



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC006973

Reading 2 Cor. 7

Sermon: 20 September 2009

CHRIST HAS NO HANDS BUT OURS

Text: "2 COR.7:" *But God, who comforts the downcast, (the lowly) comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort you had given him".*

In this week`s news there was the terrible *news- clip* of an eight year old girl who was used by Iraqi jihadists as a human bomber.

This young girl was strapped with remote controlled explosives by Muslim insurgents in a blast that killed an Iraqi officer and injured seven other soldiers.

This is probably not an isolated incident. Involving women and children in fighting, violates religious taboos. However, Jihad extremists are recruiting women and children on a daily base to stage suicide attacks in a desperate attempt to beat the tightened security measures.

Comments on this news varied from "*How low jihad has sink*", "*truly unbelievable*" to: "*these are Islamic barbarians.*"

However, the question mostly asks was: Where were the parents or carers of this unfortunate girl?

Could it be that she had nobody who cares for her – *no support, not a helping hand, no compassion from anyone?*

Listening to this awkward cruel act, I was thinking of a young boy in the 1800`s who wrote: "*I feel instinctively that I am good for something, that there is some point to my existence What could it be? What service could I perform?*"

Growing up, he searched for life. As a young man, he moved to Paris and became friends with a young Englishman with whom he studied the Bible. He began working in a little church and occasionally taught the Bible and gave sermons.

Surely, he felt that he was in the process of fulfilling his life and he wrote in his diary: "*Woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel; if I do not aim at that and posses faith and hope in Christ, it would be bad for me indeed..... It is a delightful thought that in the future wherever I go I shall preach the Gospel.*"

This young man had a dream, a clear vision of his purpose in live. He knew that God had called him to ministry and he was inspired by his faith in God and love for God.

However, he failed to get into the Theological School. But in 1879, he was assigned to preaching the Gospel among poverty-stricken children in Belgium. It was very hard work and spiritually exhausting. As a young man, he could not manage the circumstances in Belgium and he became very discouraged.

He had no one *who had compassion with him.*

While he aided the sick and poor, the Church authority issued a report saying that his ability to preach was lacking.

He had no one to *comfort* him.

As a result he was dismissed, had no income or shelter and his dream of proclaiming the Gospel was shattered.

There was no one to *encourage* him.

One morning he packed his few possessions, plodded down the road in bare feet, head bent and left. The children whom he served in the most terrible circumstances, shouted after him: "*He is mad, he is mad!*"

He left the town, he left the idea of ministry, He turned away from God decided to become an *artist*.

He had *nobody to comfort* him

To make the story short:

During his whole lifetime, he sold only one painting. In the final 70 days of his life, he painted 70 paintings. He became *unstable, unhappy, frenzy and was losing touch with reality*.

There was nobody to encourage him.

One evening he borrowed a pistol, went into the field and shot himself.

The name of this man is *Vincent van Gogh*

The name of the girl in Iraq..... I really do not know!

All that I know is *that there was nobody for her*.

We are all a combination of *strengths and weaknesses, of good points and bad points*. We all journey the road of being on *top of the world and down in the dumps*. Sometimes we are *not in control* of the situation like the Iraqi girl. Sometimes we make *our own choices* like Vincent van Gogh.

Paul admits the same experience in his life. This man who wrote in the well known Philippians Chapter 4 about the "*peace of God, which transcends all understanding*" and that he "*can do anything through Christ who gives me strength*" also wrote in 2 Cor. 7:5 "*When we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn - conflicts on the outside, fears within*"

One translation says: "There were wars without and fears within"

Let us just recall for a moment the situation in Corinth:

Things had gone wrong with the ministry in the congregation. In an attempt to mend them, Paul had paid a flying visit, which only made the situation worse and nearly broke his heart. After the failure of his visit, he had despatched Titus with a letter of quite sternness and severity. He was so worried and tensed about the outcome of the whole unhappy business that he was quite unable to rest or relax at Troas, although there was much that he might have done.

