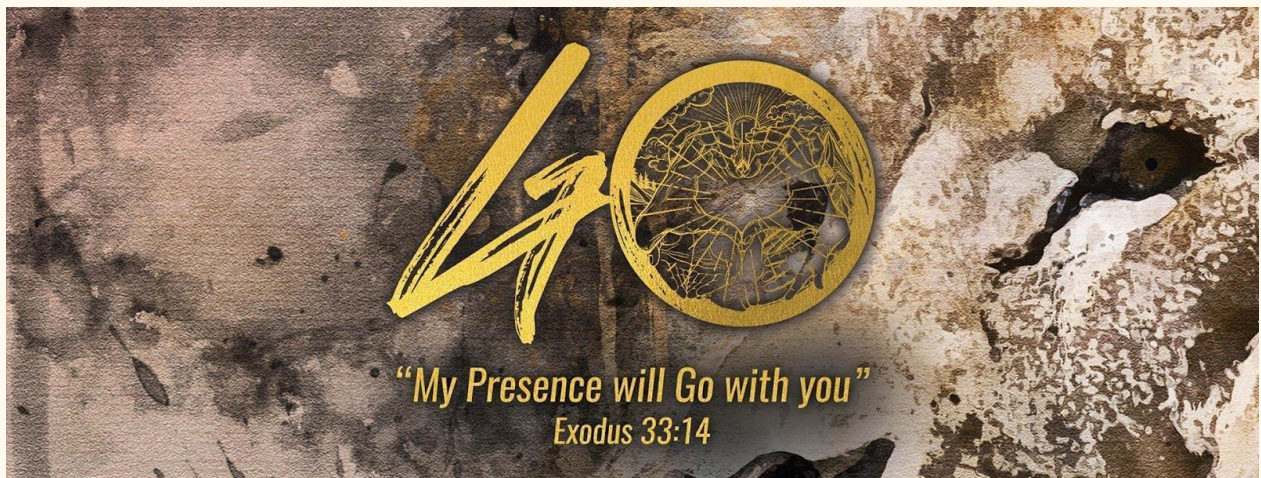

Ignite

“Lord, when things don’t go our way, may we remain steadfast to follow after You. When we do not understand the things happening around us, may we submit to Your perfect will and let it be done on earth, as it is in heaven. When we stumble and even should we fall, we are thankful that You are ever present to catch us and pick us up. At all times, we trust in You and walk humbly before You. Amen.”



SERMON SUMMARY

Note to Word Facilitator: The sermon notes below is a summary of the sermon. You may choose to further summarize it according to the needs and context of your CG members. The goal is not just to go through it “verbatim” but to prepare well, allowing members to recall and engage the message in the best possible way.

What's Next?: 5

Though The Fig Tree Not Blossom: Living by faith in a season of crisis

Dato' Dennis Ignatius

Habakkuk 3: 17-19

Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places. (ESV)

Introduction

We live in a time where hope seems bleak. From a government without the people's mandate compounded with the COVID-19 pandemic, there is so much uncertainty that it can feel as though all hope is lost. As exasperated citizens who live the Christian faith, we are to lift our eyes to God in faith and ask God ‘*what are Your plans for the future?*’

Going through the Book of Habakkuk, we find the Israelite prophet faces a similar reality to us. Anxiety and dismay as the nation had lost their moral compass and had fallen into corruption and despair. Habakkuk was a man of deep faith but struggled to reconcile what he was in his nation and in God. Let us go through what the prophet did and received in return.

1. The Lord's Answer *Habakkuk 1:5, 2:3-4*

Habakkuk sought and received God's revelation: God is still sovereign! He is still at work and He is not done yet. While the present seems filled with despair and hopelessness, our faith compels us to believe that God has our backs and that He will not leave us behind.

God calls for a response to pray and continue our work while waiting on Him in faith.

In Proverbs 29:18 (The Message), *"If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves, but when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed."*

2. Hind's feet in High Places *Habakkuk 3:19*

A hind is able to climb steep slopes that are nearly vertical. They climb the slopes in order to get to precious salt deposits which are necessary for their bone and nerves, in order to be able to move and survive. They are equipped to go places where other animals cannot or would not dare do the same in seeking opportunities vital for their survival or in avoiding predators that would seek to kill and eat them. Likewise, God promises to equip and bless us so that we are able to not only survive but thrive despite the painful or gloomy situations we may find ourselves in.

3. Three takeaways

3.1 God is at work; don't be discouraged

The message to us is do not be discouraged, God is at work. It is not about minimizing the circumstances we are in. We have every reason to be concerned and discouraged by what we are able to see. Our challenge as believers in the face of all that we know and witness around us, is to see past our circumstances and trust that God is at work; to hold on to the promises of God and to stand firm on His foundation.

As Dennis read Exodus 15 where Miriam took out her tambourine and sang praises after crossing the Red Sea and after seeing how their Egyptian oppressors crushed, he had an epiphany - that they should have been worshipping and dancing at the height of the chase, not after they have been delivered from the enemy. The challenge to us is this: will we dance and sing even in this troubling time? Will we be able to seize the opportunities before us and not stumble?

