

A UNIQUE HOPE IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS AND UNCERTAINTY



Seidel Boanerges endured personal heartbreak during the pandemic. He explains why he has HOPE in the face of an uncertain tomorrow

I remember listening to the speech of the Director-General of the World Health Organization declaring Covid-19 as a pandemic from an epidemic in March 2020. Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus stressed the fact that “Pandemic is not a word to use lightly or carelessly. It is a word that, if misused, can cause unreasonable fear, or unjustified acceptance that the fight is over, leading to unnecessary suffering and death”.¹ Unfortunately, it has caused fear, anxiety, suffering, loss, death, chaos, disruption, and uncertainty in the last 18 months. Sadly, I lost a few friends and relatives to Covid-19; some friends were made redundant from their work; I saw how it affected some of my older friends

in care homes. As a minister or a friend, what can I say to these people that will comfort them? I was doing everything I could – calling people and encouraging them; financially supporting poorer families; shopping for my neighbour who is a single mum etc. But what is the role of faith in such situations? How can our faith in Jesus Christ comfort or support us during these challenging times? We have a saviour who gives us glorious hope not only for eternity but also here and now.

Early this year, I lost my dear mum, who suddenly had a stroke and passed away in India. As soon as I landed in India, I was forced to quarantine in a hotel

for 14 days despite a Covid negative test. I was not even allowed to see her at the hospital or even at home, where she will be placed for others to see. I felt helpless, locked in a hotel room. This pandemic has made it so complicated that we cannot even grieve properly in such situations. I cried out to God, *“Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief”* (Psalm 31:9); *“Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer”* (Psalm 4:1).

The beauty of the Christian faith is that our triune God knows what it means to lament. He laments for us and through us.

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¹ WHO Director-General’s opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020 www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020 [accessed in July 2021].

Jesus is our Immanuel – God with us (Isaiah 7:14). He is our Immanuel in our fears, suffering, despair, chaos and uncertainty. He can bring hope and comfort to those who lament. The Bible says: *'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted'* (Matthew 5:4). The Lord came to my rescue and strengthened me, and I had the peace of God, which transcended all understanding (Philippians 4:7), and the Holy Spirit comforted me as I lay alone in my hotel room.

My faith in Jesus Christ gives me the hope that this suffering and death is not the end. I am not lamenting without hope as some do; I am lamenting with glorious hope. A hope that I will see my mum one day in heaven, and I will be reunited with her. Eternal security/assurance is very distinctive to the Christian faith. You would not find this kind of assurance in any other worldview or religion. There are around 4,200 religions in this world. None of them has this kind of hope we have in and through Christ.

Is our hope just eternal? Not at all! Our saviour gives us a hope to face the uncertain today and tomorrow. We might know people who struggle with health problems, financial difficulties,

broken families, marriages, or relationships, who look at the future and say, "Ah, it is just another day of pain and suffering". The good news is that Jesus can give us hope in the midst of these uncertainties. I am not saying all these problems will be instantly resolved, but Jesus gives us the strength and courage to face these uncertainties. Our 'Immanuel' journeys with us in our chaos and uncertainties. The more we grow in our relationship with our triune God, the more we can experience this hope today. The Bible repeatedly asks us to cast our burdens, uncertainties, fears, anxiety etc, onto the Lord (Psalm 55:22; 1 Peter 5:7), and he will sustain us. When Habakkuk cried for help, *"How long, Lord, must I call for help?"* (Habakkuk 1:1), God gave him the feet of a deer to tread on heights so he could see the big picture, to see his problems from God's perspective.

The more we focus on God and get his perspective, our finite problems become just that - finite problems. The more we fix our eyes upon Jesus rather than upon the waves of chaos and uncertainty, the more we will be able to say "many things about tomorrow I don't seem to understand, but I know who

holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand". That gives me the hope to face the uncertain tomorrow. We have a unique hope in Christ and Christ alone for now and forever!



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Recently, Seidel co-edited a book with Anthony G Reddie and Pamela Searle, called *Intercultural Preaching* (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2021). It is a practical resource for those concerned with developing responsive, contextual, and spirit-filled preaching that speaks to the increasingly diverse and culturally varied congregations across the UK.