

Affliction and Comfort

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[0:00] So we're going to turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 1. And this morning I'm going to be reading from the first 11 verses. We're kicking off a series in 2 Corinthians that's going to go for pretty much the rest of the year.

Almost the rest of the year. We're going to be working our way through 2 Corinthians. So let me encourage you to really get into it. Make 2 Corinthians your subject for the next 6 months or 4 or 5 months until we get to some of the Psalms series.

And it will be nice and warm. Come in here and look at the Psalms together. I can't pronounce the Psalms properly anymore. Anyway. Okay, let me read from 2 Corinthians chapter 1.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, and Timothy our brother. To the church of God that is at Corinth with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

[1:22] For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation.

And if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia, for we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.

Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us.

On Him we have set our hope that He will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

[2:30] This is the word of the Lord. All right, and if you're new with us this morning, you'll find an outline of my talk inside your bulletins and a transcript as well.

I think there are some hard copies available at the back as well. Friends, let's talk. I want to talk straight with you. You may have heard, I'm the new senior pastor.

I'm your pastor now. And as I've said previously, I'm very thankful for the vote of confidence and very humbled by the trust that you've placed in me, and I understand that it is a huge responsibility. So I'm going to do my absolute best to look after you, to teach you the word of God, to lead you, to serve you, to love you, to set you a good example.

I want to help every single one of you to grow more like Jesus. If you don't know Jesus yet, I want to introduce you to Him. Or maybe you've been following Jesus for ages.

[3:33] I want to help you make it to the end, to persevere, until we all meet Jesus. You're not perfect yet. I know you know that, and I know that. I want to help you to keep striving to be more like Jesus every single day.

And the Christian life is not just the individualistic life with individualistic goals. The shepherd doesn't just care for the sheep one by one, but cares for the whole flock.

So I want us to grow together as a church as well, to be more mature as a body. More united. Full of love for God, love for God's word, love for God's people, and love for the lost.

But I have a request for you. I'm not going to do everything from here on. We'll come to 2 Corinthians in a moment, and I think that this actually sums up 2 Corinthians pretty well.

My request for you is, please help me. I can't do this alone. So I'm begging you to help me.

[4:40] Please work with me. Please partner with me. Please join in and serve our church. Make St. Lucia Bible Church your life's work. Does that make sense?

See, that is how I'm viewing this whole new venture. I don't really know how long I might have at St. Lucia Bible Church. For one, my life might be very short. But also, I know the kingdom is bigger than just our little patch.

I hope you know that. But at least what I'm expecting, what I'm hoping for, what I'm praying for, is that St. Lucia Bible Church is my life's work.

So I'm going to stay. Even when things get difficult, I'm going to pray and serve and give to the ministry here because I want St. Lucia Bible Church to flourish.

Basically because I love you guys. And I want to ask you to do the same. Why don't you make St. Lucia Bible Church your life's work?

[5:47] Let's make this community flourish together. You know, it's more important than building bridges or hospitals or schools or governments. These things are only for this life, aren't they?

But this, this church, is a reflection of eternity. So let's build this together. And I really need your help. Now I know, of course, that some of us are feeling tired, maybe discouraged at the moment, mostly very cold.

That's okay. You know, I'm not saying you have to pull your weight all the time, right? Or you're being ungodly. I know we all go through different seasons in life.

We all have different capacities. If you're feeling that way, I'm not trying to beat you over the head with another load of extra burdens. If you've got a lot going on in your life already, that's okay.

You're really valued and appreciated just because you're here. I just mean that if this is going to work, then we all have different gifts, different contributions to make.

[6:54] We can do so much more together than we can do alone. If we work together, our best days could be ahead of us rather than behind us. And it seems to me we have a lot of work to do.

So please pray for me and pray for our church. Please talk with me. Tell me how you're going, how we could help you more.

Give me feedback. Gently. If you've got any ideas or suggestions, I'd love to hear them. You know we can't do everything everyone suggests, but I'd still love to hear your ideas.

I'm the kind of person that has, you know, ten ideas a day and Catherine tells me that nine of them are rubbish. Right? But I'd rather hear a hundred ideas and sift through them to find the good ones than just have none at all.

