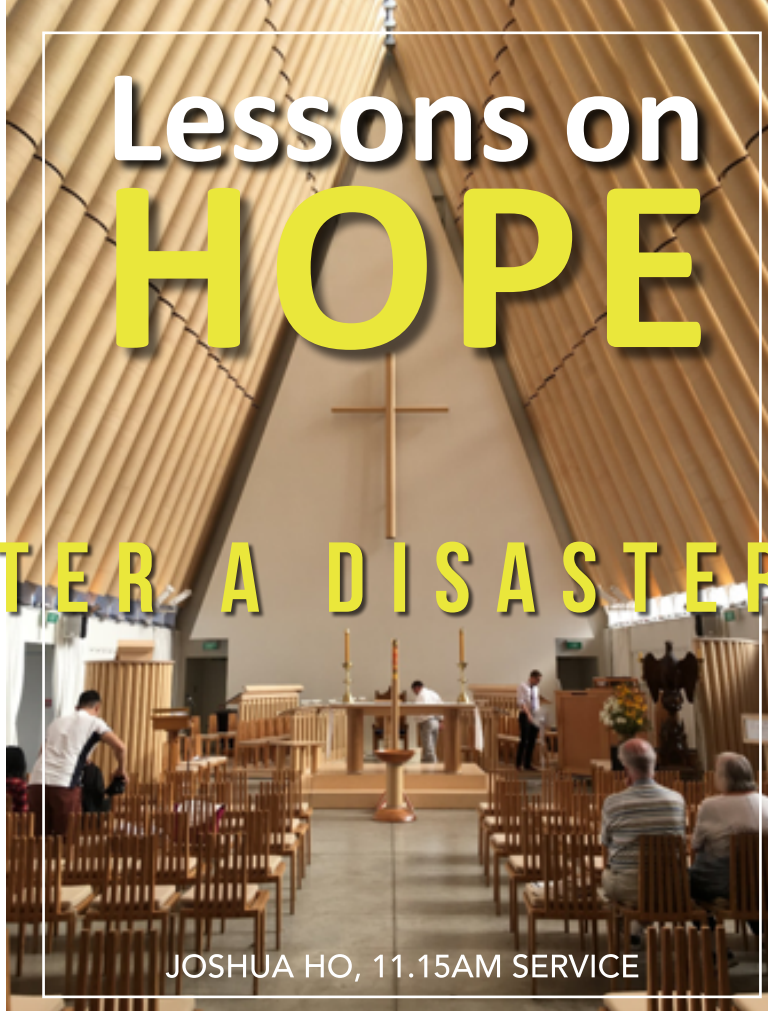


Lessons on HOPE

AFTER A DISASTER II



JOSHUA HO, 11.15AM SERVICE

The interior of The Cardboard Cathedral just before Evensong. Personal photo.

It has been more than three months since most of us last participated in on-site congregational worship services. Everything from cell groups gatherings, prayer meetings, to church services and baptisms have been disallowed due to social distancing measures. As a result, some of us might feel something is amiss in our spiritual lives.

After all, the writer of Hebrews exhorts us to, "...not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near." Hebrews 10:25 (NLT). And Jesus himself says in Matthew 18:20 (NLT), "For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them."

Whilst we are blessed with digital means to continue our fellowship, such virtual connections are hardly a satisfying replacement for attending a church service in person. I for one personally prefer to worship in a church building as it helps me to visualize God's grandeur and majesty. I miss having my senses awakened each Sunday morning by the visceral representations of God's magnificence through the pipe organ and sonorous choir. I miss the hugs and handshakes with fellow congregants, saying the Creeds and The Lord's Prayer in unison with them, and celebrating Holy Communion as one family in Christ.

