

It's Friday but Sunday is a coming ...

A reflection about hope of the resurrection during the crucifixion.

10/4/20

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

Let us pray:

Almighty God, we beseech thee graciously to behold this thy family, for which our Lord Jesus Christ was contented to be betrayed, and given up unto the hands of the wicked men, and to suffer death upon the cross, who now liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Amen.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

The continuation of the Holy Gospel taken from John 5: 28 to 29.

Glory be to thee, O Lord.

“Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgement.”

This is the Gospel of Christ.

Glory be to God.

There is an old Celtic quote and those of you who have ever received an email from me will recognise these profound words below my signature.

Ponder them for a moment:

“Let your feet follow your heart until you find your place of resurrection...”

The quote I have just read to you is intensely profound. Keep these words in the back of your mind today, as we unpack some thoughts and ideas about the crucifixion and resurrection together.

When I was a young youth leader in a local church many years ago, a friend of mine passed along an evangelical book to me that I read and have never forgotten. Whilst I am unable to relate the exact story line verbatim, I have never forgotten the title of the book, nor the main idea that the book shared with me and many other people. The book was based on a very powerful sermon written by a certain Tony Compalo. (Many of his sermons are available online if you wish to listen to him) Tony is an American sociologist, pastor, author, public speaker and former spiritual advisor to U.S. President Bill Clinton. He is currently an Associate Pastor to the Mount Carmel Baptist Church in West Philadelphia.

The specific sermon (and later book) that Tony Compalo wrote so many years ago is the title of my sermon today: “It’s Friday but Sunday is a coming...”

I have often wondered why these words have stuck in my psyche for so many years, even through the heavy theological training that I underwent at Rhodes University. When I reflect upon that question now, I think the main reason is that these words offer hope, and hope is what every single one of us is continually looking for in our lives, especially during these challenging times.

Good Friday has a very special place in the liturgy of the Christian Church. It is right in the middle of the Paschal Triduum, or Three Days. This is the period of the three days that begins with the liturgy on the evening of Maundy Thursday and reaches the high point in the Easter vigil and closes with evening prayer on Easter Sunday. On Good Friday we remember the day Jesus willingly suffered and died by crucifixion as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. Many High Churches have solemn services that include the “Kissing of the Wood” and other sombre rituals. Indeed, the services and rituals re-enacted on Good

Friday are an important part of our spiritual journey and a stark reminder of the journey that Jesus undertook for us all.

However, as a young person, I always found the Good Friday services very intense and slightly melancholy, for want of a better word. I even wondered why on earth the church would call it “Good Friday” when in fact all we were doing was recalling and remembering the suffering that Jesus underwent. It was only years later that I understood that the idea of the liturgy being called “Good Friday” was that, as Christians, we were now able to mark the dramatic culmination of God’s plan to save his people from their sins.

I would like to suggest something different today by saying that as Christians, we can only fully understand and appreciate the full meaning of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ if we see it within the context of the resurrection, too.

Why do I say this?

As I reflected upon how best I could explain this to you in a metaphor, I recalled the first few days of every academic year when I used to return to Rhodes University in Grahamstown (now Makhanda). My spirits would sink. Yes, I wanted to be at university. Yes, I wanted to continue studying towards my Divinity degree. Yes, I wanted to see my colleagues. Yes, I wanted to continue experiencing residential life. However, whenever I returned to Rhodes, it would only be a matter of days until I would be reduced to tears and deeply depressed. I so missed Cape Town and my sailing in the Langebaan Lagoon. I so missed my friends and family. I so missed the mountains and the sea. I so missed the privilege of being able to drive on highways and enjoying traffic lights! (There weren’t many traffic lights in Grahamstown in those days. Perhaps it has changed now?)

You see, this was my cross to carry. This was my burden. This was my pain and suffering as a young man. These were the sacrifices that I had to make if I was to be true to my calling and complete my theological training. I was too spiritually young and immature to understand and realise that, in time, these life lessons (or the lessons of the cross) were to make me a deeper person, a person with depth and empathy, a person who knows what it is like to persevere, struggle and have determination. It is only now, some thirty years later, that I am able to look back at my times at Rhodes and understand that all

of these experiences were in fact ALL part of my formation as a Priest. My formation was NOT just about the happy times, or the times when my life made “sense” and was easy to live. My formation was also about all the times that I really struggled and was heartbroken with all my insecurity and lack of confidence in what I was doing. These dark times, at Rhodes were in a way, my sense of suffering or crucifixion.

So, you may well be asking, “What in God’s name kept me going?” “Why didn’t I just give it all up and take the easy route out?”

Exactly that.

God’s name. Except that the name that was being used was God calling me and me answering.

You see, for me to have hope through all of this (my crucifixion), I needed to have hope and a vision (my resurrection). My hope and vision through all of those dark days was the fact that I believed and knew that one day I would be an ordained Priest. If I did not have that hope and vision, there was no way on God’s earth that I would have been able to see through those dark days that were a necessary, but hard part of my journey and formation.

So it is with the crucifixion story on Good Friday, too. As Christians, we are only able to travel through the story of the Passion and crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ because we know, in the back of our minds, that there is hope, there is light and there is an ultimate plan that God has... and that is the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. This is what makes the journey through darkness and suffering so worthwhile, so complete and so beautiful. There is always, always hope in the Christian story and Gospel, for without that we are lost.

Tony Compalo knew this when he preached that powerful sermon on Good Friday all those years ago. While he related the suffering and pain that Jesus was going through, he continually interrupted his sermon with the words, “It’s Friday but Sunday is a coming”. By continually peppering his sermon with these powerful words, he was reminding us that all is not indeed lost. There is hope, for on Sunday our Lord rises from the dead and defeats the pain and suffering of the cross.

Perhaps you also recall the powerful Celtic quote that I read to you earlier on in the sermon? Let me share it with you again.

“Let your feet follow your heart until you find your place of resurrection...”

These words are just as special and powerful as Tony Campalo’s for they challenge each and every one of us to follow our hearts in Jesus. What does this mean practically? Well, if we stay close to Jesus, read the Word, pray and worship and really listen to what He has to say to us about our lives and journey, then we too can experience a powerful and beautiful resurrection of our spirit and being. We can become closer to God and ultimately, more of the person and soul that Jesus always wanted and calls us to be.

Our journeys will not always be easy. We all have a cross to bear of some sort. Some of us even have more than one cross to carry at any one time. We all struggle. We all endure pain and suffering. We all have dark days. However, if we are able, even if just slightly, to keep a peek of the vision of the resurrection of Jesus in our lives, then we have hope, then we have a goal, then we have strength, then we have determination and courage to carry on in our journey with Him. You see, the resurrection is the ultimate fulfilment of the crucifixion. So too, we are only able to fully appreciate our lives and the suffering we often endure, by looking back and seeing how far we have come because of God’s grace and love. This then becomes our own resurrection. We learn to own our own resurrection, live it and grow it so that we can move even closer to Christ.

Our challenge this Good Friday, as we remember the Passion and crucifixion of Jesus, is to remember our cross too, the times we have struggled or are struggling with in our lives. Once we are able to do that, then we have the privilege and excitement of remembering the glory of the resurrection and all that this means for our lives and the world.

Every blessing to you this Good Friday. Make it your God Friday for He is a living God. Sunday will prove that.

Amen.

