

June 12/13, 2021

Compassion fatigue and resting at the “end” of the pandemic (Part I)

Rev. Simon Lee

Dear brothers and sisters,

The pandemic that has devastated us for the last year and a half may soon have run its course, at least we hope so. It has been too long, too tragic, and too sad, for too many. We have all been put to the test in our faith, and we all wonder who will be left standing at the end of the long period of desolations we have to endure. Personally, this past many months have been most trying as I have never experienced anything like it in all my years of ministry. The challenge came in the form of COVID hitting my oldest daughter which also led to Lydia and I having to be self-isolated for 14 days. It came at the same time as the loss of many of my closest colleagues and classmates, and esteemed teachers and veteran pastors due to different illnesses. Also, the difficulties of the ministries seemed to be compounded and more overwhelming when one cannot deal with them face to face, or rely on the knowledge and past experiences one has accumulated. But ultimately the pandemic put to the test on who I am as a person. How I and we all fare at the end depends on what we are made of, whether we are just living a Christian form of life or whether we are truly living the Christ life, the authentic life of faith, lived in the way Christ lived.

It is inevitable that when we go through any trials, whether physical, mental, spiritual, or relational, whatever the nature of the trials is, and even when we are doing things out of care and compassion, fatigue inevitably sets in over time. For those who are the business of caring for others, psychologists call this “compassion fatigue.” The concept comes from “metal fatigue” in big, engineered machines like airplanes that are made of the best metal alloys that are sturdy and last for a long time, even after countless hours of flight. However, after logging thousands and thousands of hours of flight, eventually, even the strongest material starts to become more fragile and run into risks of breaking down, causing terrible accidents.

The concept of “compassion fatigue” is applied to loving and devoted caregivers and health and service providers including those who are in ministries. It is different from “burnouts” which now refers to the results of being overworked and the experience of overwhelming pressure in different situations. It often happens before a person fall into in a burnout situation but is already on the verge of it. In fact, the reason for not quite falling into a burnout situation is the care and compassion the person has that keeps the person going despite the real need of slowing down, resting and resetting. Therein lies the danger for us as Christians, we know that we need to live by faith and serve with compassion, but despite our best intention, because we are but human, we will experience physical and compassion fatigue, especially when we try so hard against all odds.

Even Jesus with all His compassion had to fight physical and compassion fatigue at the end of days of ministries of teaching and caring. He had to take time off on His own to pray to the Father till the early hours of the morning (Mt 13, 14). But at the end of all his trials, Jesus was able to walk on water, unlike Peter, the disciple “of little faith” who wanted to be like Jesus but doubted and as soon as he moved his eyes away from Jesus and saw the wind and the water, he sank and cried out desperately for help. There

are many lessons we can learn from this familiar story, especially when we are hopefully seeing the light at the end of the tunnel in this pandemic, but I would just like to focus here on one, “compassion fatigue”, learning from Jesus to take rest. (Continue next week)

Your pastor,

Rev. Simon Lee

教牧心聲

慈憐疲勞(Compassion fatigue)與安息(一)

李耀全牧師

親愛的列宣家弟兄姊妹：

在過去一年半以來令我們身心交瘁的疫情大流行可能很快就會結束了，至少我們希望如此。對於太多人來說，這已經是太長，太難過，太令人悲傷了。我們都經歷了信仰的考驗，我們都在問，在我們必須忍受的長期傷心寂寞時間結束時，誰會站立得穩。就我個人而言，過去的幾個月是最艱難的，因為我在多年的事奉中從未經歷過這樣的事情。對我切身挑戰的是我的大女兒受到病毒感染，這也導致我和師母不得不自我隔離 14 天。與此同時，我也面對著許多最親密的同工和同學，以及我所尊敬的老師和資深牧者，也因不同的疾病而離世。此外，在無法面對面處理，或不能依靠所積累的知識和過去的經驗時，令事奉的困難似乎更加複雜和更為難以承受。但至終，這疫情考驗了我到底是何等人。我或我們如何存活，取決於我們是由什麼所形成(構成)的，我們是否只是過著一種外表基督徒的生活形式，或是我們真的活出基督的生活，真確的信仰生活，以基督的方式去生活。

當我們經歷任何考驗時，無論是在身體、心理、靈性或是人際關係的各方面，不論考驗的性質如何，即使我們所作的是出於關懷和同情心，隨著長時間的付出，感到疲倦是在所難免。對於那些專責關心服侍他人的人，心理學家稱之為“慈憐疲勞”。這個概念來自大型工程機械(如飛機)的“金屬勞損(metal fatigue)”，這些機械由最高質料的金屬合金製成，堅固耐用，即使經歷無數小時的飛行也能持續很長時間。然而，經過成千上萬小時的飛行，最終，即使是最堅固的材料也會開始變得更得脆弱，而且面臨崩潰的風險，從而導致可怕的意外事故發生。

這個概念應用於充滿愛心和忠誠的關顧者以及健康和服務提供者，包括那些投身於事奉的人，被稱為“慈憐疲勞”。與“耗盡”不同的是指工作過度以及在不同情況下承受壓倒性壓力引致勞累的結果。通常在一個人陷入耗盡狀態之前，已經是處於這種疲勞狀態的邊緣了。事實上，導致耗盡的原因是出於這人對他人的關切與同情，令他儘管在明顯有需要放緩步伐時，仍不休息及重新調整。即使我們基督徒也是面臨著耗盡危機的。我們知道需要憑信心生活並以同情心服侍，但儘管我們的本意是最好的，但由於我們只是人，尤其是當我們如在困難重重的情況下仍不斷作出努力時，我們會經歷身體和同情心的疲勞。

在結束昔日教導和關懷事工的日子裡，即使是滿懷憐憫的耶穌，也不得不與身體和同情心的疲勞爭持。他不得不獨自抽出時間向天父祈禱，直到清晨(太 14:13,14)。但在他所有的考驗完結時，耶穌能夠在水面上行走，不像彼得這個“小信”的門徒，他想與耶穌一樣行在水上做卻存著懷疑，當他一旦將視線從耶穌身上移開，看到風和海浪時，他便沉了下去，並絕望地呼救。我們可從這個熟悉的故事中可學到不少教訓，尤其是當我們盼望在這疫情中看到隧道盡頭的曙光時，但我只想在此集中於“慈憐疲勞”這方面去看並向耶和華學習安息。(下期續)

您的牧者，
李耀全牧師