The only thing on his mind was to meet Titus on his way back from Corinth in order to get encouraging news from him as soon as possible. So he set out to meet Titus along the road. He met him somewhere in Macedonia and learned to his overflowing joy that the trouble was over, the division was healed and all was well and back to normal!

But the passage however doesn't stop with verse 5. Verse 6 opens with the words: "*But God, who comforts the downcast, (the lowly), comforted us*".

Encouragement is one of God's greatest provisions.

So if you are feeling downcast today, down in the dumps or feel that all your dreams and planning are gone with the wind ...

Remember: God is comforting you. He has compassion with you in your situation. He wants you to be happy again, to have a vision and hope and to experience your purpose in life.

How does God encourage and comfort us?

God comforts us with certain promises in *His Word* that meet our particular need. Perhaps you are feeling anxious. You cannot like Paul relax, because you are not sure of the future or worried about your finances, your health or your children.

Listen to the encouraging news what God says in Isaiah: "*Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name, you are mine.*"

He also comforts through the *act of worship*. David says in Ps. 84: "*blessed are those who dwell in your house; they ever praising you. Blessed are those whose strength is in You, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage*".

We believe that the Church as the Body of Christ is the communion of believers. The NT doesn't just emphasizes my personal faith and relationship with Christ, but also the corporate faith of the believers in the Church-the fellowship of all Christians.

We do need fellowship and we do need one another. Singing songs (hymns) is a wonderful act of worship, which not only is an opportunity praising the name of the Lord, but also creates fellowship and encourages our faith in God.

He comforts us through answering our prayers and by the workings of his personal providence. Jesus says: Matt. 7:7 "*Ask and it will be given to you seek and you will find; knock and the door will be open to you*". He also taught the disciples: "*give us our daily bread*".

However, God also comforts us through a fellow believer.

Paul was encouraged through the arrival of Titus.

God imparted Paul through his servant who showed up with very good news.

It is wonderful to think that your post card to a friend you have seen a long time ago, a telephone call to someone who lost his job or the flowers one of the ladies will take after the service to a lonesome or sick person will make their day!

Furthermore, encouragement is the gift that keeps on giving. In this passage, the Corinthians, despite all their problems and differences had somehow managed to encourage Titus. Titus on his way back to Macedonia had encouraged Paul who wrote this letter. This morning we could read his letter and we are greatly encouraged by it. When we go back home in a few minutes we have the opportunity to comfort somebody who feels hopeless or lonesome. It could be by a gentle word, a prayer or just be a shoulder to lean on.

We read in Proverbs 15, "*Even a gentle word turns wrath away and brings comfort. The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life.*"

WE ARE CALLED TO BE TREES OF LIFE!

But there is also a ripple effect to our simple acts of encouragement that continues until Christ returns.

Jesus had always compassion with the poor, the sick and the sinners and we have read that Jesus Invites us all: "*Come to me, all you are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*"

An Old Story

Following World War 11, some German students volunteered to help rebuild a cathedral in England that had been badly damaged by the Luftwaffe bombings. As the work progressed, they weren't sure how to best restore a large statue of Jesus with arms outstretched and bearing the familiar inscription, "*Come unto Me*". They repaired everything except Christ's hands, which had been completely destroyed. After considerable thought, they decided to leave the hands off, and underneath to place this inscription:

"Christ has no hands but ours."

I cannot help wondering what would happen in those early days of the ministry of Vincent van Gogh if he had only one person giving him some kind of encouragement.

I wonder what would happen to the eight-year-old unknown girl if she only could have some comfort ...some compassion.

Jesus has no hands, but ours!

Amen

Prayer

I know by faith that my life is a gift.
God created me so that he could love me.
He is with me at every moment.
Each day is filled with opportunities to grow closer to him.
But life is hard.
My faith is weak.
I do not always see the signs of God's love in my life.
Sometimes I feel lost and alone.
Sometimes I withdraw into myself,
and close myself to God's love,
and fall into sin.
Then life seems not a gift, but a burden hard to bear.
Yet God does not forsake me.
When the light of faith dawns once more,
and I turn back to him,
I see that his love never fails.
I see that no day is too long or lonely,
no burden too heavy,
no trial too great,
because God is with me.

Amen