The Jottings of a Farmer 心耕隨筆

15 December 2025

O come, O come, Emmanuel!

Our city has gone through a mournful time in the past three weeks. A ruthless fire in Tai Po has taken away 160 lives and damaged more than a thousand homes. Though Christmas is approaching, our hearts are still heavy. Facing the heavy loss and sadness in our city, we will certainly have a Christmas quite different from previous years. A number of questions may popup in our mind: Why did God allow such a disaster to happen in our hometown? Why God was so indifferent towards the victims in the fire? Why didn't God stop what was happening on that day?

A famous Christmas carol, or more precisely, a hymn for the period of Advent, has come up on my mind. One of the verses is as follows:

O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer,
Our Spirits by Thine Advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

The Hebrew word Emmanuel (עִמָּנוּאֵל) means "God is with us". The hymn's origin could be traced back to the 8th century but has been widely used since the 12th century in Europe. The melody commonly used is beautiful but has a melancholic mood. The tune is so different when comparing to other Christmas carols. Over thousands of years, our human race has been struggling with different sorts of suffering, darkness and sickness. The hymn reminds us that when the promised Son comes, He could release us from the gloomy clouds of night and death's dark shadow. When His guiding radiance shines upon us, our spirit could be cheered up. The question is, it seems that suffering and darkness is still covering our globe long after the advent of Christ. Why? This question may have puzzled believers in the mid-century Europe as it does to us.

Integrity and compassion are our focuses in the current academic year. They form important elements in the teaching of our Christian faith. Our God is an awesome God who always keeps His promises. He kept His promises to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob,

Moses and the Israelites. He kept his promise of salvation to all mankind through the nativity of Jesus Christ. Because of compassion, he came to the world in human vesture in a poor family. Because of compassion, he worked among the poorest during his life ministry instead of the kings, the nobles or the religious leaders of His time. Integrity and compassion formed part of the core of Jesus' teaching.

When we started promoting integrity and compassion at the beginning of the school term, we may not have a deep understanding on them or find any concern with us. After the horrible and unfortunate incident in Tai Po, we may have a deeper understanding and reflection on their importance. Without which could be a sin and could cost the lives of many people. The question is not why God allowed it but the harmful effects of human sins. If the fire-proof nets on the scaffold had never been mixed unauthorizedly with the inflammable nets, many lives may have been spared. If those involved in the construction had compassion, faked certification of the nets and the flammable polystyrene boards may not be used on the site. Perhaps, the tragedy may not have happened. If out of compassion, the fire alarm has not been turned off despite its troublesome, the death toll may not be so unfathomably high.

Human sins could be destructive and caused many to be trapped in the gloomy clouds of night and death's dark shadow. Yet in this unfortunate incident we could still identify the bright side of humanity. The fireman who has sacrificed himself in combatting the fire, the security guard who has stayed inside the building trying his best to inform residences to escape, the domestic helper who has accompanied her elderly master to safety, the donation from the general public including our parents, students and teachers all showing that integrity and compassion can be found among us.

My boys and girls, the tragedy reminds us that if more people are walking in the way of Christ and honouring integrity and compassion, many lives could have been saved. Christmas reminds us of an important message: Emmanuel--God is with us! He comes to us out of compassion and keeping His promise! May His comfort and loving radiance touch the hearts of all those affected by the incident. May His healing power come upon all those who are still struggling for recovery. May his blessing cure the wound of our beloved city. When more people are walking in the light of God and when more people honour integrity and compassion, such tragedy may never happen again.

Emmanuel!

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以馬內利，來臨、來臨!

