

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Those 'in-between' times of life

Presented by Graham Agnew

The Apollo 13 Lunar Mission had been going smoothly since its launch at 2:13pm on April 11, 1970 – so smoothly in fact that Joe Kerwin, the Duty Commander at Mission Control casually remarked to the crew after approximately 47 hours into the flight:

“The spacecraft is in real good shape as far as we are concerned. We’re bored to tears down here.”

Nine hours and twelve minutes later, with the Apollo 13 spacecraft 321,869 kilometres from earth, there was an explosion in an oxygen tank resulting in damage to the craft and the severe restriction of electricity, light and water to the Command Module housing James Lovell, John Swigert and Fred Haise.

It was Commander James Lovell who intoned a simple heart-stopping message across the void of space:

“Houston, we have a problem!”

These words have become synonymous with moments of crisis ever since. And so the world watched and waited over the next 3 days as the crew of Apollo 13 contemplated the grim reality that they might never return to earth, while NASA experts on the ground worked feverishly around the clock to try and solve the unprecedented problems they were now facing.

Eventually, the spacecraft went into an orbit around the moon, a manoeuvre critical to any possibility of returning to earth. And it was during that period of darkness, with no communication, basic supplies dwindling and hopes of ever seeing their families fading fast that those 3 brave space explorers faced their most challenging “in between” time.

On the sixth day of the mission, 3 days after the crisis began, the damaged Apollo 13 spacecraft splashed down safely in the Pacific Ocean, A frightening ordeal for 3 American space pioneers was now over.

In a couple of weeks, we’ll be celebrating Easter and we will recall that things began well for the disciples on that fine Easter weekend as our Lord commenced His final mission to the city of Jerusalem. The adulation of the crowds during the triumphant entry to the city had been overwhelming and when the group met to celebrate the Passover, the stage looked set for a wonderful climax to a highly successful period of ministry.

But then, seemingly without warning, things went horribly wrong for the disciples: Jesus began to talk about denial and betrayal; a brother whom they thought they could trust disappeared mysteriously into the night and within a few short hours the One on whom they had pinned all of their hopes for a great and glorious future, was in custody.

What followed would shatter their lives and dash their dreams in spectacular fashion. The sight of their Master bruised, battered, bleeding and dying on a Roman cross represented a crisis of unprecedented severity for these simple men. Now they would enter a dark and lonely “in between” period, with no idea at all as to what, if anything, lay on the other side.

PART 2

Everyday, ordinary people like you and me face the “in between times” of life. A man leaves the surgery after completing a test procedure. The doctor has indicated that it could be serious, but he won’t know for sure until the results come back from the lab. What follows is 3 days of waiting ... 3 days of painful anticipation and anxiety ... 3 days of “between time”.

Meanwhile a young woman recently retrenched from her workplace is feeling very despondent, having just been unsuccessful in her ninth job interview in as many days. She’s going to a party and will suffer the indignity of telling the highly successful group with whom she mixes that she’s between jobs. She has to get a break at some point, but for now, she’s facing one of those “in between” moments of life.

How we cope with the “in between” periods of our experience largely determines how effective we are in the art of living. Frequently we find ourselves dealing with such periods: between the argument and the reconciliation; the failed attempt and the next try; between the loss and the adjustment; between the huge disappointment and the recovery.

Unlike the disciples during their period of hopelessness between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, we have the advantage of a post-resurrection perspective. For us, the in between times of life need not rob us of hope and optimism. We share in the reality that Paul wrote about around 25 years after the Resurrection:

“We are often troubled, but not crushed; sometimes in doubt, but never in despair; there are many enemies, but we are never without a friend; and although badly hurt at times, we are not destroyed.”
(2Cor.4:8 & 9)

PART 3

In one sense, the longest “in between” time is the period between birth and death. So many questions ... so many uncertainties ... so many perplexing problems. And like the disciples of old the pressure of this uncertainty can send us reeling and even teetering on the brink of doubt and denial.

But the Word of God provides us with strong reassurance to this predicament and it comes from Paul in his first Letter to the Corinthians:

“What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. What I know now is only partial; then it will be complete – as complete as God’s knowledge of me. Meanwhile, these three remain: faith, hope and love and the greatest of these is love.”

We’re ready for anything if we can hang on to these three!