Please have some patience with me when things go wrong or if I make mistakes, when I make mistakes, when I sin, don't give up on me too quickly.

[8:01] It'll just take me a few decades to get up to speed. Please try to work with each other. I don't really know if there are any rivalries or tensions or frustrations in our relationships at the moment, things bubbling under the surface.

Right? Inevitably, these things arise from time to time. We all stumble in many ways, James says. But, let's try to be patient with one another, compassionate, forgiving, kind, gentle, thankful, reconcile with one another quickly, strive for peace.

There's no point trying to go out on mission together and see people converted if we're not converting them to the godly life of worshipping Christ Jesus.

I think of the Pharisees Jesus criticizes in Matthew chapter 23. He says, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

That's terrible, isn't it? Imagine if that was market day. Lots of converts, lots of proselytes, but actually, we're not really converting them to the life of worshipping God, of worshipping our Lord Jesus Christ, the life of godliness and righteousness and love.

[9:31] So I hope forever and ever that we are a church that cares about mission, that cares about evangelism, but ultimately, we care about mission because we care about the church.

We care about gathering people into God's loving family and there's no point going out on mission if we don't have a loving family to come back to or to gather people into.

The church is not a tool for mission. The church is the goal of mission. And I want us, when we leave church, to go out into the world eager to gather more people to Christ because we know how wonderful it is to live under His rule, to belong to Him and to be with His people.

So, I know you already know this, but I just want to encourage you, I want to remind you, I want to beg you to please help me. As we begin this new phase of our life together, I'm feeling excited but daunted.

Terrified, honestly. And inadequate. I'm just trying to be completely open and transparent with you. I desperately need your help. If you don't help, this could go terribly, terribly wrong.

[10:56] Don't want to make any threats, but it really could. Okay, so that brings us to 2 Corinthians. And as I say, I actually think that this is a pretty good summary of what 2 Corinthians is all about. That is not a coincidence.

I picked 2 Corinthians precisely because I want to talk with you over the next few months about authentic gospel ministry and how we can all partner in it together. So, throughout this letter, Paul says things like, and maybe you noticed this in our reading just then, verse 11.

Paul says things like, you also must help us by prayer. Right, brothers and sisters? You must help me by prayers.

Please help me. Pray for me. Or keep going. Take a look at chapter 1, verse 16. Paul says, I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia and to come back to Macedonia, sorry, to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea.

He means, I wanted to come to you so that you would help me get back to Judea. You would supply me and set me up. And Paul keeps saying things like this throughout the letter. We won't go through the whole thing today, but just one more from this chapter.

[12:14] Look at verse 24. Paul says, not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.

Brothers and sisters, that is what I want to do. I don't want to lord it over your faith, but I want to work with you for your joy. Will you work with me?

Later on, Paul says, I'm opening wide my heart to you. Will you open wide your heart to me? Now, Paul's letter to the Corinthians doesn't say exactly what I want to say to you.

Okay? It was written at a particular time in a particular place. And before we just start ripping things out of context, we should have a think about the history surrounding the letter. Basically, the history of Paul's relationship with the Corinthians.

So let me tell you a story. I've got a bit of a timeline up on the screen for you to make it easier to follow along. Paul's relationship with the Corinthians started in about 50 AD.

[13:20] He spent two years there or just under preaching the gospel and establishing the church in this big, thriving port city in modern-day Greece. Again, have I got a little map?

Yeah, good. This is a map of where Corinth is. It's in the south of Greece there in a region called Achaia. Luke tells us about Paul's first visit there in Acts chapter 18.

Again, we won't go there now but you might like to look it up another time. It'd be good reading to get your kind of bearings on Corinth. Paul preached the gospel there, of course, beginning with the Jews as he was accustomed to doing in line with God's plan of salvation.

This stirred up some opposition, fairly typical as you might expect but Luke says many of the Corinthians believed the gospel and were baptized and the church got underway.

