

Christ Church Freemantle

Sunday 16th August – 10th Sunday after Trinity

Keeping on, keeping on.....

Life has changed for us all – and it's now almost five months since Lockdown began. At first it seemed strange but novel – we tended our gardens, phoned each other pretty regularly, rejoiced in the quietness of the roads and the clean air, tried out new recipes (if we could get the ingredients), made the most of the peace that seemed to enfold us. We didn't like it – but we sort of knew where we were.

But five months is a long time. And now we're in a much more uncertain phase. Should we go out or stay at home? Where and when do we have to wear a mask? What's the risk of getting on a bus? And above all – how long is this going to go on for?

We met up last week with our elder son and family for the first time since February. The twins (aged 14) had grown inches, and become real teenagers, they were enjoying discovering the New Forest in a short holiday.

"It's just been so boring" they said to me over lunch, *"School work wasn't the same online, we're really looking forward to getting back to school in September. But we guess things won't be any better by Christmas."* Two bright boys who'd made the most of the restrictions, kept up with exercise and activities at home, yet whose outlook is becoming more challenged as the weeks go by. *"Keeping on, keeping on"* is becoming harder.

It's true of all of us I guess. Life has become very humdrum; washing and housework on Monday, shopping on Friday (in the "wrinklies" hour for safety in my case). A walk on The Common, a coffee in the garden with neighbours, rather fewer phone calls to friends (there's no news to relate!) – it's all predictable, and yes a bit boring. Our stamina is stretched in "keeping on".

The Canaanite woman in today's Gospel (read Matthew 15. 21-28) had been coping with her sick daughter probably for many years. "Tormented by a demon" is how the Gospel puts it – we'd say "had mental problems" today. Long-term illness of that sort, for both sufferer and carer, has elements of both strain and boredom for anyone – how long can this illness last, when are we to be free from it? Can we keep on keeping on?

So she comes to Jesus, desperate for his help, shouting out publicly, *"Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David."* And despite being pushed away by his disciples, and the initial reaction of Jesus himself, *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* the woman persists, kneeling at Jesus feet and imploring him to help her



daughter. It still seems Jesus is unwilling to meet her needs, “*It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs*”. Harsh words indeed – perhaps bordering on the insulting. Yet the woman is quick-witted in her response – she keeps on. “*Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table*”. And Jesus is won over - both by the woman’s faith and her persistence. “*Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.*” We aren’t told whether or not the daughter is present, but we do know that prayer is answered – she was healed instantly.

The story is one of the pivotal points in the Gospels, as Jesus comes to realise that his mission is not just for the Jews, but for all humanity. “***I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself***” he comes to say in John 12.32. Jesus’ love extends to all people everywhere in all ages.

None of us knows what the course of this pandemic will be, whether things will get worse before they get better, when a vaccine will become available, what “normality” will be – whenever it arrives. We just have to “keep on”.

We look around our world and see others in far worse conditions than we ourselves are. The people of Beirut, struggling to come to terms with the aftermath of that gigantic explosions, bereft of any governmental help, crying out to the world for assistance to end corruption and rebuild their nation. The people of Yemen, still in the midst of an unending war; the Belarus people fighting political oppression and corruption. There’s an awful lot of “keeping on” needed in our world today. In World War two, Winston Churchill had an expression which became famous (and is probably not best printed in a church context), but it meant the same thing – “*keep on keeping on*” - *don’t give up*. And as we know from this week’s celebration of VJ Day the battle was eventually won.

Whatever the uncertainty, however long the road, we do know is that our Lord will be with us through it all – we just have to “keep on, keeping on”, making the best of things, persisting in finding a way forward. Faith in Jesus will keep us going, just as it did the Canaanite woman so long ago.

May God bless all our persistence, and bring us through to better days.

Ian Coomber