

Humility & Love

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Preacher: Neil MacMillan

[0 : 00] Great. Thanks, Stephen. And I'm just going to take a little while now to think about what we read together, which was read just a little while ago from the Gospel Luke. Anna Lorne read it for us.

So I'm just trying to see who's actually joined in the service. So Tom Martin, are you there? Cameron Scott, I'm looking for you. Connie, Estella, Judah, Anna, Matty, Evangeline, Eshlyn, Greer, Ella, are any of you in there?

I love Sunday mornings at Cornerstone when we gather as a church Sunday because it's always really great to see who shows up. And I love seeing the kids running in, grabbing their snacks, chasing each other around.

And so I think all of us who are kind of regulars at Cornerstone are missing seeing each other. And everybody who's joined this service today, there'll be people that you're missing seeing, the people that you see day to day and week to week that you like to join with and spend time with.

So I'm missing lots of people right now. I'm missing my church family. I love it on a Sunday morning when we can just be together in the same space, in the same place, at the same time.

[1 : 27] We can look each other in the eye. We can laugh together. We can sing songs together. We can hear one another's voices. And we can share the love that we've got for God with one another.

So I think everybody will be feeling a degree of loss at this point and a degree of longing for things to kind of get back to the way they were.

Some of you might even be missing school. Some of you will be missing your friends. And that gives us a sense of grief, a sort of sense of that something is missing.

And the truth is that the story of our lives has taken an unexpected twist at this point. And we've ended up in a place that we didn't expect to be.

But when we go through this kind of season of loss and missing out on lots of stuff that we normally enjoy, it is a good chance for us to just kind of like recalibrate or rethink a few things.

[2 : 38] It's a time when we kind of work out what's really important to us. What are the things that we're missing that really matter?

And then what are the things that we're missing that seemed important at the time, but actually don't matter that much? If you're a Christian, then this is a time when you begin to learn more about what's truly of God.

And what was just some kind of idol that you enjoyed that was propping you up. For all of us as people, whether we're Christians or whether we're just kind of trying to work out the relevance of Jesus to our own lives, there's a time when we kind of sort of think, well, what do I need to flourish as a human being?

And at the heart of it all, as we lose stuff, as we recalibrate and reevaluate what's important, I think one of the things that I really believe is true is this, that we find out that what matters most in life is to know Jesus, to know his life, and to know his love.

And the story that we've got in Luke chapter 19 is a story that tells us that Jesus was in the process of losing everything so that we don't have to lose him, the life that he gives, and the love that he gives.

[4 : 08] In the story in Luke chapter 19, we see Jesus on a journey. It's a journey that he's been on for a while. It's a journey towards Jerusalem.

And in Jerusalem, he's going to die despite his innocence. He's taking the road to the cross of crucifixion because he knows that through his death and resurrection, we can find forgiveness and new life, that we can know the life of God and the love of God forever.

So we might lose a lot of precious things at this time. But Jesus says you're never going to lose the most precious thing of all. So I usually give to my congregation a phrase that stays, something to remember on a Thursday later in the week, as we cast our minds back to the previous Sunday, what did we hear in church?

And the phrase that stays this time is this, Jesus is the life and the love we never lose. So if you think later in the week, oh, Cornerstone, Neil, church, what was that all about?

Then what I want you just to remember is this simple phrase, Jesus is the life and the love we never lose. Jesus is the life and the love we never lose. So I'm going to think about a couple of things here, about the humility of Jesus and the loss that he suffers, and then the love that we see in God and that God asks for from us.

[5 : 46] So thinking about Jesus' humility first, Jesus is entering Jerusalem five days before his death. He's riding a young donkey and the crowds are going crazy for him.

They've rolled out the red carpet, which in this case is a carpet of cloaks to smooth the road for Jesus. And it's a way that that population around Jerusalem at the time can show respect and honor to Jesus as their true king.

It's a kind of welcome, it's a kind of acclamation that Prince Charles dreams of every night, a king entering his city. And Jesus is entering the city of Jerusalem at this time.

He's going there to meet with his people in fulfillment of a prophecy given many, many hundreds of years before. There was a prophet Zechariah who said that the king of Israel would come as the prince of peace, riding amongst them on the coat of a donkey.

Their king comes to them not with a display of military power, but in a display of humility and weakness and dependence.

[7 : 08] And that's because their king comes amongst them. King Jesus comes to us, not just in a display of power and might, but in a display of humility and loss.

As he enters Jerusalem, the cops are after him. There's an arrest warrant out for Jesus. They've got a capture and kill policy.

Jesus has to die. But instead of hiding away, Jesus enters Jerusalem in the most public way possible, in a way that everybody can see him and everybody knows Jesus of Nazareth is in town.

Because Jesus is committed to a process, to a journey, to a trajectory that is going downwards. One step lower, one step lower, one step lower.

He's left heaven, where he's lived in eternal joy, in the presence of his father and the Holy Spirit forever. In the fellowship of eternal joy and love that the Trinity shares together.

