

Dear Friends,

We have just had a performance of "The Hiding Place", a play based on the book by Corrie Ten Boom on her family's experiences of hiding Jews in their house and shop in Haarlem, Holland in the Second World War and of her imprisonment and escape from Ravensbruck Concentration Camp. (A review will appear later). They had a false wall built in Corrie's bedroom, so that Jews who were staying with them could hide if the house was raided. I have visited the shop and seen 'The Hiding Place' myself when we visited Holland and it is a moving experience, and the play brought it all back to me. The name "The Hiding Place" is taken from Psalm 32 which says:

"You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance." (Psalm 32:7)

As we have seen from our national politics this week with Theresa May, our Prime Minister, being forced to resign, leadership can be a brutal business. People can be kind to your face and unkind behind your back, scheming with others to bring you down, and saying nice things to appear magnanimous when you are leaving. Therefore we are commanded, as Christians, to pray for our leaders;

- our national leaders: **"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity." (1 Timothy 2:1-2)**
- our church leaders: **"Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. (Heb 13:7) "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account." (Heb 13:17)**
- Our Civic Leaders **"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God....Pay to all what is due them--taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due." (Romans 13:1-7)**

Some criticism of our leaders is right and proper in a democracy and a free society, and church leaders are not exempt from proper criticism, but I have noticed a marked decline in civility within our national discourse, especially with the rise of social media. What should we do when we are faced with unjust and unfair criticism?

The first thing we must do is not to react immediately or to retaliate with angry denials, but to take time out and reflect.

- Is there an element of truth in this criticism, despite there being large elements of falsehood? If so, what can I learn from it.
- Can I look beyond the words and see the person making the criticism as a person loved by God, who may be projecting their anger of another situation onto me? It does not make it right, but it is so much easier to cope with if we understand that the criticism is not personal to us but relates to another situation.
- Can we turn first to God to obtain His perspective on the situation. Psalm 4 gives us a model of how to do this.

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- Tell God the problem and exactly how we feel. He can take our anger and it is much better to let Him have it than others around us. (Ps 4:1-2)
- Reflect on what God has already said and taught us. (Ps 4:3-5)
- Praise God that our lives are truly in His hands. (Ps 4:6-7)
- Sleep on it before responding (Ps 4:8)

We must remind ourselves that God is with us and on our side. He does not like us being unfairly accused, but He can use the situation to help us to know how to respond with grace, after the pattern of Jesus.

My mother was 91 recently so I reminded her of the words of Psalm 91, which can all help us when we face difficult times and need a "Hiding Place."

**1 You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
2 will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."
9 Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place,
10 no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.
14 Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.
15 When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honour them.
16 With long life I will satisfy them and show them my salvation.
(Psalm 91)**

In Christian Love

Paul