

Life is hard.

We know it is. We watch the news. We see missiles and rockets falling in Ukraine. People dying. We hear about more civilian conscription in Russia. Perhaps 500,000 more. We have floods effecting our homes here in Auckland. See slash and rubbish all over the East Coast and wonder where it all comes from. We read about ram raids, even in Mt Eden and diary robberies. Drownings and murders. Shootings in the US. We see creation being destroyed.

We see interest rate rises and inflation increasing. House prices falling and people worried about their finances. We read about economic hard times. That people shouldn't be expecting a pay rise, this year. How quickly things change. And then, if things get worse, people possibly losing their jobs.

Life is hard.

We know it from our own lives and families. As we have experienced this week, flooding, and destruction, and even for some death.

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We have health concerns. We hurt. Bits of us wear out. We need new hips and knees. Our eyes don't work as well as they use too. We aren't as steady on our pins as we were. We get stiff and sore. We can't hear the TV. We are tired, all the time. We are getting older. Our children and grandchildren have concerns. Things go wrong. It doesn't always work out as we had hoped it would. We want to retire. As much as we wish it wasn't, money is something we think about. There doesn't seem to be quite enough of it. We have marriage stresses. As much as we work at it, as much as we love our partners, sometimes, often, marriage is difficult and difficult work. Being single is no picnic either. On our own. Wanting to have someone to share with, but there isn't anyone, yet. Thinking about the future. What will that be like, alone. Loneliness. Being a widow or widower. Work stress. A challenging job. A difficult boss or co-worker. A toxic work environment.

Life is hard.

I thought this on my way to the gym on Monday morning.

I also thought that despite the 1000's of sermons I have preached. The many days and weeks of praying I have done. The journaling. Meditating. The years I have spent reading and studying the bible, theology, church history, the church, and most other Christian and biblical topics. Despite all my trying really, really, hard to get it right. I am still a loosely tied parcel of anxieties, desires, greed's, lusts, and fears.

Life is hard.

And faith is hard too.

The misunderstandings and comments we get sometimes. The complete puzzlement. The unfair portrayal of what we hold to be dear in the media. The double standards of the way things are

sometimes reported. Being held accountable for the sins of other, perhaps more outspoken, and odder members of the wider church.

The opposition from family members. Partners even. The worry about children and grandchildren not following. Not understanding. The pressure to conform to ideas that are not our own. The cross we sometimes carry because of the decisions we have made. The things we may not have done, or done because of conviction, and no one understood. The times we have bitten our tongues when we wanted to say something, do something, but we didn't, couldn't. The stuff we put up with because we thought we were doing the right thing. The good actions we stood by, when no one returned that goodness. Sometimes that good returned with evil. The kindness and compassion offered. Being taken advantage of. Disregarded even.

The things we have experienced in the church. Being taken for granted. Overlooked or mistreated. Feeling left out. Not understood. Unaccepted. Unwelcome. Things we have seen or heard that have been wrong and should never have happened. The lies and double dealing. The hurt and hypocrisy. The evil masquerading as good.

The times when things happen which we simply cannot comprehend. Do not understand. The horrors of war. Natural disasters. Terrible incurable illness. The cruelty of people, one to another, especially towards children. The megalomania of some world leaders.

The times when believing ... is simply beyond us.

Life is hard, and so is faith.

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Jesus says to the people of Matthew's day, and to us ...

We're blessed when we're at the end of our rope. That means less of us, and more of God.
We're blessed when we feel we've lost what is most dear to us. It's a space God can fill.
We're blessed when we know who we are, and are content with that. This is a gift from God.
We're blessed when we are hungry for God, and decide for God's way. No matter the outcome.
We're blessed when we care, and sometimes that hurts.
We're blessed when our world on the inside is put right, even if others don't understand.
We're blessed when we model co-operation, and help others to do the same, despite opposition.
We're blessed when our God decisions create puzzlement, for those who don't understand our convictions, no matter how hard they try.

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We're blessed, if the name of Jesus causes people to misunderstand us, disregard us or alienate us.
We're blessed because this shows we are his and not anyone else's, and it is a price worth paying.
All the creation and heavens clap their hands for us, the company of apostles, prophets, and witnesses shout hallelujah on our behalf ... and the angels rejoice and sing ...

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because despite life and faith being hard ...

this is what it is ... to be the people of God.

Amen.