

OUR HOPE IN THE MIDST OF TRYING TIMES

8 'I am the Alpha and the Omega', says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. (Revelation 1: 8)

God is creator and we are all creatures. First of all we are to acknowledge the existence of God who created all that exist; seen and unseen and that the fulfillment of humanity, individually and collectively and of the whole of creation is found in God and are defined in the laws and the purposes of God, which are laws given not merely by words or commands, but in God's creative designs/purposes for us human beings and creation; in this way obedience to God becomes at the same time loyalty to who we are as human beings, in other words obedience to God fulfills the purpose for which we human beings were created. . This point is made when we state that human beings are a part of God's creation, made in the image of God. Here we are speaking of relationship with God, with creation and with each other. Emerging from this relationship with God, creation and with other human beings is an obligation which was established by the very act of creation, in which humanity is "gifted" with an aptitude towards God, and God appears as the ultimate "good" for which all human beings are made. This is to say that by nature we human beings are religious we are restless until we find our place in God. As St. Augustine says 'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you'

This to all intents and purposes is a faith experience. When we speak of faith we are not merely referring to things we know about God rather, we are speaking of a relationship through which we have come to know and believe that the fulfillment of humanity, individually and collectively and of the whole of creation is found in God and is defined in the ways and purposes of God.

As we look at the reading from Exodus 14: 10-20

The Hebrew people found themselves in a very precarious situation, Moses was leading them on their escape from bondage in Egypt and suddenly they found that the sea was ahead of them and Pharaoh and his mighty army were pursuing

them. So, they cried out to the Lord; and said to Moses: “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, in bringing us out of Egypt, ‘Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”

The people in spite of previously seeing and experiencing the mighty works of God on their behalf were now in a situation in which they were terribly afraid, their faith was at an all-time low. It was a terrifying moment, which caused them to be despondent, to lose hope.

Moses said to them: “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be still.”

Then the Lord commanded Moses to move forward. In so doing they moved into safety.

Our hope in trying times is not found in man no matter what position they hold, what status they have or how wealthy they are. As Bro. Valentino a Trinidad Calypsonian states in his song “Birds that Fly High”

So you belong to the ivory tower
I say, this ivory tower of power
The material world makes you feel superior
So then you look down with scorn at your brother
But your flying space is getting narrow
Soon you won’t be able to resist the arrow.

Birds that fly high, none of them ever touch the Jah sky
Birds that fly high got to fly back down to die
So flap your wings and fly, you could never touch Jah sky
And don’t care how high you fly, you got to fly back down to die
Birds that fly high, got to fly back down to die.

Psalm 46: 1-4

- 1 God is our refuge and strength, *
a very present help in trouble.
- 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be
moved, * and though the mountains be toppled into
the depths of the sea;
- 3 Though its waters rage and foam, *
and though the mountains tremble at its tumult.
- 4 The LORD of hosts is with us; *
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

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8 ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega’, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. (Revelation 1: 8)

Faithfulness is a characteristic or attribute which is used in reference to both God and human beings. Here I am speaking of faithfulness in its application to God. In other words, the faithfulness of God.

Christians believe that Faithfulness is a fundamental feature of God's nature. It signifies the steadfastness or constancy of God in His relations with human beings. It is one aspect of who God is- it speaks of truth and that God is the same yesterday today and forever. God is true because He is constant or faithful in keeping His promises, and therefore is worthy of trust. God's nature is unchangeable because of the reliability of God's goodness and mercy, and fulfillment of God's promises. This is what we mean by the Faithfulness of God as presented in the Scripture.

I will now share some examples:

Deut 7 : 6-9

6For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

7 It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8It was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,

In the following passage God is the Object of trust:

² “The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer,
my God, my rock in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” **Psalm 18:2**

The faithfulness of God is implied where God reveals Himself to Moses and to Israel as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and their fathers' God.

Exodus 3: 6, 15, 16

⁶He said further, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. ¹⁵God also said to Moses, ‘Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you”: This is my name for ever, and this my title for all generations.

¹⁶Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, “The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt.

This emphasizes that God did not only have a good and gracious relation to the Patriarchs, but that He is faithful to His gracious promise to their fathers, and that what God was to them He will continue to be to Moses and to Israel. This emphasizes the faithfulness of God throughout history.

Continuing our reference to God's faithfulness in the Old Testament:

Numbers 11: 12

¹²Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, "Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child", to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors?

