

St Luke's day: 17.10.2020 Suzanne R Hyde

Good morning! Can you hear me clearly? It's quite refreshing not to be asked to 'unmute'

Well we are certainly living in discombobulating times!

Thinking about today's reading, particularly the one from

2 Timothy, I felt myself almost envying St Paul as he

proclaimed 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished

the race, I have kept the faith.' We of course, are all still

in the middle of a most challenging and exhausting

battle. When Covid and then Lockdown first began, as a

Nation we embraced the collective challenge to stay safe,

to do our bit and indeed many people found creative and

constructive ways to re-structure their lives and the St

Marylebone HCC did too! As restrictions eased we

enjoyed greater freedom, but just when we thought the

end of the race was in sight, we turn the corner and

realised we still have a long, complex road ahead of us.

The problem is most of us have used up our resources -

and our resilience, patience and optimism are failing. I have noticed in my own clients that they are struggling far more now than earlier in this pandemic. And of course we are facing dark winter nights as well as further restrictions – the mood all around us and that I heard articulately expressed by Lord Hennessy on Radio 4 is that: ‘we face what must be a winter of bleakness, loss and widespread anxiety...a perilous winter.’ Sorry – a rather bleak way to start! But hang in there..... So whilst feeling rather envious of Paul, I then read the context of this letter to his much missed friend Timothy. In fact, his letter overall is rather subdued. Historians believe Paul wrote this letter after he had been arrested and imprisoned, and shortly after this he suffered a martyr’s death. He confides to Timothy that he misses his friends, that winter is coming, he feels his death is imminent and he speaks bitterly of the failure of many of his friends to stand by him. It’s all now sounding rather familiar. I wonder how many of our emails, letters and

texts have followed a similar pattern over the past months. But the crucial thread that runs through the whole letter is that 'he knows 'who he has believed in' [2 Tim 2, 11-13] and despite all he holds firmly to his faith. Even though St Paul can't hide his despondency, he still encourages his colleagues [in the chapter before [2 Timothy 3] to hold on to sound doctrine, right conduct and to oppose false teaching and to be steadfast in their response to all situations. Paul here is talking of course about being 'resilient'. Resilience is not denying the gravity of a situation or just covering over our feelings with jolly platitudes but making a realistic appraisal of a situation and at the same time holding fast to our beliefs and values. This was brought home to me in an assessment I was doing the other day. I had been asked to explore someone's resilience. I was struck when the person, who was recovering from a recent psychiatric admission, said they had realised that 'resilience' wasn't

just a matter of just ‘pushing through.’ They thought because they had ‘survived’ many terrible things over their lifetime, that they were resilient. However, Lockdown had revealed their deep vulnerability and they had suffered – along with one in four people in the UK - increased mental illness over the past months.

Wikipedia provides a helpful definition of resilience ‘Psychological resilience is the ability to mentally or emotionally cope with a crisis or to return to pre-crisis status quickly. Resilience exists when the person uses "mental processes and behaviors in promoting personal assets and protecting the self from the potential negative effects of stressors". As I talked with this person, they shared the things they were now putting in place to help them to develop their capacity to weather the current storms.

Whilst resilience is a current buzz word, Jesus got there – as usual – way before we did. In our reading from St

Luke's Gospel, Jesus, whilst appreciating that there was an enormous amount of work to do and not enough people to do it [sound familiar], he takes time to prepare them for the difficulties that lie ahead – in essence, to adopt behaviours that will increase their resilience.

He counsels them [and having looked at many of the Mental Health organisations current Advice pages, the advice is remarkably similar] to:

- Firstly, he exhorts them to make sure they travel with someone else. Good advice for us all – don't go it alone! Reach out to others – stay in touch through all the resources we have at hand. Just having someone else's perspective on a situation can help to shift our own position and make us less susceptible to 'going down rabbit holes' as I like to call them i.e. thought processes that are negative and self-destructive.
- He instructs them to choose carefully who they associate with. Also important for us to be with people

who encourage and support us. We also need to be careful about what we read and listen to. Jesus cautions them: ‘you are lambs among wolves’. We can be remarkably naïve and like Pollyanna, want the world to be how we would like it to be, not how it is.