Now, eventually, so that was the first two years, eventually Paul did leave Corinth. He returned to his home church in Antioch. I always like to imagine him going back to sort of CMS summer school, running the workshops, you know, running an elective or something, that kind of thing, telling everybody how it's going.

[14:35] So he goes back to Antioch and CMS summer school and then he headed out again. He made his way to Ephesus and Paul probably wrote his first letter to the Corinthians or at least the first letter that we know about in about AD 54 from Ephesus.

He mentions this letter, sorry, back to the timeline, oh yeah, no, this first. He mentions this letter in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 9 where he says, I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people.

You see that? So I know this is a bit confusing but 1 Corinthians wasn't Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. It's just the first letter that's been preserved for us and that verse probably gives you a hint too that there were some serious problems in the church at Corinth in AD 54.

Paul has heard various reports, terrible reports about factions and quarreling, sexual immorality that not even the pagans would put up with, idolatry and so on.

So it sounds like it was a real mess. But then, yeah, if we go back to the timeline again, from the things we can glean in 2 Corinthians, we learn that Paul made a second visit to Corinth sometime in AD 55 and he describes this as a painful visit in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 and he also talks about another visit that he intended to make but didn't and he cancelled it.

[16:09] Hence now on the timeline we've got the first visit where the church was planted, second visit which was painful, the third visit which was postponed. So instead, he wrote what is sometimes called the severe letter or this letter that caused grief which again we don't have but Paul mentions it in 2 Corinthians chapter 7.

Now having sent it out, Paul then left Ephesus and journeyed into Troas and Macedonia on his way to Corinth that's up north and then up and around you know by land but he's still waiting as he heads into Macedonia he's still waiting to hear back from Titus about how his severe letter was received.

Finally then when Titus arrives he has good news that the Corinthians were grieved by the letter but as Paul describes it it was a godly grief that led them to repentance.

Okay, so that just about brings us up to speed. Paul's relationship with the Corinthians has been somewhat rocky for quite a few months and even years now. I don't think that's how our relationship has been so again there are things that don't quite fit but anyway, anyway, this is how it's been for Paul and the Corinthians but by God's grace they seem to be now at a point where things are looking up.

They're on the cusp of a kind of hopeful new dawn for their relationship and Paul wants to re-establish and restore the Corinthians as gospel partners in his ministry.

[17:50] Okay? So, let's get into our passage for today then. There are three parts to it. We'll skip over Paul's greeting in verses 1 and 2 not because it's not fantastic but just to save some time.

In verses 3 to 7 the letter begins in earnest and the key theme is comfort. It's hard to miss, isn't it? Paul mentions the word comfort 10 times in verses 3 to 7 and he's not just talking about fluffy pillows and comfort food.

I think we often miss this but there's a fort in the word comfort. Did you notice that? Comfort has to do with strength. You know, when someone needs to be fortified.

Paul's talking about this kind of strengthening comfort. It is tender and warm and caring and so on but it's more than that. It's not weak. You know, when someone sympathizes with you but they really can't do anything to help.

It's not that kind of comfort. That's not what Paul is talking about here. He's talking about being restored and re-established, having our wounds bound up by a powerful and compassionate God.

[18:59] Being renewed and set right by God and then able to comfort each other. So there is a sense of warmth and emotion and care and consolation.

You know, God's tenderness after a time of sorrow and suffering but it's more than that. Paul wants to talk to the Corinthians about God's power to bring true and lasting comfort to His people and to fix up this whole broken mess of a world that we live in.

And in particular, Paul wants us to have Isaiah chapter 40 in mind. You might know or you might not know but the book of Isaiah is split into two halves.

Often the first half is described as the book of judgment which is a bit simplistic but it's often described as the book of judgment and the second half is described as the book of salvation or the book of comfort.

Because just listen to how the second half of the book of Isaiah begins. This is Isaiah chapter 40 verse 1. See that?

[20:19] The repetition? Comfort, comfort. And in the original context what Isaiah was looking forward to was the end of the Babylonian exile.

Right? Comfort for the people of Jerusalem and Judea after 70 years of sorrow and suffering and desolation as punishment for their sins and idolatry.

