

It's good to be able to share again with the family of St. George's – for those of you who are here in person or at home, it's good to be with you again. It goes almost without saying that it's certainly been a tough week both home and abroad - especially as we see the rates of infections climb, and conflict engulf the Ukrainian people.

It's certainly made me think a lot about our theme over this last month, 'The Joy of Living Worshipfully'. For those who find themselves shivering with illness or shivering out of fear for their lives, how do followers of Jesus experience the joy of living worshipfully, even in the midst of all this?

Actually, to be honest, I've been thinking a lot about this over the last six months as I've watched our seventeen year-old son, Evan, experience three separate concussions. Constant headaches, life narrowing down to just 5-10 minutes of exercise a day followed by nausea, not being able to attend school... How do we experience the joy of living worshipfully, when in truth we feel like we're wading through a steady stream of horse manure?

Many of us will have heard sentiments expressed by preachers and theologians who've suffered deeply, like Dr. Marva Dawn who makes an important distinction between 'joy' as the world understands it and 'the joy' that is ours in Christ.

In her 'Preface' to 'Joy in Our Weakness' the late Marva J Dawn, contends that Christ-like 'Joy does not mean "happiness," which is dependent upon human circumstances." Instead, she points to a 'Joy that is ours because our relationship with God fills us with security, confidence and hope.

Now to be honest, this idea of Christlike 'joy' that Marva outlines for us here – that's ours no matter what – can seem a bit of a pipe-dream. "How can we be truly joyful, in the face of life delivering some decidedly 'suck-full' (as my kids used to say) moments?" How can we truly be truly 'joyful' when life seems to be coming apart at the seams? Does it require me to go around grinning inanely, even when, as Chris Clarke so eloquently put it last week, we feel 'undone'? This week, we return, again, to consider where the basis and foundation for our joy can be found...

The thing is, I'm very interested in the idea of 'foundations', at the moment. Probably, because King's College, is celebrating not only our 100th Year of being founded in Ōtahuhu, but because we're also marking the laying of this, "The Memorial Chapel Foundation Stone".

Laid on the 12th of June 1922, by Governor General – Lord Jellicoe and consecrated by The Bishop of Auckland, the Chapel's 'foundation stone' symbolises not just the beginning of building The Memorial Chapel pictured here, but I think more importantly points them and us to where the true 'foundation' and 'basis' of our 'joy' can be found...

You have to understand that not unlike us sitting here today, the laying of this Chapel Foundation stone happened in the wake of what was some very difficult years in the life of

the College. For the two thousand people gathered to see it laid on that perfect autumnal day on the 12th of June 1922, lay a story of even greater tragedy...

Some of you will know that during the period of the Great War, 1914-1918, the College lost a total of 109 Old Boys, including three former Head Boys, and two staff members; close on double the numbers of people gathered here today. 1 in 10 Old Boys that went to fight, never came back.

It was a heavy and sobering loss...

But it was during these dark days, that we hear that the then Headmaster, Charles Thomas Major, had a vision:

'... During these years,' says V F Maxwell – long-serving staff member, 'I think Mr Major saw a vision. He saw a great college of stately buildings, erected around a chapel, dedicated to the Glory of God and hallowed to the memories of its old boys who had died in battle. This chapel should be a testimony to the purpose and ideals of the school...'

A vision of a Memorial Chapel... not built to become some 'empty religious monument', but be a place that inspired generations of young people, to live lives that made the world a better place - built on what they believed to be the firm foundation – the foundation stone of Jesus Christ, his life, his words, his example...

In the parable that we've just heard read to us from St Matthew, chapter 7, Jesus speaks to a Jewish world that knew the 'real wisdom' of building their homes, their lives on a solid foundation rather than on shifting sands. This carpenter-come-Rabbi, Jesus, who has an eye for the practical, knows that when the storms of life come our way, we need to have built on a firm foundation - Jesus' own words, put into practice. When the storms of life hits us out of nowhere, whether it be Covid 19, or a personal loss, a sudden illness or a broken relationship what can we rely upon? WHO CAN WE RELY UPON?

What's interesting to me is that today 'foundation stones', in architecture, have become largely ceremonial - detailing when and who laid it, and these other sorts of details. But in ancient times the 'foundation stone' was originally THE first stone that was laid, and it was THE point of reference for all the other stones and bricks that were laid upon it...

And it's why St Paul in his first letter to the Corinthian church, chapter 3, verse 11 describes Jesus as THE foundation ... He is the foundation stone upon which, we might build our lives, and take our reference point from...

11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

The second of our two Gospel readings from St Matthew gives us a practical illustration of what setting Jesus as our foundation of looks like. We see how Jesus - as we heard from Chris last week, walks across the stormy waters – appearing to the disciples as a ghost. But there's a difference in today's version of events from St Matthew—namely Peter's plucky reply.

28 “Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.”

Now for those of us who know this disciple, it’s not uncommon to hear Peter in the Gospels shooting off his mouth off... But even for Simon Peter what he’s calling out to Jesus, must’ve caused the other disciples to have thought he’d lost his marbles. ‘Get out of the boat and walk on water...? If they were Irish, they’d tell him straight, ‘Get back in the boat. You’ll be drowned, ya idjeet!’ You see, the Jewish people believed that such storms were whipped up by malevolent spirits. Being in a storm in a boat was one thing; being out on the water, in a storm was madness.

But there’s something about Peter that sees in Jesus something else that no-one else does... You see, as Peter steps out on what anyone else would think is a heaving ocean, he seems to recall that walking across the water is no ordinary person. It’s the One who’s just fed five thousand people with what amounts to a couple of tuna sandwiches... Since calling Peter in Matthew chapter 4, we’ve seen him heal a man with leprosy and a centurion’s servant, calm another storm, restore two demon-possessed men, forgive and heal a paralysed man... You get the picture.

