

Vicar's Letter #18: 20 August, 2020

Be strong in the Lord

Dear Parishioners

In our epistle reading for this Sunday, St Paul writes, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his power" (Ephesians 6:10). With our nation facing the delta variant of covid-19, this is a time when strength is needed. But St Paul adds an important understanding. We don't need to do be strong in our own power. We can rely on the power of God.

Psychologists often tell us that our resilience is affected not so much by the things that happen to us as by the way we look at them. It is true that the delta variant of Covid-19 is present in our community, but that does not mean that we are without resources. Our leaders have once again decided to follow the best scientific advice to "go hard and go early" so as to eradicate the virus. That is positive. Thousands of health professionals, contact tracers, and other workers are doing all they can to defeat the virus in our country. That is encouraging. New Zealanders as a whole understand the need to be thoroughgoing in our lockdown response to the virus, because we have seen in New South Wales that a compromised lockdown will not be successful. That is helpful.

In the face of this major challenge to our country, we can give thanks for all of these things. But above and beyond all of them, God's powerful love and care is there for us, and we can gain even more strength as we put our trust in God.

We can tend to think of putting trust in God as a passive exercise. We trust and God acts. There is a biblical basis for this. For example, when the escaping people of Israel were about to be attacked by the army of Pharaoh, Moses said to the people, "The Lord will fight for you and you have only to keep still" (Exodus 14:14). But often we need to exercise trust in a way that is not passive. In the Ephesians reading, Paul urges the Christians of his day to trust God by taking active measures to prepare themselves for the spiritual battle. They are to do this by putting on the whole armour of God.

Before our Zoom service on Sunday (the address details for which are provided in this week's Newlink), I encourage you to read Ephesians 6:10-20. The armour and weaponry that St Paul writes about include the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes to equip people to proclaim the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. In this passage, prayer is also spoken of, because prayer is a key resource in the spiritual battle that we are all called to engage in.

At times when we are faced with a powerful opponent such as Covid-19, we can become pre-occupied or frightened by our opponent's power. But whatever we face, we can look to God for the power we need to be strong, and we can exercise the power that God freely offers us.

Let us stay strong and encourage others at this time. Let us also continue to pray for all who are sick or anxious, those who are in difficulty because of the lockdown, and those who are working hard to remove this threat from our country.

May God bless and encourage you and those for whom you pray.

Peter Bengt

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