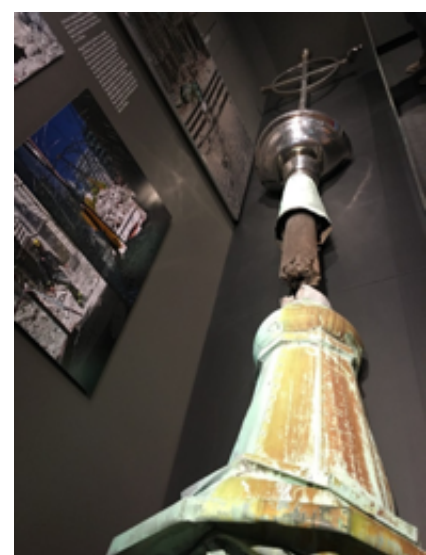
As I reflect upon these massive disruptions to our weekend worship routines, I am constantly reminded of God's provision for our fellow Anglicans

in Christchurch, New Zealand after a major natural disaster rendered their house of worship unsafe for human occupation to this day.

On 22nd February, 2011, a Magnitude 6.3 earthquake devastated the city of Christchurch, New Zealand, killing 185. The earthquake caused massive damage to the iconic Christchurch Cathedral (see Images 2, 3 and 4). When I visited in November 2019, it was still unsafe to enter and the feasibility of restoring the cathedral remained uncertain.



Left: A photo exhibit of the damage to Christchurch Cathedral after the 2011 quake. Personal photo taken at Quake City, Canterbury Museum.



Right: The stainless steel cross that fell from Christchurch Cathedral's spire on the day of the earthquake. Personal photo taken at Quake City, Canterbury Museum.



The damage to Christchurch Cathedral from the 2011 quake remains obvious to this day. Personal Photo.

Despite the seemingly-permanent loss of their original house of worship in a great tragedy, the congregation at Christchurch continues to meet today in the now world-famous Cardboard Cathedral (formally called the Transitional Cathedral), a building that features cardboard and other light materials in its construction to enhance its resistance to future earthquakes (See Image 5).

Attending an Evensong Service at the Cardboard Cathedral provided me with a glimpse into how their congregational life evolved and adapted post-disaster. It was evident that God provided them with a new (and iconic) house where they could gather once again in body and spirit to worship and connect with Him. This reminded me that it is in God's will for us to gather as one like the early church in Acts 2: 42-47.

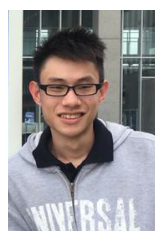
For some of you, the social distancing measures put in place to stem the tide of Covid-19 have made it difficult for you to receive personal, intimate support during the painful moments in the past three months. And the image of the cross that once towered over the City of Christchurch lying on the ground illustrates how you might be feeling at this present moment; frustrated and confused at God, doubting His power and character.

God might seem defeated and powerless this season, but empty churches and fallen steeples are not an accurate depiction of His nature and character. For He has already triumphed over the grave and we are co-victors with Him over forces and entities much darker and sinister than Covid-19. There will come a day when we will live in the midst of His manifest presence, to which our grandest cathedrals and most beautiful liturgies today will pale in comparison. So although times might seem difficult at the moment, I pray that the Spirit will renew our confidence in His unchanging character and help us trust that He will provide in His time.



The Cardboard Cathedral was designed pro bono by Shigeru Ban, the same Japanese architect who designed Onagawa Station in Japan, a picture of which was featured in my previous article on Lessons on Hope After a Disaster which can be found at <https://cathedral.org.sg/hope-stories/lessons-on-hope-after-a-disaster>. Personal Photo.

Like me, you might have felt a seismic change in your spiritual life after not being able to attend an on-site church service for the past three months, but be assured that this situation is only temporal. For just as God aided our brethren in Christchurch, New Zealand to recover from their great disruption, so too will He help us to recover from ours. For just as our brethren in Christchurch met again, so too will we meet again.



Joshua Ho

PRAYER:

Lord God Almighty, we have missed gathering physically with our friends and fellow congregants to worship You in unison as one body of Christ. We thank You for the technological avenues available to us to continue meeting and interacting with one another during this interim period of social distancing.

We pray that as we await for the gradual resumption of church services proper, grant us the patience to wait upon Your perfect timing. Grant those working in our churches the wisdom and strength to plan the resumption of services in accordance with Your will and the safety guidelines given by the earthly authorities You have appointed over us. We pray that in the intervening time, we will continue to meet digitally and safely, being united in Your Spirit and Your Son, Jesus Christ, the Author and Perfector of our faith. Amen