

## **Message for February 6, 2022**

**1 Chronicles 22:6-10**

**Matthew 11:25-30**

In many ways the protest that began in Ottawa last weekend almost seems to be 'un-Canadian'. Protests and demonstrations are of course a part of any healthy and democratic society but this one is different. Indeed the behaviour of some of the protestors has been and still is appalling including as it does the disrespect and even desecration of national monuments, demanding food at a homeless shelter, wearing swastikas, and waving a Confederate flag. Such behaviour in fact may well lead us to ask, "what on earth is going on?"

The protest of course began with some truck drivers who are very angry about the requirement that they be vaccinated or else go into isolation if their trips involve going to and returning from the United States. Then however, it seems as if any group or person who is unhappy about something 'jumped on the bandwagon', proclaiming their unhappiness about such as the party in power, the pandemic restrictions or the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic makeup of Canadian society today. As reflected by their signs and behaviour, there was and still is so much raw anger. In fact in many ways, it seems to be like a great big temper tantrum. Perhaps though we shouldn't be surprised by all of this.

In large part due to the pandemic, we are living in a very stressful time and if we do not think so, then all we have to do is consider road rage for example. Road rage has always been around but the number of such incidents has been steadily increasing over the years. As a report recently put out by an insurance company states however, there has been a real uptick in such incidents since the start of the pandemic. So many people today for so many reasons are like sticks of dynamite, just waiting for someone or something to set them off. Yes, while stress and frustration have always been a part of life, things seem to be worse today, but how should we as the disciples of Christ deal with such feelings? Today's first scripture passage provides us with an answer.

David was undoubtedly the greatest king in Israel's history and as the king, he had three great goals or ambitions. First of all, he wanted to be militarily successful and establish Israel's independence. Secondly, he wanted to establish Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Last, but certainly not least, David

also wanted to build a glorious temple for God. History tells us that David achieved the first two of these goals but as for the last one, building the temple? It was not to be. It wasn't because David, the man after God's own heart, was also a man of war. As God said, "You have shed much blood and have waged great wars. You shall not build a house in my name because you have shed so much blood before me on the earth." In other words, it was not fitting that David, the great warrior, build God's temple which would be a house of peace. Rather than David build it, God wanted David's son Solomon to do so.

There can be no doubt that this news bitterly disappointed David since building a glorious house for God was one of his great dreams, but how did David deal with his disappointment? He didn't become angry or just walk away from his pet project as some people might have. Instead, despite his intense disappointment, David accepted the situation. In fact David did not just accept it, he went one step further and made the best of it by ensuring that enough money and supplies were set aside to help Solomon build it. And while today's first scripture passage does not say so, I firmly believe that David, being the great man of faith that he most certainly was, also did something else as well. I don't doubt for a moment that David prayed to God about the situation, telling him about his frustration and disappointment. In the words of the old gospel hymn, he took it to the Lord in prayer.

This then is the story of David and the greatest disappointment in his life. David was so disappointed and even frustrated when he was not allowed to fulfill his dream and build the temple, but the way in which he handled his feelings surely speaks to us.

Frustration and disappointment are an inescapable fact of life and these feelings have many different causes. Some of us for example may be frustrated by the fact that we are growing older and can no longer do things as easily as we used to when we were younger. Others of us perhaps experience frustration and disappointment with our jobs. Sometimes we may be so very frustrated and disappointed by the gulf between the way that things have turned out in our lives and the way that we hoped they would. Truly anger, disappointment and frustration are an unavoidable part of life, and the big question is how we handle these feelings.

People handle these feelings in many different ways. Some people for example become apathetic or resigned. In more extreme cases they may even

withdraw from life and their involvement with others altogether. A good illustration of a person being overwhelmed by life's pain, hurt, and disappointment may be found in Simon and Garfunkel's song of years gone by, "I am a Rock".

"I am a rock, I am an island,  
I have no need of friendship,  
Friendship causes pain,  
It's laughing and it's loving, I disdain."

This song ends with the bleak affirmation that a rock feels no pain and an island never cries. Other people however become cynical and sneer at everything. Who cares, they ask, or what's the point? And of course, as demonstrated by the protesters in Ottawa, some people deal with their frustrations by erupting in sheer, unthinking anger. Truly there are a host of ways in which disappointment and frustration are handled but surely the best approach is that of David.