- He encourages them to ‘travel light’; to not be encumbered by possessions and paraphernalia. How many of us have become aware of how much clutter and unnecessary baggage we carry. Having less can help us to appreciate what we do have.
- He also urges them not to be pre-occupied with outcomes, but to focus on what they have been commissioned to do. If people receive and make use of what we give them – that’s great, if they don’t that’s not our business and we don’t need to lose sleep over it. Many times, Jesus reminds us to just focus on what is within our circle of influence and control and not to get busy with what everyone else is doing. This is a key factor in mental health and often media sources can

contribute to anxiety and confusion as we are influenced by what others are doing and saying.

- Jesus also encourages them to ‘receive’ from others and to attend to their physical needs. He obviously predicted the pandemic as he exhorts them not to go ‘from house to house’, but to stay in one place [sorry I couldn’t resist]. But seriously, It’s never been more important to make sure that we look after ourselves and ensure that our basic needs for sleep, good nutritious food, gentle exercise and rest are being met. I often check in with my clients on how they are doing in these areas. Recently, I had breakfast with a lovely friend, who is working in A & E in a London Hospital. I was so impressed as she shared how she has ‘up-scaled’ her own personal self-care during these times, despite working 13 hour shifts! Even though she’s a hero – she recognises that she doesn’t have super-powers and needs to rest and replenish. Someone else told me that they set themselves small goals, like

making their bed every day or just writing in a gratitude journal a few minutes each day. If we are not sleeping well it affects our judgement and increases our anxiety. In Japanese Prisoner of War camps they used to wake prisoners up every hour, so that when they interrogated them, they were often disoriented, anxious and unable to sustain their resistance.

Overall, Jesus is saying that in order to be a healing force in the world and effectively do His work, we have to make sure we prepare ourselves for the challenges ahead, not just mindlessly or frantically react to situations around us.

I know last year when I preached I spoke about the film *The Joker*. In finishing today, I want to mention a rather more nourishing and inspiring film, that is currently showing on Netflix, called *My Octopus Teacher* [it's great

for kids too!] It's a beautiful documentary where a filmmaker, having a sort of breakdown of his own, starts snorkling and comes across an Octopus camouflaged by lots of beautiful shells and only shakes them off when it feels safe. By developing a relationship with the Octopus the filmmaker begins to slowly learn how to take care of himself and to become re-invigorated by the beauty of life as well as acknowledging it's terrible and sometimes destructive forces.

What struck me in reflecting on resilience, is that there is a misconception that resilience is something you either possess or don't. However, resilience is something we can choose to 'develop' through difficult times by drawing on the resources within ourselves and around us. It isn't something magical. The person I mentioned earlier had grasped this and was able to see how she needed to create new habits to help her respond to difficulties and challenges. Or as one writer comments: "No matter how

bleak or menacing a situation may appear, it does not entirely own us. It can't take away our freedom to respond, our power to take action.”

— **Ryder Carroll**

I heard a quote recently that ‘we are all in the same storm, but we are not all in the same boat.’ I think this applies to resilience too – what works for one person, may not for another. We have to discover our own particular tool-kit to navigate the crazy waters that we find ourselves in. Jesus exhorts us to ‘speak peace’ to those we encounter but we are also in need of that peace ourselves before we can sustainably reach out to others. So wherever you are in your personal boat – it may be a lonely one, or it may be crowded with children/or people dependent on you, I hope you will find the strength to navigate safely through and that your resilience will be developed and that with St Paul you can confidently say

'you have fought the good fight, you have finished the
race, you have kept the Faith'

Amen