Look at God's faithfulness, love and concern for God's people to ask Moses to "Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child", to the land God promised to their forebears.

This expresses that God is firm or constant, that is, faithful in regard to His promises, and will surely fulfill them.

God's constancy and firmness indicate God's faithfulness. They express the idea that God is always faithful to His promises. It is this attribute of God which the Psalmist declares:

Psalm 40:10

¹⁰ I have not hidden your saving help within my heart,
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;
I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness
from the great congregation.

and the greatness of which he affirms by saying that God's faithfulness 'reacheth' to the clouds.

(Psalms 36:5)).

⁵ Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds. Psalm 36:5

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In the Prophets, the salvation of the Hebrew people, Israel, rests upon no claim or merit on their part, but solely upon God's mercy, grace and faithfulness. When the people of Israel sinned against God and incurred God's judgments, sometimes it appeared as if His promise would not be fulfilled, but, this was far from the truth. For God is faithful to His word of promise which stands forever.

Isaiah 40:8

⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for ever.

Isaiah 25:1

O LORD, you are my God;
I will exalt you, I will praise your name;
for you have done wonderful things,
plans formed of old, faithful and sure.

These verses affirm that God's faithfulness is eternal, it is constant, it is everlasting. Therefore, God's righteousness, mercy and faithfulness, became the ground of Israel's hope.

God's relationship with His people Israel is founded in God's grace, and not on any merit of theirs. This gave them the firm assurance that the past experience of God's grace would continue in the future because of the indisputable faithfulness of God. Which was a part of their history as a people from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and which passed on from generation to generation. Thus, it became the firm basis of Israel's hope. When the people of Israel turned away from the ways of God or were experiencing difficulties or trying times, emphasis was placed upon God's faithfulness, so that the only hope of God's people lay on God's grace, mercy and faithfulness, which stands in marked contrast with the faithlessness and inconstancy of His people.

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In the New Testament God’s faithfulness is grounded in God’s nature, so that Paul’s hope of eternal life rests on the fact that God who cannot lie promised it before the world began (Titus 1:2)²in the hope of eternal life that God, who never lies, promised before the ages began—

and the certainty that God will remain faithful in spite of human faithlessness rests on the fact that God cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13)¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

The faithfulness of God is the basis of Paul’s confident assurance that God will preserve His people in temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13)¹³No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. In addition Paul believed that God will establish and preserve His people from evil (2 Thessalonians 3:3)³But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one.

John also ascribes this attribute to God. John says that God's faithfulness, and righteousness, are manifested in the forgiveness of sin (1 John 1:9)⁹If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(1 Peter 4:19)¹⁹Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God’s will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good. The quality of faithfulness, ascribed to God in the New Testament in relation to God’s act of redemption, is the basis of our hope in difficulty, challenging situations and trying times. For Peter the fact that God is a faithful Creator is the ground of our hope under persecution, suffering and trying times.

In the gospel when the disciples were in a very precarious situation in the sea of Galilee due to a raging storm they cried out to Jesus:

‘Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?’³⁹ He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. (Mark 8: 38-39)

Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

21 From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²²And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.’ ²³But he turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.’ (Matthew 16: 21-23)

It is important to note that we believe in a God who suffers a God who does not give simple answers as we go through pain and trying times we must learn that there are limits to the extent of our understanding; we believe in a God who, by his gift of human freedom, who has made us persons and not robots journeys with us through this Pandemic and the trying experiences of our lives. Sometimes this would seem to be uncaring. However, we believe in a God who does not give easy answers but enters into our questions and gives Himself. Therefore, our difficulties, challenges, and trying moments are intimately connected to the suffering of God. As it is said ‘He went not up to joy but first suffered pain.’

As disciples it is important to note that in trying times we can trust God for discipleship in spite of what we are experiencing is not losing life but finding it in a depth and richness which we did not know before. As Jesus says “whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Therefore in these trying times it is for us to trust God for God is faithful. God is journeying with us through these trying times.

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Basically, there are two things that are essential and which can and will renew our hope. They are: 1. To believe and trust in God and to love God with all our hearts. Which issues in worship, prayer, reading and studying Holy Scripture and fellowship and 2. To love our neighbours as we love ourselves, and to do others

no harm. In other words we are called to be our brothers and sisters keepers, to look our for each other. To work together for the well being of all.

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