過去三週，我們這座城市經歷了無比悲痛的時刻。大埔的一場大火奪走了 160 條生命，破壞了上千戶家庭。雖然聖誕節臨近，但我們心中依然沉重。面對這座城市遭受的巨大損失和悲痛，今年聖誕節的氣氛預期與往年截然不同。許多疑問或許會湧上心頭：為什麼上帝要讓我們的城市蒙受這樣的災難？為什麼上帝對火災中的受害者如此冷漠？為什麼上帝沒有阻止這場災難發生？

我突然想起一首著名的聖誕詩歌，或者更準確地說，是一首將臨期的詩歌。其中一節歌詞如下：

清晨日光，懇求降臨，藉主降臨，歡慰眾心；
衝開長夜幽暗愁雲，驅散死亡深沉黑影。

希伯來文「以馬內利」（עִמָּנוּאֵל）意為「神與我們同在」。這首詩歌的起源可以追溯到公元 8 世紀，自 12 世紀以來在歐洲廣為頌唱。詩歌旋律優美動聽，卻又略帶憂傷。與其他聖誕詩歌相比，曲調截然不同。數千年來，人類一直在與各種苦難、黑暗和疾病鬥爭。這首讚美詩提醒我們，當應許之子降臨時，祂能將我們從黑夜的陰霾和死亡的陰影中解救出來。當祂的光輝照耀我們時，我們的心靈就能得到慰藉。但我們難免仍會問：基督已降生多年，為什麼苦難和黑暗似乎仍然籠罩著我們的世界呢？這個問題或許曾困擾著中世紀的歐洲信徒，正如它現時仍困擾著我們一樣。

誠信和同理心是我們本學年培育的重點，亦是我們基督教信仰教導的重要組成部分。我們的上帝是全能的上帝，祂總是信守祂的應許。祂信守了對挪亞、亞伯拉罕、以撒、雅各、摩西和以色列人的應許，祂也信守了透過耶穌基督的降生而賜予全人類的救贖的應許。出於同理心，祂以人的樣式來到世上，出生在一個貧寒的家庭；出於同理心，祂在傳道生涯中，沒有走到當時的君王、貴族或宗教領袖面前，卻與最貧困的人同在，感受貧困大眾的悲苦困厄。由此可見，誠信和同理心就是耶穌基督教導的核心。

學期初開始提及誠信和同理心之心時，我們仍對兩者未有深刻的理解，也未曾想過它們的重要。然而，在大埔發生那場駭人聽聞的悲劇之後，我們或許對它們的重要性有了更深刻的體會和反思。缺乏誠信和同理心，就是聖經中提及的一種罪，

這罪甚至能奪走許多無辜的生命。此刻，我們應該問的不是上帝為何允許慘劇的發生，而在於人類的罪惡對鄰舍帶來的傷害。如果竹棚上的防火網沒有被人以易燃網魚目混珠，或許能及時拯救許多生命；如果參與施工的人員心懷同理心，就不會在工地上使用偽造的防火網證書和易燃的聚苯乙烯板。或許，這場悲劇就不會發生。如果出於同理心，相關人士即使知道火警警報誤鳴或會帶來不便，但也決不會關掉警鐘，或許死亡人數就不會如此慘重。

人類的罪惡可以造成毀滅性的後果，令許多人陷入黑暗的深淵和死亡的陰影。然而，在這場不幸的事件中，我們仍能看見人性的光輝。奮力撲救至犧牲自己的消防員、堅守在樓內竭盡全力勸導居民逃生的保安、陪伴年邁主人安全脫險的外籍家庭傭工、以及包括我們家長、學生和老師在內的廣大民眾的慷慨捐助，都展現了我們身邊不乏仍堅守著誠信和同理心的同行者。

孩子們，這場悲劇提醒我們，如果更多的人能步武基督的道路，秉持誠信和同理心，許多生命本來就不用犧牲。聖誕節提醒我們一個重要的訊息：以馬內利——上帝與我們同在！因著同理心，祂來到我們中間，並信守祂的應許！願祂的安慰和慈愛的光輝觸動所有受災者的心！願祂的醫治大能臨到所有仍在復原中掙扎的傷者！願祂的祝福撫平我們所愛城市的創傷！當更多的人行走在上帝的光明中，當更多的人秉持誠信和同理心生活，這樣的悲劇或許就不會再發生了。

以馬內利！

二零二五年十二月十五日