[8 : 23] And he's left that heaven to come into a world of suffering. And in that world of suffering, he is on a downwards journey towards a place where God will only be present in judgment.

The cross of crucifixion. It's a place of utter isolation. At the cross, Jesus is going to be stripped of everything. He's going to be stripped of his clothes.

He's going to be stripped of his dignity. He's stripped of justice. He's stripped of hope. He's stripped of human kindness and love. At the crucifixion, Jesus says his heart will melt like wax with fear.

And he will lay himself in the dust of day. This is the God of heaven. Humbly losing everything. Making himself nothing.

The Bible tells us later on, he who was rich, talking about Jesus, he who was rich made himself poor, so that we through his poverty might be made rich. Jesus loses so much.

[9 : 31] But I want to say this, that it is a controlled loss. It's not being ripped out of his hands. He is giving it up. Because as God, he's working to a better plan.

Nobody else can really see what's going on in these circumstances. But Jesus has a good plan that he is working out. He knows what he's doing. Think about if you found yourself in an emergency situation right now, and you needed to get to hospital in a hurry.

Well, you wouldn't want the five-year-old in the family driving the car to the hospital. You at least want somebody who can see over the steering wheel and reach the pedals, who knows how to drive, who knows the route, who knows how to get there safely.

So in this passage of scripture, what we see is that Jesus is in control. He's driving the car.

He arranges the circumstances, the coat, the entrance to Jerusalem, the confrontation with the Pharisees. He's in control.

[10 : 40] And in our circumstances, I really want us just to get hold of this as well, that God is in control. It's not a five-year-old who's driving the car.

We're losing a lot, or it might feel like we're losing a lot. And some of us will lose through bereavement, and in other ways, through loss of work or loss of income.

But it's a controlled loss. And the control in these circumstances, the hard thing for us is the control in these circumstances doesn't lie with us. It lies with someone who's actually better than us, greater than us, who is truly loving, truly wise, and truly good.

God is in control. Jesus is in control. He knows us. He knows our every question, every shaky moment, every wobble.

And he says, I know what's going on with you, and I'm in control, and I can bless you. We all want this time to be over, because we know it's going to be costly.

[11 : 48] But Jesus says, trust me, lean on me. And instead of losing everything, you might emerge from this time with new treasure, with a greater sense of my presence, and my love, with more of my life in you.

So something happened yesterday in my house. Didn't mean for it to happen, but I saw a snippet of Lord of the Rings, Fellowship of the Rings.

So somebody in my family was watching the whole Lord of the Rings trilogy yesterday, and just the little bit I saw, not a big Lord of the Rings fan, but I did see a little bit of Frodo getting in a boat, heading off to Mordor.

And Sam says he's not going to let him go alone. So Frodo's heading off in the boat, and Sam wades out into the water, to go after him, to go with him.

And in doing so, Sam risks his life. He begins to drown. But he can't let Frodo face this time on his own. Well, Jesus says to us, you don't have to face this time on your own.

[13 : 03] I am here, I'm in control, and I'll be with you, even though it costs me my life, so that I can do all this for you. So Jesus shows a great humility, being willing to lose so much and give up so much.

But it's not a situation that's out of control. He does this according to his own plan and wisdom, so that he can be with us in the hard and difficult circumstances of life.

That requires a little bit of humility in our part too, that we can't do this on our own. And that's sometimes hard to admit. For people who feel in control most of the time, it's humbling to suddenly have to say we don't have all the answers.

But this is a circumstance where we learn that it's okay to feel needy and inadequate. Because we are needy and we are inadequate. And it's okay to have to put your trust in somebody who's greater and wiser.

It is okay to trust Jesus today. So thinking about his humility, I also want to think for a moment or two about his love and the love that Jesus is showing in these circumstances.

[14 : 19] So there's a YouTube video that's been doing the rounds. And it's called the Portobello Priest. You might have seen it on Facebook or someone else too.

And this is a priest in Portobello in London. First of all, I thought he was in Edinburgh, but he's in London. And he's driving around his parish with his car and he's got a big sound system in it.

And he's stopping in all the different streets in this parish and he's getting out the sound system and then he's calling everybody to come and listen to the song Amazing Grace and to join in if they want.

And there's even a clip of it being done outside a hospital in London as well. And all the patients who are in the hospital can hear this great song of hope and love being sung.

Amazing Grace. So there's a song that's been sung in this world and it's a great song and it's a song of praise towards God. And Jesus says nobody can silence the song of praise that there is for him in Jerusalem the day that he enters it or in our world today.

[15 : 35] So the disciples, the followers of Jesus are crying out in worship as he enters the city. They're praising him as their king, as their Messiah, as their savior.

And the Pharisees, the kind of religious elite in Jerusalem, very strict, very moralistic people, they're like, shut your disciples up, will you? And Jesus says no.

Because even if you silence them, the stones will cry out with praise to me. The streets of Jerusalem, the buildings of Jerusalem would cry out because God's praise can't be silenced.

