

[1] The Hope That Is In You

St. John's Presbyterian, Mt. Roskill

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Readings: Psalm 71, Luke 9:23-27 & 51, 1 Corinthians 13: 8-13, 1 Peter 3:13-17

Over the previous weeks we have looked at the words and prophecies of a number of the minor prophets and ended last week by considering the words and life of John the Baptist. [2] One of the recurrent themes throughout all of these prophets was the call to righteousness, not as an intellectual construct but as a practical daily way of thinking and of living. What use is faith to us if we cannot live it out and if it makes no difference to our lives on a daily basis? We will now our focus to considering a framework within which living faith will practically happen for us.

Today will focus on 'Hope'. [3] Hope you will remember is one of three vital things that the apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13, tells us will remain throughout eternity. What is hope? What do you hope for? What did you hope for when you were young? How has that changed as you get old? With what hope do parents bring their children to the Lord? With what hope do we look to the future?

I've often heard people tell me that when they were younger they hoped to travel, to find the perfect partner, make lots of money ... as they get older these hopes have often changed, tuned more to the lives of their children and grandchildren ... and staying healthy themselves. I've certainly understood the last one over the last week. How often have I heard, *'I just hope for a bit of peace and rest'*, from right across the spectrum not just from those hard-pressed mums and dads with children to manage.

What is hope? [4] Hope is an expectation for a positive future in some manner particular or general. When one consults a dictionary the definition *"a feeling of expectation and desire for a particular thing to happen"* or likewise is common. More thorough dictionaries note that the archaic understanding of hope was *'a feeling of trust'* as in *'I trust in our relationship and its outcome'*. If one considers this change in definition it reflects that subjective, relativist philosophy of much of the modern world. Gone is any sense of relationship or expectation of a future looking good. Rather hope is now a positive subjective feeling, a feel-good factor, with little or no substance. Let me say unequivocally that the Christian hope is no such thing. Christian hope is based in the absolute person of God, enriched by the experience and wisdom of the past and experienced as it unfolds in our lives and will continue to do so out into eternity. The Christian hope engages us with taking up the challenges of the present and seeing them through the lens of Jesus. To take up our Cross and follow Jesus looking forward to what He will do.

The big picture of Christian hope looks though, not past, but through the immediate to the long term, receiving encouragement and strength on the way. Last week we touched on Paul's words of [5] Romans 8:28, **"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."** This is the big picture. For those who love the Lord (and let's note here that you can't love God without being drawn and called to God,

by God, for His purposes), for those that love the Lord **ALL** things work together for good. In other words, no matter how dark, how miserable, how pointless, how painful, something or some situations might seem to us, God's purposes are behind everything. God is not just working in the things that seem good to us but in all the rest as well. It's easy to praise God when all goes well. It is wise to wait patiently and trustfully to see God's hand at work in His time when things are not so good. All things then have purpose, even if we are not always sure what that purpose will be. We see, says the apostle Paul, as though through a mirror darkly, one day we will see and understand clearly. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

It is revealing to consider the way that Jesus operated. [6] The most poignant example is what Luke tells us of Jesus in chapter 9 of his gospel as He appears to pour cold water on the disciple's parade. The disciples had been out on some of their earliest mission work spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ and calling people to repentance. They have seen large numbers respond. They have seen healings, exorcisms and events that have made them extraordinarily happy. So they should have been. There are times in life of blessing and we should celebrate them. Jesus reminds the disciples to make sure their celebration has the right focus: not what they have seen but rather what it demonstrates of the relationship they now have with their heavenly Father. Turning to the next task Jesus feeds the crowd of over five thousand making a whole lot of people happy! Then He comes back to the disciples to continue their education: enjoy the now because soon your discipleship will have a cost. The disciples believe the hope of generations is being fulfilled. It is. But what they see they don't really understand. In time it will all become clear.

Luke 9:51 tells us that Jesus set His face steadfastly, like flint, toward Jerusalem. One might see this as Jesus looking towards the pain and suffering that was to come. Maybe that's part of the story. Or even to the shame and death on the cross. That too is another part. But more likely He was looking through that to the salvation for all and the glory that was to come. People will make the most incredible sacrifices for a vision, a goal, a dream. In [7] Matthew 13:45-46 Jesus gave the short parable that reveals His thinking: **"... the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."** Jesus, as Paul would speak of his own journey in Philippians 3:14, **"[P]ressed toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God..."**. Or as the writer of the Book of Hebrews would put it so aptly, **"... Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."** Hope helps us to keep a positive focus through the distractions and challenges of the immediate.

