

## **Conflict August 17<sup>th</sup> 2025**

### **Luke 12:49-56 Hebrews 11:29-12:2 May the words .....**

Who are the heroes in your life? Our Hebrews reading reminds us of some of the Biblical heroes who have helped to shape our Christian lives. We are reminded of their faith in God and of times when God stepped in to save them. However, it also reminds us that, even as people of God, they did not have an easy life, with many of them suffering and dying for their faith. Their stories bear witness to the faithfulness of God, not to easy lives with no problems and challenges. They did not receive their reward on earth, but in heaven.

Jesus' baptism was the public start of a road which he walked to change the world forever. As God He had a message to convey which was not always popular, and in our reading this morning Jesus admits that He is under stress until he completes the task that He has come to do, namely, to die a humiliating and painful death on the cross so that our sins can be forgiven. We often talk about a baptism of fire, when we talk about doing something with which we are not familiar, which is new, and which is therefore stressful. Jesus is stressed about His baptism of fire, which will take him on the road of suffering to the cross. The resurrection will come in due course, but Jesus still needs to suffer first so that He can save the world from sin and offer us an opportunity to have a right relationship with God.

There is a poem by Annie Johnson Flint who lived from 1866-1932. It says this:

God hath not promised Skies always blue, Flower-strewn pathways All our lives through;

God hath not promised Sun without rain, Joy without sorrow, Peace without pain.

Jesus' journey started as the angels declared peace on earth at His birth, but the road that Jesus trod was often difficult.

Jesus is honest with his disciples; he is under stress. The path that he **has to** walk is not going to be easy, in fact as soon as he was baptised Jesus was taken to a wilderness space where the devil tempted Him for forty days and forty nights.

In our reading this morning Jesus says, "I have a baptism with which to be baptised, and what stress I am under until it is completed". When John baptised Jesus, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove. A voice came from heaven and said, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased".

Before Jesus started His public ministry, God was well pleased with Him. Did that mean that Jesus was going to have an easy life, and a nice comfortable death at the end of his three score years and ten? We know that it did not. As we explore the gospels and the life of Jesus, we are painfully aware that his ministry involved conflict.

I am reading the book which has been recommended as the Big Church Read this year. It is written by Bear Grylls, whose career started in the SAS and who has hosted many adventure TV shows. He is the chief ambassador for the worldwide Scouts movement and is a committed Christian. It is called the greatest story ever told – an eyewitness account. It is an excellent read and captures some of the tensions that surrounded Jesus during His ministry. It gives us some insight into what stress was like for Jesus. I would strongly recommend it as a way of taking a fresh look at the gospel story as we acknowledge that conflict that surrounded His ministry.

Conflict with those within the Jewish faith through the scribes and Pharisees.

Conflict as he challenged the norms of society, as he included women, as he associated with those who were outsiders; lepers, tax collectors and sinners.

Conflict with the Roman authorities.

Conflict with his own disciples when they failed to understand the road that he must walk to deal with sin once and for all, for everyone.

What stress I am under until it is completed.

Walking the right path is not always easy, it can bring us into conflict with the world around us.

Life is not always easy. As Jesus talks about bringing fire to earth, He is recognising that fire has two outcomes. It destroys what can be burnt but it also purifies what is not combustible. Jesus wants to bring fire so that it will destroy what is evil and purify the faithful who are left.

The prevailing culture at the time of Jesus was that when the Messiah came the Jewish nation would immediately be led to victory over their enemies, including the Romans, and that they would, in effect, re-enter the garden of Eden, so that they could lead this Utopian existence in Paradise.

Jesus wants his disciples to be under no such illusions. What Jesus does and says will bring about division, not everyone will want to follow Him, and those who choose to follow Jesus will be shunned by others and persecuted. Most of the disciples were martyred.

But Jesus is clear. He has a job to do, he has to destroy Satan's power and the power of sin once and for all, and in spite of the stress and the division that will come about as some choose to follow Him and others do not, the job has to be done.

