

## **Survival and Hope**

We never know what a week will bring, I'm sure for Kate Forbes, it will have been the most testing and trying week of her life, as she sets out her stall to becoming the First Minister of Scotland; deep down in that steely character, I'm sure, is hope, the hope that we have as Christians, based on the belief that God is with us in our testing and trials.

Testing and trials are part and parcel of what it is to be human.

In fact the Bible begins with the first people being tested, in Paradise, a paradise that quickly turns into a hell for our first people; from perfection to failure, from ease to hardship, all in the eating of an apple, or was it much more than this? The act of rebellion, and disobedience of humans against the love and grace of God.

So, the Bible begins with the first people being cast away from Paradise. They were literally stripped of all their privileges and banished from the Garden of Eden; they were driven out to work the land from which they had been taken...from dust they came, and to dust they now return.

In the wilderness, the story continues, sibling rivalry, murder and all sort of evil which become part and parcel of the world. Yes, the Bible tells it as it is! We are no better today!

What this opening story of God's Word tells us, is that life is going to be tough for human beings, from the moment that they open their eyes for the first time, till the moment they shut them for the last time.

We all know that life is often about survival, and through this short life we meet with many turns and twists, bumps on the road that will test us and stretch us to our limit and sometimes beyond – so the question is how do we survive?

A quote that I came across this week and sums up the temptations of Jesus,  
“Man can live about forty days without food,  
about three days without water, about eight minutes without air,  
but only for one second without hope.”

Whatever you may think the Devil to be or not be, there is no denying that there is a sinister force in this world, that seeks to destroy humanity, just ask the people in Eastern Ukraine.

There is a resistance to good and perfection, and the Bible story begins with evil creeping in and polluting the world with a deadly venom that results in sin and death.

This story is the framework for our Christian faith, that we live in a world that is far from perfect, a world that is fractured; this is mirrored in our own lives, and the Bible points the finger to this opening story of Genesis, and it asks the question, how does God sort this problem out?

Well, he does so through his Son Jesus.

One moment Jesus is basking in the sunshine of his baptism, the world is perfect, His Father is in Heaven, and has anointed him and Jesus has been given the title Son of God.

The next moment he is castaway into the wilderness of a lonely desert to endure 40 days without food and then comes severe testing from his enemy. He was literally stripped of everything.

Jesus now stands where the first man Adam stood.

What is it that the Devil wants of Jesus?

He wants Jesus to bow the knee to him.

He wants Jesus to doubt his relationship with his Father?

He wants to destroy Jesus' hope in God.

He wants to do what he did to Adam.

Jesus starting point was faith and trust in the Almighty God and God's promises through his word to him. He had a heart full of hope!

When Thomas Muir, elder of this church, was sent to Botany Bay as a political prisoner, one of the things that we know about Muir was that he led services on a Sunday amongst the prisoners.

Hope is powerful.

Satan gets right to the heart of the matter, he challenges Jesus' status as the Son of God, he taunts Jesus, if you are the Son of God, turn those stones into bread.

Satan knows where to strike – he goes immediately to Jesus' human weak point.

Come on Jesus show us your power, if you really are the Son of God, then this is easy for you, and Jesus immediately stands his ground. I would suspect with every fibre of his human body is crying out for bread but his response is perfect, man does not live on bread alone, but every word that comes from the mouth of God.

This is where Jesus finds hope!

It's not in himself, his strength, or wisdom but his hope comes from the Word of God.

When we are being tested, tempted and attacked by a power that appears greater than ourselves – where do we go to for help? Jesus went to the power that was greater than his accuser, he went to the source of life, and God speaks into this temptation, that the food he needed more than anything else was God's presence with him. God would sustain him.

Where do we find our strength when the world turns against us?

Where will Kate Forbes find her strength this weekend? I would expect in the hope that she has in God's mercy and love.

Where do the people of Ukraine find hope in their testing? Well, the Bible Society tells us that there is a hunger for God's Word in Ukraine.

Satan attacks Jesus' relationship with God, if you are the Son of God...do this...do that....

We do not need to prove God's love to us.

We are a child of God simply because God loves us...we do not need to turn stones to bread or jump off a temple...God loves us for who we are his child.

His love has been demonstrated to us through the love of Jesus on a cross.

This is where the ultimate battle with evil is fought on the cross of Calvary but that comes later in the Easter story.

If you ever doubt his love, turn to the cross and hear Jesus say, "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing".

Today, we have entrusted Jack into the love of God, and we trust in God's covenant with us, that He will be faithful and all he asks us to do is trust in his mercy.

There are times when we will despair of the world. When we look out and see the mess that the world is in.

At times like this, let us turn to God and trust that he is in this with us and trust that ultimately the victory is His.

The Bible begins in a garden of Paradise and it ends in a garden of Paradise, and so the world is restored through Jesus Christ and his sacrifice. God has given us a glimpse of our destiny which is Paradise restored.

Let us learn from Jesus today, keep hope alive, trust in the One who has won the ultimate victory and go forward for he has redeemed you and you need not be afraid.