Peter is being called not just by anyone... If it’s the same Jesus who has done all this, then surely the One who now beckons him out of the boat, who has called him according to His purposes, can be trusted and won’t let Him go... And as Peter steps out, he begins walking towards Jesus not just on water, but onto the very words, the very promises of Jesus that have become for Peter the firm foundation on which he depends. See, Jesus and His words are entirely dependable.

What’s interesting is that this picture of faith quickly changes. No sooner is Peter off surfing barefoot on the waves, in verse 30, we see his firm foundation built on Jesus begins to waiver. ‘But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord save me.’ The truth is we can all be overwhelmed by the reality of our circumstances The chronic diagnosis that tells us we’re never going to be the same again. The loss of a family member or friend who’s leaving... We too, like Peter can feel like we’re sinking, by the ocean of discouragement that seems to be swallowing us whole... And then we hear these words of Jesus to Peter: ‘You of little faith? Why did you doubt?’

In short, Jesus is saying to Peter, and perhaps to us, ‘Forget all the storm that’s raging about you, and focus on me and my words. Trust in who I AM and what I say to you, not on your circumstances. Remember WHO it is with you... I love You, You are mine, I’ve got You and I’ve got this situation...’ Even though you might not feel it, I am with you, however grim things look... I will not let You go, even though spiritual forces might be arrayed against you... Yes, you will have trouble in this life, but take heart... for I have overcome!

Jesus shows Peter, the disciples and us the deeper truth that – as the Lord of all creation He can be entirely trusted. Despite what this world throws at us, the TRUE REALITY IS JESUS AND WHAT HE HAS TO SAY ABOUT THINGS, THOUGH OUR CIRCUMSTANCES SEEM TO POINT OTHERWISE. It’s a theme we hear St. Paul say time and again to the churches throughout the ancient world, especially the persecuted Church, when they find themselves squeezed and under pressure. Even though you cannot see it, The Lord is with you in this storm. He is with you in your difficulties. First Corinthians 4 reminds us:

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles, are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.'

This kind of faith-filled approach leads us to worship... As we cling to Jesus and His words, to His reality, our gaze shifts and we realize who it is that has been with us all along. Verse 32, tells us, 'And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly You are the Son of God.' They realised who it was that with them. That's what Jesus yearns for us, and I think is one of the biggest challenges we face as followers of Jesus – the capacity to look beyond the immediacy of our situation and say, 'Truly you are the Son of God', and who You are, what You say, what Your promise is the ultimate reality I am going to put my trust in.

I believe it's one of the key reasons, why Peter is able to get out of that boat in the first place while the others' stayed put... He has a strengthening relationship with Jesus, that is helping him see who Christ truly is. He does life with Jesus daily. He eats with Him, he fishes with Him, He went from town to town with Him; and finds His wisdom can be relied upon entirely, which leads to these deep revelations that lead him into worship, 'Truly you are the Son of God'. It's why when Peter was handed the responsibility of leading the Church in Jerusalem, after Christ's Ascension and was able to stand the squeeze of persecution. He knew His Lord... And that's our challenge, isn't it? To dwell so closely, every day in Jesus – that when the storms of life come our way we're not trying to fabricate our faith in a howling gale. If you've ever been camping, you'll know the folly of trying to put a tent up in a storm?

But by daily spending time with Jesus, through the spiritual practices of silence, soaking in His love, engaging with ancient practices like Lectio Divina that encourages us to dwell on the stories and words of Jesus in the Scriptures and respond to the call to live it out in our lives, our foundation on Jesus is built...It takes time. It takes effort, but it's the way of becoming firm in Christ.

What's interesting to me is that Peter was so anchored to Jesus, with his final breath Simon asks his captors to crucify Him upside down because he considered Himself unworthy of being crucified in the same manner as His Lord and Saviour. It's this close relationship of dependence upon Jesus, His presence, His words, His life, that ultimately provides a firm foundation upon which to stand and enables us to live worshipfully come what may. It's why the writer of Hebrews encourages the churches in chapter 12:

"And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

I've seen this to be true in the last six months, as I've journeyed with my son Evan. Truth is, it's not my faith that's shone out as he's faced these concussions, but his quiet, convinced faith in Jesus that despite what he's going through, he is not alone and that the God He believes in, can be trusted - despite what his circumstances look like. What he's reminding me is that God is God, and that we are not, but that we can by degrees, be faithful even

when we can't make sense of what's going on. What's been interesting to me, is that while I've rushed to prayers of healing, so that Evan might come through this quickly... [Don't get me wrong... I believe God could heal him in a jiffy]... it's been Evan that's reminded me actually what he really needs is the strength to endure daily what he's going through and wisdom to use his long days wisely... Practicing a daily awareness of God through the timeless traditions of silence, of prayer, of meditation of Scripture, attunes us to Jesus' divine Presence and words to guide us, helping us see more closely our situation through the eternal lens of Jesus.

Someone else who dwelt upon the firm foundation of Jesus' words and implemented them in her own life was the late Marva Dawn, whose own litany of suffering did not dim her eternal perspective, when in April last year, she shuffled off this mortal coil:

Most important, Christ's present reign enables us to be overcomers in times of suffering and trouble. When we feel the force of the assaults of evil powers – in sickness or doubts or any other sort of spiritual pain – we will cherish the unfailing hope that someday this old order will have passed away. Someday our tears will be gone, so in the meanwhile we can carry on.

[p.198, Joy in Our Weakness, Eerdmans, 2002]