But what Isaiah wanted the people to look forward to after the exile was a new dawn a new day a day of comfort a day of restoration and salvation.

And Isaiah said that this day of comfort or messianic comfort and salvation would come through a man a servant who we've just been reading about in Isaiah 49 and he has another song in Isaiah 42 and another song in Isaiah 53 and so on.

61 I think is the last one. A man a servant whom God would send filled with the Holy Spirit to bring in this messianic age of comfort for God's people for all the nations and he would ultimately bring in a new heavens and a new earth.

[21:29] Now you'll never guess who this servant is. I'm kidding. It's the Lord Jesus Christ of course. Christ is the ultimate servant of God the spirit filled Messiah.

but I think what Paul is doing in 2 Corinthians as Christ's apostle is he's showing how his own ministry is really an extension of the ministry of the servant.

So just as God and Israel had a rocky relationship for a while that's putting it mildly but had a rocky relationship with Israel for a while that ended in comfort through the work of the servant so God and the Corinthians have had a rocky relationship for a while but now is the time for comfort through the work of the apostle of the servant.

Does that make sense? So Paul wants us to have Isaiah 40 to 66 in mind the whole thing I think he's going to keep drawing on it throughout the letter because he wants us to see the parallels there.

I'll say it again just in case you missed it just as God and Israel had a rocky relationship for a while that ended in comfort through the work of the servant so it's not just that Paul and the Corinthians have had a rocky relationship for a while but that God and the Corinthians have had a rocky relationship for a while but now is the time for comfort through the work of the apostle Paul as the servant of the servant of the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[23:13] Okay so this is a letter of comfort it's a letter of restoration at one level it's about restoring the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians re-establishing the Corinthians as partners in Paul's ministry but at another level because of who Paul is and who he represents it's about re-establishing the Corinthians in their relationship to God.

Now of course the most famous thing about the servant in the latter half of Isaiah is that in order to bring in the messianic age of comfort he himself is going to have to suffer affliction so that's another key word in this first part of the letter because the Corinthians you see don't really have a place for suffering in their understanding of gospel ministry so you may recall from Paul's previous letter to them what we call 1 Corinthians that the Corinthians were very interested in power and powerful people powerful speakers displays of signs and wonders it's quite a natural human sinful common way of thinking isn't it this is how we think about God and power we start with the power that we see around us powerful people powerful speakers powerful conquering heroes winning great victories and so on and we assume that because God is the most powerful of powerful beings out there that his power will look much the same way only more so you know if Alexander the Great conquered Mesopotamia then God's Messiah will conquer the whole world and there's definitely some truth to that isn't there

I mean God can display power like that he's done that plenty of times I think of all the great conquests in the Old Testament and so on the conquest that will happen at the end of the age and great power we see on display in creation there's some truth to that definitely but you know the most powerful thing God ever did was let himself be crucified in shame and weakness and humiliation and that's what the Corinthians don't get they don't get the power and purpose of suffering the power and purpose of the cross and cross shaped ministry so in verse 3 the Corinthians want a powerful God but Paul wants to talk to them about a God of tenderness and love God is the father of all mercies and the God of all comfort an idea of a father is intrinsically a powerful one fathers have authority and power but our God doesn't dominate and oppress with his power he's the father of all mercies and the God of all comfort so God uses his power to care for the afflicted to lift up the downtrodden and save the broken and the word power actually is in there in the Greek it's slightly hidden in the

English in verse 4 because it's translated able in the ESV but literally in verse 4 you see Paul is saying that God comforts us in all our affliction so that we then may be able or may be empowered to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God so I think of it kind of like a cascading waterfall of comfort and affliction that the real power to bring comfort comes from God and as it flows down into Paul and his companions through Christ it fills them up as it were and then it flows onto others but we've got to remember that comfort and affliction always go hand in hand right so God doesn't just pronounce comfort from on high again think back to Isaiah the way God brings comfort to his people is by stepping down into their affliction joining them in their suffering and then carrying them through it to comfort and in the same way