God's praise will always be found in this world. And I think that's really good news for us just now. That right now throughout the world, there's a beautiful song of hope.

It's a song of the gospel. It's a song of good news. It has always been sung in heaven and on earth. And nothing can stop that song being sung. As Christians, we're going to say this to God now.

[16 : 41] Even in the hardest of circumstances, we will never stop praising you. From this day until eternity, we will always sing praise of your unfailing love.

I saw another great video yesterday doing the rounds on Facebook, and somebody WhatsApped it to me as well. It's a doctor in London asking us to pray for her and her colleagues.

And the amazing truth is that even in the dark, sad places where there's great suffering right now, there are Christians putting on their PPE and going into care for gravely ill patients.

And as they do so, they are going praising God, saying, he who is in me is greater than he who is in the world. Lord, even in the dark places, your light and your love can be found.

The church is singing out with good news this Easter. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. There is nothing in heaven or on earth, we are told in the Bible. There is nothing in life or death that can separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

[17 : 53] That's why we praise him. Because he humbly comes to give up so much to suffer and die, to lose everything so that we never have to lose his love and his life.

So the praise of God will always be found in this world. And I want to ask myself and you then, will God's praise be found on our lips and in our hearts at this time?

You know, we live in a world, in Western culture anyway, where it's so just like not cool to be a Christian. Being a Christian is a cringe in many people's eyes.

It's a sort of embarrassment. There's a book written quite a long time now, quite a while ago now, about post-modernity and what the author called the book, The Gagging of God.

And just that in a kind of more and more secular context, there was a pressure for the praise of God to be privatized. You know, if you want to praise God good and well, but do it in privacy.

[19 : 01] Don't bother us with the stuff about Jesus. And we live in a culture where there's a real sense of, or there's a real sense of loss around what is transcendent and good.

No sense of sacred order. And it's as if the world has said to us, as if the Pharisees of our culture have pointed at us and said, tell your disciples to stop.

Tell them to be quiet. Yeah. But Jesus says, no, nothing will stop my praise. If you shut the mouths of my people, even the stones will cry out.

My glory will cover the face of the earth as the waters cover the sea. And now we are in this culture, which has sought to silence the praise of God and the voice of God in lots of different ways.

And the pandemic has come and suddenly we're asking, well, what's it all about then? If I can't just have all the stuff I normally have and have the life I thought was going to make me happy, then what's it for?

[20 : 09] And a lot of people are grieving this. And all the news in the world right now has a somber note. I just want to say though, there is still a good song being sung.

A song that says there's hope and joy. There's a love that lasts forever. Remember, Christians, even when we grieve, we still have songs of hope and songs of joy because we know that no matter what, God loves us and we love him.

We know that no matter how deep the darkness, there is a light that shines in the presence of God into our lives. In the sadness, we see a love that never leaves or forsakes. We praise God because we know he will always care for us.

And so I want to encourage myself in you that in hard days and difficult times and times when we're fed up or bored or anxious or afraid or where we're faced with bereavement and loss or illness and struggle, let's keep praising God.

And if you're not a Christian, let's start praising God. Praise him with your lips, but praise him from the heart. Praise him not just for a moment, but praise him for a lifetime.

[21 : 22] If you are one of those who thought it was better for the voice of Jesus and the name of Jesus and the praise of Jesus to be silenced in our culture, this is a good time to change your mind.

To think actually our world does need a transcendent message of hope, of a God who is alive and in control, who loves us enough to lose everything for us so that we can have life in him.

Jesus was made nothing and entered the grave. That's the news that we're thinking about as Christians this week as we run up to Easter.

Jesus loved us enough to enter the grave for us and he loved us enough to rise from the grave from us as well so that death holds no terror for the believer.

Death holds no fear for us. During a time of great illness and suffering, Charles Wesley was told this by a physician who had treated many Methodists who followed the teachings of Charles Wesley.

[22 : 26] He said, this doctor said, most of the people I'm seeing, they die for the fear of dying, but I've never met people who die like yours.

They are none of them afraid. They are calm and patient because faith in Jesus does give hope. He's conquered death.

He's conquered the grave. That's the life that Jesus offers in his resurrection. So the humility of Jesus is incredible that he'll lose everything for us.

The love of Jesus is incredible that he gives us a new life and a love that's never taken from us when we put our faith in him. We've all messed up. We all need forgiveness.

We've all sinned. We've all gone far from God. But God invites us back into a life where there's not just darkness, but also light. Where there's not just fear, there's also peace.

[23 : 26] Where there's not just sad songs, but there's songs of praise. And where those songs of praise and goodness never stop being sung. So I'm going to give you a moment just to silently think about that, respond to that in your own way, then I'll pray, and then Fergus is going to sing our last song.

So thanks for sticking with us this long. God, we do thank you that we can just take a moment to think about whether we really love you, whether we really know you, whether our hearts beat with praise towards you.

And we ask that for every one of us today, that that might be the case, that we praise you and we thank you right now for all that you've done for us, for the love and the humility that you've shown.

Amen.