3.2 Stand in the Gap; Seize the Moment

The church was made for adversity. Everyone else thinks that it is futile and nothing can change, but the Bible tells us to not give up, but to arise and shine. The church in Roman times went into places of sickness when even the government abandoned its citizens, and because of their selfless act many came to know Christ as Lord and Saviour. If we choose to respond rightly to God, it may be our finest hour – to be the aroma of God where there is hopelessness and decay. The field is ready for harvest and those who work will reap the benefits.

3.3 Trust God; Let Not your hearts be troubled

There are some of us who are in real situations that seem impossible: financial troubles, loss of job, sickness. The challenge is to trust in Him who is able, and that He will make a way. As believers we should go deeper into the Word and use it to prophesy over ourselves in whatever terrible situation we find ourselves in. We are to remember that God has made the impossible possible for the heroes in the Bible, and believe that He can and will do the same for us.

Joseph the dreamer thought God had forgotten him while he spent 15 years in jail. God came through and made him the second most powerful man in Egypt, used Joseph to save the land and his family from a seven-year famine. David was anointed three times to be king over Israel, yet he spent many years running for his life, living in enemy territory even acting like a madman in order to survive. But in the end, he is remembered as the one after God's own heart.

Do not let the world pull you down, and trust that God is preparing you for a comeback. Isaiah 43:19 English Standard Version says *"Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."*

Conclusion

Trust that the Lord is good and faithful. Put on the armour of God and go forward knowing that we are not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed. Lift your hands and heart in the midst of the drought, trust that God will take care of you, and prepare for the rain He will bring.

SERMON REFLECTION

As the story of the hind was shared, I was reminded of the experience of hiking up Bukit Pelindung in Kuantan after Form 6 exams. We had trained our bodies, prepared our supplies and gear for the jungle hike. We had a couple of friends who were familiar with hiking this hill. Being gung-ho teenagers, we decided beforehand

that we would take the path less taken, which had a 45-degree slope using ropes and trees to break the descent downhill to the beach.

However, when it came to the real climb, it was tougher than we thought. We had to be wary of many loose stones that threatened to twist our ankles. Wildlife who treated us as trespassers to their territory. Insect repellants did not seem to work. The already difficult path downhill became more dangerous as rain suddenly fell. The ropes became slippery and the ground down slope muddy.

Giving up was not a choice. We were in the middle of the jungle! We were already on our way down the slope when the rain suddenly poured. We only had two choices: to go back up and back down the way we came from or to continue on with our current way down. Going back up would mean we will have to trek at least 2 hours back to where we started, and risk getting lost in the rain. Going down our current track would take us about 30 minutes, without the rain, to reach the beach, even with inexperienced hikers like us.

What the experienced hikers knew that we did not know, was that the 45-degree slope was just a short distance - less than a hundred meters away. Without consulting them, we went back and forth with no conclusion. Finally, the experienced ones spoke up and told us the seemingly daunting slope was short and that the rest of the trek downhill was fairly easy. Before we knew it, we were out on the beach, all within 30 minutes. We became more aware of jungle hiking and some of the challenges that come along with it. Imagine, we could have saved ourselves from an unnecessary dilemma if we had asked the experienced hikers' opinion at the start!

Sometimes, all that we are able to perceive seem to be choices that are as good as being stuck between a rock and a hard place. Instead of wallowing with our limited view, we have a choice to reach out to the One who has the Big Picture. In our time of need, reach up to God to seek His view, reach out to the community available around us for assistance and support, and reach in to what we have been equipped to forge the way forward in faith. Trust that God is in control, that even as He allows us to go through the storm, He can use the storm to educate us, to temper us, to

make us stronger and more resilient. What is required of us is to raise our eyes to Him and seek His future for our lives.

Contributed by Adeliyn



APPLICATION

Note to Word facilitator:

As you prepare for this session, this is a great time to pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you to use the questions efficaciously. You can select, modify or entirely create your own questions, according to the needs of your CG, especially if you feel that there are too many questions than required for the allocated time. The questions below are crafted with a certain flow in mind. You could use these towards the end or insert them in between your own sermon reflection and summary.

Suggested Icebreaker Questions (for Welcome that would link to the Word time)

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your emotional state now? (1 – Hopeful. 10 – Despair.)
- How long are you willing to wait for:
 - Coffee at your favourite café?
 - Online shopping to reach you?
 - God's calling?

Suggested Word Introductory Questions

- Which of Habakkuk's complaints speaks most to you? Why? (*You can choose more than one answer*)

1. God, why do you allow all this to happen?
 2. Why do the unjust prosper?
 3. Why do you tolerate so much evil?
 4. Why do you allow treacherous people to succeed?
 5. The law is paralysed and justice never prevails; and you allow it
 6. Don't you care about what's going on?
 7. Is there any reason for hope?
- How are you dealing with the negative impact(s) during these abnormal times? (*such as financial issues or psychological issues like anxiety or depression*)

Suggested Questions linked to main point

The Lord's Answer

- Looking back, is there something worth giving thanks to God for despite your situation?
- How do you see God working? (*in areas such as personal life, family, church unity*)
- In the age of Google and Netflix, are we willing to wait on Him?
- How long does it take for your faith to diminish? (*refer to Joseph's imprisonment*)

Hind's feet in High Places

- Are you equipped to go against the tide? Do you know the risks involved?
- What are your "hind legs"? What edge/talents has God given you to overcome your hardships in life?
- Just like the hind, are we willing to scale the seemingly impossible, to survive?

