

SERMON

Matthew 17:1-13
Deuteronomy 18:15-19

“Faith Booster”

Let us pray ...

Good morning, church! This is how I normally begin my sermon. But actually, nothing is *normal* right now. And whether it's right to greet you good *morning*, I also don't. Because I don't know if you are following this service in the morning or in the afternoon. And then, I don't know if it is a *good* morning. Because it is not good that we can't meet as a church in person this morning. In one of my previous parishes, the vicar had a great burden to prepare the church for a moment like this when the church is no longer able to meet in person on Sundays. He was thinking of a scenario where extremism and persecution would make it impossible for the church to come together. But nobody – I think – would have expected a flu virus to one day cause the suspension of church services in many churches in Singapore. It is not normal, and it is not good.

But '*church*' we are regardless how we are meeting and that is good. And God is good ... all the time. And all the time ... God is good! Hallelujah!

Therefore again, good morning church!

Welcome to all of you who are watching this at home. The Lord be with you!

I was wondering what I would preach on a day like this. Just go on in our sermon series on the Apostle Peter from part 1 to part 2? That didn't sound right. But then I took a closer look at the sermon series and realized that the passage today is the Transfiguration story from Matthew 17 under the title "Faith Booster". Isn't the Lord wonderful? As if he knew – and of course he did - when we drafted this series that on a day like this, we all need a faith booster and that the Transfiguration passage is a perfect Word from the Lord in this time. That is good!

So, let us dive into his Word with great expectation of how the Lord will build up his Church today!

The Apostle Peter had just been on a roller coaster (Matthew 16). He had identified Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus had commended Peter for his declaration and he even bestowed upon Peter the leadership of the Church and the keys to the kingdom of heaven. An incredible honour for Peter. But what Peter had not realized was that he would carry out this role without Jesus physically by his side. Jesus reminded him of that reality, that the Messiah would suffer at the hands of the people, he would even be killed. (Mt 16:22) **"Never Lord!"** ... **"This shall never happen to you!"** Peter might have

remembered the time when he tried to walk on water (Matthew 14). He was able to do so as long as he focussed his eyes on Jesus. But without looking at Jesus he was no longer able to walk on water, he sank into the sea and was about to drown. To make matters worse in chapter 16, Jesus rebukes Peter with very harsh words **“Get behind me, Satan!”** and lectures the disciples on the cost of discipleship.

It is in this moment of confusion that Jesus takes his three closest disciples up a mountain on a short retreat, so to say. They are confused, and he knows that they will be more confused even distraught, deeply troubled, when Jesus would be crucified. That is why he takes them away on a short retreat to prepare them for the difficult time ahead. When they reach the top of this high mountain, Jesus was transfigured before them. The disciples see Jesus in his celestial glory. (If you want to have details about how Jesus looked like, read Revelation 1 in your quiet time.) It’s an awesome and awe-inspiring sight. But that’s not all for the disciples. They also see Moses and Elijah with Jesus. This is further confirmation of Jesus’ identity as the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. He is the one who fulfils all OT prophecies, he is the one that Moses talks about in the passage that our brother Jeffrey read earlier (Deuteronomy 18). He is the ultimate prophet, the Son of God, endorsed by the two greatest OT characters, representing God’s Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah). But that’s not all for the disciples. They also

hear the voice of God Almighty (Matthew 17:5) **“This is my Son, whom I love; with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!”** This is the highest endorsement of Jesus that anybody could think of. As during Jesus’ baptism in the river Jordan, God the Father audibly declares that Jesus is his Son on whom he has placed all authority. Verse 6-8 **When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.** Just like John in Rev 1, the disciples fell to the ground facedown, but Jesus touched them gently and asked them to stand up and not to be afraid. Can you imagine how they would have stood before Jesus, their knees trembling but at the same time tremendously strengthened in their faith. This man Jesus, whom they have followed for the past two years or so, really is the Son of God. Peter’s profession six days earlier was right (Matthew 16), Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Yet, he would eventually leave them when he ascended into heaven, but he would never leave them alone. He would breath his Spirit on them (in John 20) and a few days later at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit would fall on them in full measures (Acts 2). And Emmanuel would always be with them. When Stephen was martyred, Emmanuel was with him, when Paul was crucified, Emmanuel was with him, when Peter was

crucified upside down, Emmanuel was with him and when John died of old age in exile, Emmanuel was with him.

How does this passage strengthen our faith in a time like this? When the Anglican Church and many other churches tried their best to keep our Sunday services running, I saw the heavy cost that we were paying. We needed to mobilize staff and volunteers for temperature screening, we needed to think of ways to increase the distance of our seating arrangements, we needed to implement safer ways of handling the offertory and distributing Holy Communion, we needed to start livestreaming for those who no longer were able to join in person on Sundays, we needed to contact all members age 70 and above to stay home for two Sundays and many more things. I thought to myself, wouldn't it be so much easier to simply suspend our services like other churches did early on? When the message from Bp Rennis to suspend our services for two Sundays came on Thursday afternoon, instead of breathing a sigh of relief, I found myself deeply affected by the weight of the decision. We would – for a time – no longer be able to meet as the people of God and worship together in one place. As a pastor, I no longer see your faces, I no longer see if you are happy or sad, if you need pastoral care and prayers, I no longer can give Holy Communion to you here in church, the sacrament of grace. How

will we be able to know who needs care, how can we encourage you in your faith? I was very sad.

But yesterday morning, when I shared and explained the service order to the team that is serving so faithfully this morning, the Spirit impressed upon me what it means to be the people of God in a time like this. In a short while, we will declare our Christian faith with the words of the Nicene Creed and then we will say the “Peace” together when we declare that ‘we are the body of Christ’. In a time like this, across Singapore, the people of God are standing up to declare our faith and our identity in the midst of everybody else, the 80% of our population who are not Christians. We are like little matches shining the light of Jesus into our neighbourhood.

In a time like this, you are families worshipping together this morning, *as family* in your homes. I wonder when was the last time that you have done this. Today, our Sunday School is not teaching your children, you *as a family* are teaching your children. If you are not sure how to do this, just read this mornings’ Bible passage together again later on and talk about it.

In a time like this, we have the opportunity – as the family of God – to care for one another in a different way. We can call one another, we can encourage one another, *we become church!*

*'But Pastor', you may say, 'how can I do that? I am not a pastor. I prefer you doing it with me or even for me...' Peter reacted in the same way when Jesus told him that he would no longer physically be with Peter when Peter would build the church: "**This shall never happen...**". Well, it happened, and Peter build the church with the help of the other apostles, and the deacons, and the many lay leaders in every city. Because Emmanuel was with them. In the same way, we can shine for Jesus, worship as family and care for one another because Emmanuel is with us!*

Church, the Lord is with us in this difficult time. He will see us through. He will even strengthen us in our faith if we focus our eyes on Jesus. The church in Singapore and around the world, even we at St Hilda's Church can arise in a time like this. And why is this? Because we are the body of Christ, the crucified, risen, ascended and glorified Messiah, whose Spirit lives in us, who will never leave us nor forsake us.

The transfiguration showed the disciples how powerful Jesus is, the one whom they were following. I pray that God's Word this morning is showing us how powerful Jesus is, the one whom we are following. Because he was victorious, we too are victorious.

Let us pray!