Paul wants the Corinthians to understand that all authentic gospel ministry comfort bringing ministry involves affliction the affliction of the one bringing the comfort so that Paul's sufferings don't undermine his claim to be an apostle but actually define what it would mean to be an apostle of the suffering servant all authentic gospel ministry involves weakness and suffering and pain and heartache and then receiving the comfort that comes from God so that that comfort can then flow overflow to others so again in the ESV the ESV talks about sharing abundantly in Christ's suffering but the Greek literally says something like that the sufferings of Christ overflow into us the sufferings of Christ overflow into us and thus through Christ our comfort also overflows see that sort of cascading idea it's as if

[28:32] Christ's sufferings have caught up to Paul like a flood saturating his life with both comfort and affliction on the one hand comfort because when we are flooded by Christ's sufferings all our sins are washed away and so on it brings comfort but on the other hand it brings affliction because a servant is not greater than his master when you belong to Christ you experience affliction too Jesus said to his disciples if the world hates you remember that it hated me first so you see our participation in Christ and this salvation that he is bringing always has this dual nature to it when Christ's afflictions catch up with you and start to shape and dominate and define and transform your life they bring affliction as well as comfort so in verse 6 Paul talks about how his affliction and his comfort were all to bring comfort and salvation to the

Corinthians but notice how halfway through verse 6 Paul goes one step further when he talks about how the Corinthians themselves have to patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer it's not just that Paul is the apostle or that I am the pastor so I'll take all the comfort and all the affliction or as if I can just take all the affliction and you get all the comfort you'll be getting the affliction and the comfort too we're all in this together cascading down from God or from Christ we receive comfort and affliction as we participate in his salvation and as we act as his ministers and in verse 7 it's because the Corinthians are suffering notice that Paul is so confident that ultimately they will be comforted or they will be saved it's because they are sharing in Paul's sufferings and more importantly in the sufferings of Christ that Paul is confident that they will ultimately be confident and saved elsewhere

Paul puts it even more strongly I'm studying Romans in growth groups and we're up to this chapter this week in Romans chapter 8 Paul says the spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God and if children then heirs heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him in other words if we don't suffer with him then we won't also be glorified with him if we don't participate in the affliction we have no confidence that we'll participate in the comfort and we don't need to go looking for suffering of course but if we continue to live as faithful followers of the Lord Jesus then we will have to endure many trials and tribulations!

on our way to the kingdom of God now in verse 7 the word share is really important again it's just gives us another insight into the whole purpose of this letter the word is *koinonia* it has to do with being partners being in fellowship together Paul wants to encourage the Corinthians to be partners with him in authentic gospel ministry this gospel ministry of affliction and comfort he doesn't want to lord it over the Corinthians making some grand distinction between himself and them even though he's an apostle but no it's quite the opposite that's how the rulers of this world use their power isn't it instead Paul wants to encourage the Corinthians to be his partners in this work to be partners in faithful new covenant cross shaped ministry so brothers and sisters God is inviting you this morning to share in this ministry of messianic comfort by taking part in

Christ's afflictions okay which brings us into verses 8 to 11 where Paul gives us a little glimpse into just how bad things can get sometimes in the Christian life he says for we do not want you to be unaware brothers of the affliction we experienced in Asia for we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself how bad can it get we don't know exactly what happened to Paul in Asia what crisis he might be referring to I think most likely he's talking about the riot in Ephesus that we read about in Acts chapter 19 but either way Paul says things got so bad at some point as he was trying to preach the gospel in Asia that he despaired of life itself he's not saying that he was contemplating suicide or something like that he's just saying he didn't think he was going to survive he wasn't sure if he was actually going to make it through this particular crisis in verse 9 he says indeed we felt that we had received the sentence of death this is what

[33:52] Paul was trying to cope with not some internal struggle particularly with mental health or something like that some of us might have to cope with those struggles from time to time but he's not talking about that here he's talking about he felt that the death penalty was hanging over his head and again it doesn't matter exactly but I think something like the Ephesian riot fits the bill here you might remember how angry Demetrius and the silversmiths were at Paul because he had been preaching against idolatry and that was going to affect their hip pocket Luke says they were enraged and when Paul wanted to go into the theater to address the crowds his friends wouldn't let him presumably because they thought he was going to get torn limb from limb but in verse 9 Paul says whatever the crisis was that the Lord had a purpose in this crisis it was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead and this is the essence of the

