

Trinity XVI Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

By the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

Bishop of Saskatchewan

O God we are not pure, we are not safe and we are not competent, so in your mercy, cleanse, defend and guide your Church through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Faint not, weep not. These are things we all avoid, and we make special effort not to do them publicly - and especially not in Church. If it is any comfort, I have managed very public displays, in large services, of both fainting and weeping. Faint not, weep not. These exhortations from both Paul and Jesus are spoken to people who were overwhelmed by sorrow and distress. The Christians in Ephesus had heard of all Paul's troubles and his imprisonment, and he is worried that they will be overcome by grief at this horrible news. Faint not. Jesus meets a most destitute woman, having lost

Trinity XVI Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

her husband. She had one only son, and now this day she must bury him, and with him all her hopes and her comforts. Weep not.

Neither fainting nor crying are things which it seems we have complete control over. So there must be something more here, some basis on which we can be exhorted not to faint or weep.

The ground of these similar exhortations, to not be overcome by grief and sorrow, is the same. It is that God himself, in the person of his Son, has come into the world. He has visited his people, seen their sorrows, and had compassion on them. He has entered into their sorrows and even into death, in his own passion and cross. And he has risen again, triumphant over darkness and sorrow, sin and death, and has thus saved them.

The Epistle and the Gospel are, in this sense, devotional commentaries on the incarnation and the cross, the suffering and death of the Son of God, for us and for our salvation. Jesus meets

Trinity XVI Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

this woman outside the city, where he, too, would be led to die and be buried, where he commanded the daughters of Jerusalem to weep not. He commands her to weep not, who would himself weep, and become the man of sorrows.

Our Lord stops the funeral procession of humanity about to be buried in silence, darkness and hopelessness. And he touches the coffin, which ought to make him unclean, but which will cleanse the dead man, and he commands with one word, “Arise.” This word is spoken by the authority of Jesus, who is both God and man. He is God, by whose word the heavens and earth were made. And he is man, the first begotten of the dead, who was alive and dead, and is now alive for evermore, and who has then by his victory over sin and death, taken the keys of hell and of death. Jesus Christ raises this man from death, by the power of his own innocent death and resurrection. He can say, “Arise,” for he will die, be buried, descend

Trinity XVI Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

into Hades, and rise again for him. Isaiah 26.19 says, “Thy dead shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise.” So our Lord prophesies in John 5.25: “The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.”

This is our hope.

But soon at break of day

His calm almighty voice,

Stronger than death shall say,

Awake, - arise, - rejoice.

But there is more in that Gospel, for we have that most touching and reassuring phrase, that Jesus “delivered him to his mother.”

Those who were once divided by the narrow stream of death are reunited, in Christ and by Christ. This, too, is our hope in Christ.

Trinity XVI Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

Weep not, for Jesus Christ is Lord of both the dead and the living, and he has won the victory over all our enemies. He has won the victory over our last enemy, death, and he shall finally destroy it.

And faint not. Don't despair; don't be overwhelmed by sorrow and disappointment. Paul offers this wonderful prayer for the Ephesians. He speaks of bowing his knees, apparently this was becoming in many ways a distinctive Christian posture for prayer, on one's knees. What does he pray for? Renewal in the gift of the Holy Spirit. For it is by the inner gift of the Holy Spirit that we are strengthened. Remember his title, Comforter, which means he fortifies us. Comfort, in this sense, means to make strong. Comfort is to strengthen inwardly, make us strong in our inner being. It is by the Holy Spirit that Christ abides in us. It is by the Holy Spirit that this love is poured into our hearts. It is by the Holy Spirit that God fills us with himself.

Trinity XVI Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

The presence of Christ, in our hearts; the love of Christ, in its infinite dimensions; and the power of Christ, at work in us - this is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul speaks of our being rooted and grounded in this divine love. We are to be like trees, firmly rooted and anchored in the love of God. We are to be like houses, built upon the foundation of God's love for us in Christ. Then we will not faint. Why not? For the love of God having been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, and we knowing by faith Christ who died and rose again for us, will be persuaded and will prove that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. What is the breadth and length and depth and height of this love? "Look how high the heaven is in comparison of the earth, so great is his mercy also toward them that fear him. Look how wide also the east is from the west, so far hath he set our sins

Trinity XVI Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

from us.” (Psalm 103.11-12) The mysterious dimensions Paul gives must be, above all else, those of the cross of Jesus Christ.

There is infinite forgiving love, and there is eternal life. The Gospel, which you are invited to believe today, is that God can do more that you can conceive or dare ask. It was most certainly true for the widow of Nain, it has been true in my life over and over again, and it is supremely true in the incarnation and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and in the gift of the Holy Spirit. So what is left? Nothing but this for ever: “Unto him that is able to do exceeding above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end.” Amen.