First of all David, however reluctantly perhaps, accepted the situation and then chose to make the best of it. Now this is not of course to say that we should always blindly and unthinkingly accept things the way they are, but even so we may often create needless frustration and disappointment for ourselves by banging our heads against a stone wall as if it were, trying to change the unchangeable or demanding the impossible whether it be of ourselves, others, or even life itself. This is something that the famed comedian of days gone by, Groucho Marx once did.

Many years ago, a charity baseball game was held in Hollywood between the Comedians and the Actors. Groucho Marx was the manager for the Comedians. He had Jack Benny lead off and said to him, "All right Benny. Get up there and hit a home run". Benny got up there but instead of hitting a home run, he promptly struck out. And what was Marx's response? Instead of laughing, he angrily quit, saying, "I can't manage a team that won't follow instructions". Groucho's demand was certainly unreasonable since no ball player can be ordered to hit a home run, but was Groucho's demand any more unreasonable than some of ours? How often do we expect or even demand the impossible in life and then get so angry or so disappointed when we don't get it? Truly one of the best ways to avoid some of life's frustrations is by not

demanding the impossible in the first place. Rather we should remember the words of the famous Serenity Prayer:

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

This brings us to the second way of handling life’s frustrations and disappointments: prayer.

People of course pray at different times for many different reasons. Sometimes people pray when they are in trouble and need help or guidance. At other times people pray to confess, while sometimes people pray to give thanks to God. Surely one of the greatest reasons or times for prayer though is when we feel disappointed and frustrated. To do this however may make some people feel very uneasy. They feel reluctant to honestly tell God how they feel, thinking that it isn’t right to complain to God or to tell him how hurt, angry, or disappointed we are. To think this way is perfectly understandable but we should also remember Jesus himself.

Do we really believe that Jesus in his humanity never ever felt disappointed or frustrated? How disappointed must he have felt for example when he was forsaken by all of his disciples on the night in which he was betrayed! Jesus is truly well aware of life’s frustrations and disappointments. In fact Jesus is not just aware of them, he even invites us to share ours with him in prayer. All we need to do is remember his words in today’s New Testament passage: “Come to me all you who labour and are over-burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Jesus invites us to turn to him when we feel over-burdened, frustrated, disappointed or even full of anger. And when we do so he has promised that he *will* give us the rest, peace, and strength that only he can. As a great theologian of days gone by, Philip Malanchthon, said, “Trouble and perplexity drives us to prayer, and prayer driveth away trouble and perplexity.” Truer words were never said, and we should take them to heart. Troubles and perplexity drive us to prayer, but prayer drives away all of our trouble and perplexity. Or, as Jesus himself said, “Come to me all you who labour and are over-burdened, and I will give you rest.” If we do so, then he will.

## **Pastoral Prayer**

Gracious God, in the old gospel hymn, “What a Friend we have in Jesus”, we are encouraged to bring anything and everything to you in prayer; hear us now as we do just that.

We give you thanks for the privilege of coming to you in prayer. You are God, the Almighty, the Creator, the one who is so far beyond us and yet, as great as you are, you still want us to talk to you as good friends do, sharing with you whatever may be on our minds.

We thank you for the prayers granted and the blessings that we have received and experienced. At those times when our prayers do not seem to have been answered the way that we hoped or even thought that they should have been, help us to put our faith and trust in you.

We pray for all those who have, for whatever reason, lost their faith and trust in you. We pray for those who are ill, and those who mourn the loss of a loved one. We pray for all who feel hurt, disappointed, and even angry about the circumstances in which they have been placed as the pandemic with all of its restrictions and implications continues.

We thank you that we live in a nation and society where basic rights and freedoms are a reality, but we remember and pray too for the people in Ottawa whose lives and livelihoods have been so disrupted by the on-going protest. We pray as well for those in positions of authority as they strive to keep the balance between freedom and law and order.

We remember and pray for the other troubled places of your creation this day, such as the situation in Ukraine. We pray too for the sake of your very creation itself. Grant that we, individually and collectively, may treasure it and use its resources carefully and wisely for the good of all. Truly may your love and compassion, and ours as well, be over all that you have made.

We ask these things in your Son's name. Amen