Christian faith isn't it we believe in the God who raises the dead and very often it's only when people get a seriously close look at death that they are forced as it were to stop relying on themselves but to turn to God for help are you at your wits end have you lost all hope of survival again when you get a good look at death make sure that you then look up to God because God is the one who raises the dead and again just think about the theme of power for a moment we often marvel at the powerful people of this world people who seem to hold the lives of others in their hands powerful people sometimes try to stave off their own deaths with endless treatments and regimens and surgeries and so on but no one has succeeded yet as far as I know but Paul is saying here under the sentence of death which in a sense we all are there really is only one wise place to turn the whole reason God puts us into this into these perilous situations

Paul says is to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead that is real power isn't it what good is power if you can conquer kingdoms and expand empires and kill others only in the end to be swallowed up by death yourself but God is able to raise the dead and in verse 10 Paul says he delivered us from such a deadly peril and he will deliver us on him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again Paul is not afraid of any affliction or danger not even death itself because God is the God who always comes through and he always finds a way to bring us through with him even when the path seems impossible in Ephesus Paul thought he himself that he wasn't going to make it he wasn't going to get out alive but of course he did the Lord delivered him and now

Paul is even more confident that God will always deliver him in fact even when he dies eventually God will deliver him through that even when Christians die and it looks like God hasn't delivered us this time we know that God has even found a way through death by God's power and the power of that dead man hanging on the cross we have deliverance through death Christians will survive even death and in verse 11 Paul says even in this it's not just that we let go and let God he says you also must help us by prayer so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many in God's grace he doesn't actually just save us by divine pronouncement from above you know each one of us as individuals but he uses the prayers of others as well as what we do for one another he sends people to people and works through people to save people the ministry of comfort and reconciliation that also involves affliction happens as people go to people in God's kindness in his power so brothers and sisters I think that brings us full circle please help me I said it at the start and I meant it authentic gospel ministry it seems to me is not about pretending to be successful strong you know a person who has it all figured out I am not Alexander or Joshua the great I want you to know from the get-go that I am a jar of clay just like Paul in fact even more so I'm sure I'm weak and inadequate and some days maybe maybe most days I'll get things wrong and that's all part of God's plan actually to show off the power of his gospel both in my life and in the lives of others and what koinonia means is partnership sharing you and I will be in this ministry of comfort and affliction together constantly suffering constantly looking weak and yet bringing the powerful comfort of God to each other into each other's lives and to the world I wonder if you think that our church would display

[39:47] God's power more clearly if we were all a bit more successful and victorious I mean if we were 30,000 strong instead of a hundred or so huddled together in this cold little hall pretty weak if only we had more important people in the room some CEOs would be nice some politicians would be fantastic you know I've just been down in Canberra whole city's wonderful I'm kidding but anyway I'm not saying that those things would be bad exactly if you're a CEO you're very welcome and or a politician I'm just saying that it would be foolish to think that God displays his power in worldly ways like that no God displays his power through weak people and weak churches sharing

together in affliction and in comfort relying on the God who raises the dead and is always able to deliver his people so let's pray loving father you are the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ the father of mercies and God of all comfort we thank you so much for the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ that have caught up to us and blessed us with your comfort that have paid for our sins washed us clean set us free and we do see a great power of the cross a remarkable mysterious wonderful topsy-turvy power of the cross this great moment of weakness that has done what nothing else in the world could do set us free from our sins we do pray father that you would help us in all of our afflictions to turn to Christ and his cross to look to you and your power to raise raise us from the dead we pray that as we are weak and we suffer and are afflicted that you would help us to minister to others and to show them your power ever more clearly through that help us not to be a church where we rely on ourselves but a church where in our weakness we learn to rely on you we are prayerful we are humble we love one another and keep seeking to serve and strengthen each other and we pray that through that you might display your great power to the world pray in Jesus name

Amen Thank you.