God is at work; don't be discouraged

- Are you standing in faith? What inspires you?
- What keeps you in the faith, even with everything going on around you?

Stand in the Gap; Seize the Moment

- How do we give hope to those feeling hopeless?
- How do you translate "stand in the gap" into real action?
- What can we do for others? (*Turning our eyes to God and others instead of our own self*)

Trust God; Let Not your hearts be troubled

- Have you been tempted to compromise on your convictions, to be in a "better place" than others? (*such as cutting corners, giving false accounts*)

- Do you struggle with the thought that God is no longer there for you?
 - What helps you remember God and to be at peace?
-

Question Bank*(Extra questions you can use to bring discussion further as you see fit):*

1. Have you faced/ are you facing an impossible situation? How has God guided you through this? How can we pray with/for you?
 2. During a time of crisis/difficulty, who do you focus on - yourself, man or God? Has God proven to be faithful? Share an experience of how God has helped you through a difficult time.
 3. Are you hoping for a new government? Or that the newly developed vaccine will return life to “normal”? Where is your hope?
 4. How can we shift our mind to focus on God in spite of our circumstances?
 5. Call on God: what do you think He is saying to you?
-



WHAT'S YOUR STORY?



Photo by Judit Peter from Pexels

Story of the week...

In this season of Advent, we will be reflecting on the One who brought us Hope, Peace, Joy & ultimately, Love. A video podcast is released each week for four consecutive weeks leading to Christmas. This week's theme is HOPE and being featured are two amazing young ladies, Heidi and Andrea., who founded Refuge for the Refugees. What started off as an initiative to grant education to refugee kids has turned out to be so much more than that, now.

Watch the podcast [here!](#) Better still, share it with others that you think will be inspired by Heidi and Andrea's stories!

Note: Videos will be posted on dumc.my/chats every Sunday at 12pm (for the duration of Advent).

This 4-part [video podcast](#) is put together by Darren Ong and Team

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."

- Maya Angelou

If you or your CG member(s) has a story to share related to today's Word or any other story that speaks of His goodness or of IMPACT Now, **share their/your story** [\[HERE\]](#)



PRAYER

Note to CGL: You (or someone you assign this portion to), may lead by praying OR reading these prayers together as a CG during worship.

Given that it is the first week of **Advent**, and our theme for this first Sunday of Advent is Hope, let us remember those who have suffered and see no end to their pain :

1. **Individuals** who have experienced losses financially and relationally with untold pain or even disillusionment with God in 2020.
2. **Families** who have seen dysfunction and brokenness in the midst of a prolonged pandemic.
3. **Refugees** who have lost their homes and loved ones due to armed conflict (eg Yemen, Nagorno-Karabakh) and natural disasters (flooding locally and elsewhere eg South Sudan where 1 million are affected, forest fires, massive storms eg hurricanes and typhoons).
4. **Heart of Worship:** Pray that online church or cell meetings for us will not result in any lesser intimacy or desire to worship the King of Kings, compared to when we meet physically. Ask the Lord to keep our hearts ever wanting to exalt His name and to draw near to Him, in personal times of praise and corporate times of worship.
5. **Hunger for His Word:** Pray that we will seek daily moments to study, meditate, and ponder upon the written Word of God. We remember in prayer the many in the world who still have no access to His Word and that the Lord will make a way for copies of the Bible, especially in their local language, to reach them.
6. **Hope for the World:** Pray that as we enter the season of Advent, that our heart will long for the lost to find the real reason for Christmas: Jesus Christ. Pray that we will play a part in His salvation plan for our neighbours, our cities, our nation, and the nations of the world. Holy Spirit, light up our heart, so that we in turn, can shine Your light into the world, this Christmas!



OTHER RESOURCES

Below are some links to resource you. Do **CLICK** on the images below!

FEATURED

In view of our current changing landscape that affects us individually and corporately, here are some featured resources for you this month!



Methodist Prayer

methodistprayer.org

Methodist Prayer is based on Daily Prayer, the Church of ...

Prayer & Spirituality

Website



Following Christ in a Pandemic: Philip Yancey

59 minutes

biologos.org

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, "science" has be...

Philip Yancey

Social Concerns

Christian Living

Video Clip



The Psalms Dare Us to Bring Our Whole Sel...

Short

christianitytoday.com

Praying the Psalter can give shape to the river of our emo...

Tish Harrison Warren

Prayer & Spirituality

Christian Living

Article

OTHER RESOURCES

Discover a host of other resources curated for you here!



DUMC STORIES

Be blessed by a compilation of inspiring DUMC Stories that you can share with others!