Jesus is being honest with about them. There were devout Jews who saw Jesus as a radical and struggled with the idea that others were going to be included in God's family, that the kingdom was open to all. Jesus offers a different idea of faith, one which includes everyone including those on the margins of society, one which brings

peace to individuals, not to the land as a whole. It is these different and groundbreaking ideals which are the ones which were going to bring division, even in families.

Many of us were christened as children and may have been confirmed either as teenagers or adults. As we set out on our Christian journey, what did we expect? Did we think that by becoming Christians God would wave a magic wand and give us an easy life?

Our reading this morning is all about conflict and division, something which we are often reluctant to confront. I am sure that I am not the only one who finds conflict very stressful, and I am not always very good at dealing with it. My experience has been that God is faithful, and that I am not on my own when stressful situations arise.

God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that everyone who believes in him shall not perish, but may have everlasting life.

In today's world sin is a word that is unpopular, but ever since Adam and Eve wanted to be like God, knowing good and evil, and succumbed to temptation in the Garden of Eden, sin has been in the world. None of us are perfect, as we come to worship, we always have an opportunity to confess our sins, and to be forgiven.

We make our commitment to follow Jesus and are confident that we have been forgiven and are welcomed into God's family here on earth, and that God is with us. Do we expect that to make life easier for us? That has not been my experience and may not be yours either.

Becoming a Christian does not necessarily mean that life will be easy. As we have got to know Pete Greig and his wonderful ministry, we recognise that Sammy's brain tumour has meant that they have walked a painful path to serve God in this way. We are purified for God's service as we are christened and confirmed, or baptised, and choose to have our sins washed away and rise to a new life in Jesus. That service may not be easy.

In some Christian circles it is unpopular to recognise that we are not always going to have an easy life. There are those who have become Christians, only to walk away when they realize that it does not mean that they will lead a charmed life. In fact, being a Christian can sometimes make life more challenging as we can feel that we are a minority that is trying to uphold patterns for life that are honouring to God.

The church does not always get it right, and others can be quick to judge. The media loves to expose the abuse and wrongs that have taken place in the Church, but we need to remember that the church is full of human beings, who are all capable of making mistakes.

How often have you set out on something, and part way through have wished that you had never started? Sometimes the job is bigger, more complicated than it at first seemed. Sometimes you were relying on other people, and you may have found that they can also let you down. Seeing the job through to the end can take courage and determination, Jesus saw it through.

As a preacher my heart sank when I saw the reading that I would be preaching on. We love to preach about the positive messages of love, forgiveness, peace, joy, hope and give you the opportunity to walk out of church into the new week with a warm glow that makes you feel that God has blessed you.

The gospel reading does not do that today. Our Hebrews reading reminds us that, as we look back on some of the lives of key characters in the Bible, they are remembered for their faith, although it is not until much later that their faithfulness is rewarded.

Life may not always take the path that we would have liked. We may feel that we already have our fair share of battle scars, and that we have had experiences in our lives that we would rather have avoided.

The second verse of Annie's poem says this:

But God hath promised Strength for the day, Rest for the labour, Light for the way,  
Grace for the trials, Help from above, Unfailing sympathy, Undying love.

In my experience God heals the wounds, and uses the scars that life gives us. We would not choose a stressful path, but we do not walk that path on our own. If we remain faithful God not only walks with us but often uses the difficult times in our lives to help us bless others.

It may be that you have not been christened, baptised or confirmed. If you would be interested in offering your life more fully to God Geoff and I would be happy to support you as we are gathering a group who would like to enter into a deeper relationship with God in this way.

I strongly commend Bear Grylls book as a way to re-examine the gospel stories through the eyes of those who witnessed the events. May we, as people of faith, remember that God loves us and walks with us, and that we will receive our reward as people of faith, just as those in our Hebrews reading did.

**Amen.**