

Last year, I went to see the movie *Captain Fantastic*. It's a story about a man living off the grid in the wilderness with his six children, educating them with philosophy and extreme physical discipline. There was one scene in the film that really struck me. Shortly after the death of their mother, Ben the dad is forcing his kids to climb a sheer rock face when one of his sons fractures his hand. Ben makes the boy complete the climb by himself without any help, calling out "There is no cavalry! No one will magically appear and save you in the end."

That phrase echoed through my mind over the next few weeks. It felt eerily familiar to me, even though nobody has ever used those words to me that I can remember. But the conviction that "there is no cavalry" – that you're on your own in this world, that nobody is going to come and fix your problems or clean up your mess, that it's up to you to just keep going no matter what pain and sorrow comes your way – that sentiment is somehow part of my core worldview. It's shaped me in fundamental ways through the years. I think it's quite a common mindset, and I wonder if you recognise it in yourself.

And the thing is, it's kind of true. Part of growing up is learning that there's no fairy godmother, no magic wand, no-one who's going to swoop down and make everything alright and kiss it better. We do have to learn to take care of ourselves, to work, and plan, and make hard decisions in hard times. That's what it means to be an adult.

And yet, it's also not true. It's a worldview grounded in wounded trust, a protection against vulnerability. It conditions us not to rely or depend on others, and stops us from getting too disappointed when things go wrong. In short, "there is no cavalry" makes us numb. It helps us to press on when we're in pain, and it also blocks out the joy of loving wholeheartedly, and receiving care from others.

I heard a story recently of someone whose dad, when he was a young kid, called to him to jump into his arms from a top bunk, and then at the last minute stepped aside so he went crashing to the ground. His fall to the ground was meant to teach him that you can't trust anyone in this world.

That father might have had an insight into a small piece of truth about the human condition, but he was profoundly wrong to break his child's trust so cynically. Because while it may be true that people will often let you down, it is also true that there are welcoming, embracing arms in this world and being unable to step into them lessens our humanity. There *are* people we can love and trust in this world. Sometimes, sadly, those arms will not always be our parents'. But they are out there, and they are real. Often imperfect, but real. And if we are traumatised into not believing that, we will be lost, in the core of our souls.

The essence of our faith is to know that *all human bonds of trust are echoes of a God who is 'for us.'* And a God who is so on our side that God has done and continues to do all that is necessary to bring us into God's embrace. The core message of our reading from Romans today is this: "It's not up to you." We don't know how to pray, so God prays in us. We didn't choose God, God chose us. We couldn't reach God, so God became one of us. We can't overcome all the onslaughts and terrors of this world, and ultimately, we can't thwart death. So God draws us into the life of God, makes us one with God, so that no matter what happens to us in this world and beyond, we will never be separated from God's love.

While Ben, the father in *Captain Fantastic*, may have wanted to do his best by his boy by teaching him that "there is no cavalry", he was neglecting the deeper truth of grace. Grace doesn't stop us from experiencing pain, and God doesn't usually turn up and save the day when we're in danger. But grace sits underneath all that we experience whispering "I've got you. You'll be okay." Or, in the beautiful words from Deuteronomy: "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." (Deut 33.37)

The people that Paul was writing to in Rome were suffering terrible persecution. They lived in fear for their lives. To these people, Paul wants to say, "none of this can destroy what matters most, which is God's love for you, and your eternal home in God. Not just after death, but now. In the midst of threat, God is with you, and we can trust this because God has already shown that God will do anything, *anything*, to reach out and take hold of you."

There is no cavalry. In that, Captain Fantastic is right. But there is Calvary. The story at the heart of our faith that says that God's desire to be "for us" is so complete, that in Jesus, God suffers what we suffer, and dies our death, and opens the gates of our hell. If God has already done this for us, there is nothing left that we have to do, or can do, to wrestle our lives into some kind of proper shape. No amount of striving or intensity can save us or help us save the world. It's not up to us. It never was. It never could be. And in the end, it's love that saves, not grim effort in the face of life's harsh realities.

There are so many people today who are suffering unbearable pressure, not only because they face really tough circumstances, but they do so in a world that lacks grace. Our politicians and media commentators knowingly tap into the voice in the back of our heads that says "the reality is, if people can't help themselves, they don't deserve help. There is no cavalry. If they tried harder, and made better choices, they'd be fine." And so those who are struggling to make ends meet, or who live with mental distress, addiction or trauma, not only suffer these conditions, but also shame, isolation, and lack of hope.

Maybe you are someone who feels like you're failing at life, like you've never quite managed to get things together and life isn't working out how you'd hoped. God's word to you this morning is this: God is for you. And even when it seems like the whole world is against you, your spirit is being held safe by an unconquerable love. The truth about your situation is that it's held in grace, not in condemnation.

Or maybe, we are those who feel that we have already received this grace, that we are learning to live our lives trusting in God's goodness. Can we then, also offer this grace to others as a sign of God's greater love? How are we called to reach out with love into a hurting world? We may feel overwhelmed by the pain we see around us, and by the feeling of not knowing what to do, how to 'fix' the problems. But this is not our task. Remember - it's not up to us. But it is our task to love as we are able, to offer to others the grace we have ourselves received and to pray. And when we don't know how to pray, to simply be alongside in silence, letting God's Spirit groan in our weakness.

We do not live in a loveless universe. We do not live in a graceless universe. There is a love that we can trust that is larger than anything that's happening to us right now. It won't just "magically appear to save us in the end." It has already saved us and continues to hold us all in the everlasting arms.