

In Rest You Shall Be Saved

I love the passage we have read in Isaiah this morning
“In returning and rest you shall be saved
In quietness and trust shall be your strength”

Isaiah is writing to a people who have not trusted
Who have not rested
And the penalty for this is dear.

Because they have rested in the wrong things
In big horse, and they have loved to go quickly on those horses, to fly on them
Then one day they will run way for safety on them.

Because they have ridden on fast horses
Their pursuers will also be fast.

It is a story here that if you place your strength on a false strength
Then the thing you lean upon
Will one day destroy you.

But if you lean on God who is the true strength
Then in this way will you be saved
In this kind of trust
Will you be made strong.

There is a lack of frenetic activity to this
There is a lack of panic to this
But this also feels like something that requires a certain discipline
And trust.

This is not a glib trust, It is a kind of trusting that we grow into
And as we grow into it, we grow strong.

Let me give you a picture of this this morning,
The picture I want to give you this morning is of a funambulist
A funambulist.

And in particular, the greatest funambulist who has ever lived.

His name was Charles Blondin.

He was born in France in 1824,
And on 1855, he performed for the first time the act of funambulism for which he was most famous, he cross the Niagara Gorge – all 1,100 feet of it on a tight rope.

Tight rope walking is Funambulism.

Ever the great showman, Blondin added to his act
He crossed blindfolded
He crossed with a wheelbarrow
He crossed and sat on a chair with only one
He even crossed with a stove and cooked with an omelette.
He once crossed carrying a man – his manager – on his back.

Sometimes faith – and you can find people doing this on the internet – faith is depicted as accepting the invitation that Blondin once gave, to sit in the wheelbarrow, whilst Blondin pushed across.

I don't think that is the illustration of faith that fits with what I see in the Bible
Nor even in this passage which asks us to trust and rest.

Faith is what Blondin did,
He had learnt to put all his trust in the rope.

He wasn't panicked by the view, he was scared by the uniqueness of what he was doing
He was prepared to trust.

That I think is what it is like to learn to trust in God,
Although I could expand the analogy and say that faith has also a safety net which is forgiveness
But learning to trust, in each moment
Putting the foot down and without fear knowing that God will hold you.

Now what of this idea, this idea of trust,
Though
What is this trust that is called rest and returning.

How do we live like this.

I want to suggest first of all that rest is in some senses a lack of activity
It is the activity of God on the Sabbath
It is the activity of cutting out all the extra things
Of not panicking.

It is recognising that our life is full of clutter and chatter and activity.
Much of it not needed,
In Fact like the steeds and horses in this parallel – much of it destructive.

It is in the stillness of resting.

I recently read a book on our phones called indistractable,
And it was about how not to let your phone dominate your life.

I was not surprised that at the end of the book there were lots of tips about cutting out your notifications, keeping your phone away from you and so on.

But at the start, what was interesting was that the writer said that all of us live our lives in pain, all of us live our lives with a fear,
And we have to recognise that what we are doing with our phone
Is distracting ourselves from pain and fear.

And instead what we need is a way of putting our trust in God
To deal with our fears and our pain and our restless activity which so often are a form of running way.

So what are the practices that can help us here.

Well one is pure silence, rest, forms of prayer which call us into silence.

Thomas Keating was a Catholic Monk who lived in a monastery in the States. In the 1960s, during the time of Hippy's and the popularity of Transcendental Meditation, he was struck by the number of people particularly young Americans who would turn up at his monastery wanting to learn to pray or meditated, because up to now they had only discovered how to do this in Buddhism. And Keating taught that Christianity is full of this, full of this understanding. He taught people centering prayer, whereby they would use a word to call themselves back to the presence of God. You can do this for 5 minutes or 10 minutes or 20 minutes.

You will be surprised what happens when you do this, there is a strength that comes to this for the rest of your day. The opposite of how you feel when you have been on your phone too long. Who knew that proper resting in God, makes you stronger, gives you energy.

Or perhaps we might learn what people in this part of the world have always known, that prayer each day is about locating ourselves and resting in God.

The Celts used to have circle prayers, in which they rested in the presence of God here, they had a name for it, it was called Caim, and they would say Christ be within me, all darkness be outside me; love be within me, all hatred be without me. Christ is here.

Or a man called Alexander Carmichael who was an excisemen in the Islands who as well as collecting Excise, also collected prayers, in Gaelic, and published them in a famous volume called Carmina Gadelica which means the songs of the Gaels.

God be with me lying down
God be with me rising up
God be with me in each ray of light
Nor I a ray of joy without Him,
Nor one ray without him.

Christ with me sleeping
Christ with me waking
Christ with me watching
Every day and night
Each day and night

God with me protecting
The Lord with me directing
The Spirit with me strengthening
For ever and evermore
Ever and evermore
Chief of Chiefs
AMEN

And I would urge us to learn these practices of rest in amongst all that assails us.

We are twisted by so many values which perhaps we unlearned a little during Covid, and have to keep unlearning.

It is not in the strength of our horse, or our car
It is not in the size of our house
For if we lean on them, these things will crush us

It is not in our phone or our tablet
For if we lean on those things they will eat our souls
And they will not take away our pain, they will only kick it down the road.

Instead it is learning to stand rest and trust in him
In Christ who is in all places
Every day,
Every day

And when this happens a strange newness
The Holy Spirit comes into us
And changes us – imperceptibly – without us knowing
One of the remarkable things about centering prayer
Is that you don't feel it happening
You don't feel it working
It just does.

Pierre Teilhard De Chardin, a palaeontologist, who understood the slow work of time
Notice here that the opposite here is trusting in things of speed
Once wrote of this trust. "Above all, trust in the slow work of God."
In some words that have become so important to me

Give our Lord the benefit of believing
That his hand is leading you;

And accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
In suspense and incomplete.

Trust him, he is here in Christ he is here
Put your trust in him
And he will make you truly strong

Take away your trust in vain and empty things
And give yourself to him each day

As those disciples rested with Jesus
Ate with him
Realised he would always be with them

So to us,
Rest in Christ
Rest in Christ

AMEN