, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross for you... what would you be willing to do and endure for Him?

*Rt Rev Terry Kee
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The Blood of Christ Redeems for Eternal Life

14 April • Monday of Holy Week

Hebrews 9:11-15

¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. ¹⁵ Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

Meditation

Hebrews 9:22 stated that according to the law, almost all things are purified with blood. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. Hence, during the Old Testament time and under the old covenant, it was required by law to be purified every year by the blood of goats and calves.

However, in Hebrews 9:11-15, it was unlocked for us the eternal truth about the blood of Christ, and what it had done once and for all to redeem humanity for eternal life. Christ went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not humanly made (Heb 9:11). Christ entered the Most Holy Place, once and for all, by His own

blood and not by means of the blood of goats and calves as required by law, having obtained eternal redemption (Heb 9:12).

Hence, when Jesus received His last drink during crucifixion, He said, "It is finished". Therefore, as the Scripture had claimed, "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God!" (Heb 9:14).

"For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance" - now that Christ had died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant (Heb 9:15, Rom 5:18-20).

We praise and thank God for Christ's blood has secured eternal redemption for mankind. Just as man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many. He will appear a second time to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.

Prayer

God of mercy and love! May Your Holy Spirit enlighten all people on earth to understand what the blood of Jesus has achieved for all humanity and all for generations. All shall come by faith to the Son of God, Jesus Christ, that our sins might be forgiven, and receive eternal life.

Action

Reach out to all people and all nations through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, so that Jesus' blood shed on the cross may bring life eternal to all who confess that Jesus is Lord and Saviour.

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Retired Asst Bishop of Sabah*

The Cross of Christ Reveals God's Power and Wisdom

15 April • Tuesday of Holy Week

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Meditation

Looking at the world at Paul's time, the writer of this epistle, and today, we see a common human mindset in trying to be enlightened. Learn, earn or burn.

Paul had gone through all three and he came to the conclusion after his conversion. Philippians 3:8 "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ" Paul having been a Pharisee was indeed a very learned man... full of knowledge, tried all three - learn, earn and burn (by persecuting Christians). But by the revelation of Christ to him on the road to Damascus, he was renewed and transformed.

What about you? Are you able to see the world in the light of Christ, focusing on the cross which is a stumbling block and folly to those whose mind is dulled or polluted by a fallen world. Do not lose heart when you are feeling small among the so called powerful intellectual giants who are your peers. Our life as Christians should demonstrate God's power in us. Weak, poor and inadequate as we are by the world's standard of things, God's power is most outstanding if we believe and trust Him.

I entered full-time ministry at the age of 23. 36 years have passed and I have stood with statesmen and kings! I have lived and ministered to people of different languages, cultures and races. I have lived with communities very different from my own. The power of God has enabled me to face all challenges.

Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father, I come to You

1. Just as I am, without one plea,
but that thy blood was shed for me,
and that thou bidst me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come
2. Just as I am, and waiting not
to rid my soul of one dark blot,
to thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.
3. Just as I am, though tossed about
with many a conflict, many a doubt,
fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.
4. Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
sight, riches, healing of the mind,
yea, all I need in thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.
5. Just as I am, thou wilt receive,
wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
because thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.
6. Just as I am, thy love unknown
hath broken every barrier down;
now, to be thine, yea thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Charlotte Elliott, 1789-1871

Action

Resolve to always turn to God in the face of conflicts and matters beyond you and each day, to demonstrate the power of God in you to others.

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