

We had a flood.

Last Monday in that deluge, the drainage system at the Vicarage was overwhelmed and we had water come uninvited in to one of the downstairs bedrooms.

So, a part of this week's agenda has been sorting out insurance, plumbers and coping with the smell of wet carpet and dirty drain water, which is not a wish list activity, but these things happen.

This happened to us this week, but other things have also happened, to you and those you love. Some of us have been recovering from hospital care, some are grieving the loss of family or friends, some are deeply worried by world events, some have been hit hard by things that they never expected to occur.

Some, have things no one knows about.

Things happen to us. Life happens.

At this week's Lenten study, I was reminded of a situation that we faced as a family just over 20 years ago, when we needed to be in the intensive care unit of Auckland hospital for longer than is good.

What struck me was, here we were, hanging on to normalcy by the skin of our teeth, and all around us, people and families were doing the same. I realised that this was true for someone, every day, whether we were there or not. This horrifying wait, to see if your loved ones were going to be torn apart by a motor accident, violent act or deadly disease.

It is like that there, today, as well.

Life is also happening to those living in Ukraine, and other hot spots around the world. It's happening for everyone, everywhere on the globe.

As I write my sermon and think about these things, I want to take hold of this week and all this life happening to us, and simply ask our texts what they have to say about it all.

I don't want to twist them, or make them say something they aren't, I just want to listen.

In the first testament reading from Joshua, we have a profound change in the status of the people of God. For 40 years they have been on the way out of Egypt, on an Exodus, and today it is over. These few verses move this people from Exodus to homecoming.

The disgrace of Egypt is done with. Today they finish with manna, the provision of escape, and begin with the produce of the land, the provision of welcome home.

Life can certainly be an exodus. Hope of escape, from stress, from bad things happening. How often have we prayed? I wish this was over? The people of Israel wandered for years, yet today, that wandering is done. And so will it be for us, one day as well.

Whether in this life or the next ... there will be a welcome home and everything will be put right.

In First Corinthians, Paul gives us an explanation of stories like the one we have just read, that they are an example and a warning to us. Here, in facing testing, not to think that we are stronger than we are. This warning is meant to be helpful.

As for not being tested beyond what we are able, I have always struggled with this, as I can imagine some things that would certainly be beyond me, if they ever came to pass.

But when life happens ... looking to God for strength and comfort is expected ... as ... is a reply.

In the gospel of Luke, we have a parable about some very bad things happening to some Galileans, the question is asked, did this to them happen because they were sinners? The answer is ... no. We don't have bad things happen to us because we have offended God, in spite of what 1 Corinthians might look like it says. God does not smite us or those we love, because we have done something wrong, or omitted to do something right. That's not how it works ... sometimes ... life just happens.

So, whatever difficulty you are facing ... it's not because you have offended God, or are a sinner.

And then we have another, about a fig tree, who quite simply ... gets another chance. Praise the Lord.

So ... no matter what is happening to any of us ... there will be a welcome home ... and everything will be put right.

So ... God expects us to look to God for strength and hope when difficulties arise. Paul says if we do this ... those difficulties will not break us.

So ... we can know that nothing that happens to us is punishment for what we have done or failed to do. None of it, is punishment for being flawed.

And, thanks be to God, like the fig tree ... there is always another chance.

Even after a flood.

Amen.