Jerusalem was not only the place of suffering but would also be the place of His greatest victory over sin. [8] Jesus knew what was coming but determined to look past it to what would be achieved. That achievement was worth the wait, worth the pain, worth the cost. The hope, the expectation of the outcome and rewards at the end of the journey, not just for Himself but for all of us, and the steps along the way,

gave the necessary impetus for Jesus to do what He did. Hope sees and works toward the reward at the end.

I spoke recently to a men's group about depression and suicide and have been since asked to speak to another couple of larger men's groups. I used to speak regularly to youth and church groups on the same topic. One of the things I have believed for years is that the lack of hope is one of the biggest killers of our generation. [9] The Second World War was the largest scale global war the world has yet witnessed. Millions were transported to countries far from their own in an age of slow transport to fight and, so often, give their lives. Why, even in the darkest of days, did the Allies fight on against Germany when it seemed they were being overrun? The brilliant English Prime Minister Winston Churchill summed it up well when he said to the nation, "**Nourish your hopes, but do not overlook realities.**" The hope of a future peace and freedom was a vision worth fighting for. Churchill was saying that we have to feed and encourage our hopes, our dreams, the vision we have, the future the Lord calls us to, but at the same time to be real about what is ahead. Without the hope, the vision, we forget what we are about. Without realism we can hardly take on the challenges ahead.

[10] In our individual lives, our church life and wider community what hope, what dream, what vision do we have? What are we called to achieve in our lives by the Lord? What gifts and talents (no matter how small or big) has He given us to use and what are we doing with them? What dream has He installed deep in our hearts? What vision do we walk towards? Has our dream become too small because our God is too small or because we have lost focus? Because our God is never too small. He is always able to complete that work He has begun in us. What are we hoping for? And as Churchill would ask, what are we practically doing about it? Are we like the woman who always wanted to be a baker but never got a cookbook or walked next door to the shop she lived next to get ingredients? Or are we like the woman who collected every recipe she could and tried out as many disks and bakery items as she could until she was a brilliant baker, even if she had copious failures along the way. Her hope was realised because she did something and what she hoped for came true. How much more when our hopes and dreams lie in God's will.

For our church [11] we have a simple vision statement "**To be a united Christ-centred church sharing faith, hope and love in our community.**" We make this real in small ways and big as we share faith in worship and work together. Our work in community comes from the heart we have together. Our Op Shop, Community Meal, Mainly Music, Drop-In, Alpha and the like, and our personal efforts only work because of the support we give them. They work as your heart is shared with others, your love and hope is transmitted to those who want to see a brighter future.

What is our hope based on? [12] Our hope is based first and foremost in the character of God; His loving kindness and His faithfulness has towards those He has called to Himself. Secondly, it is based in the reality that God's love and faithfulness is demonstrated in the fact that Jesus came, lived amongst us and died

to take away our sin. Thirdly, it is based in the knowledge that God forgives us as we seek His forgiveness and that forgiven, one day we will arise with Jesus into a new life in eternity. In eternity we will enjoy His presence and each other, forever, with more joy than we can conceptualise. The momentary trials of this life will be forgotten in comparison. And fourthly, our surety is, as the prophets and history demonstrates, God always fulfils what He promises. God does work all things for the good.

This hope then leads us to living out our faith. Consider what happens in the Scriptures. Never be a Judas. Never give up hope. The Lord is bigger than any person, situation or event and the Lord is in control of the big and small. [13] When we are challenged and tired and struggle to see hope Jesus says to us: **“Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest.”** (Matthew 11:28). When the load of this world seems too much we are told Jesus **“will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared.”** (Revelation 21:4) When we don't feel capable God says to us: **“My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak.”** (2 Corinthians 12:9). How do we find strength? Isaiah 40:31 tells us: **“... those who trust in the Lord for help will find their strength renewed. They will rise on wings like eagles; they will run and not get weary; they will walk and not grow weak.”** And we should all know the words of Philippians 4:13, **“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”** Our Hope is that God's power is more than sufficient for now and for the future. This is a reality we can embrace today.

[14] The heroes of faith acted on their hope courageously. Abraham, given the vision of a new world, family, expansion, called to leave everything he had, home, parents, the idols of his parents departed for a new country and life in the hope of God's promise (Genesis 12). Watching Jesus ascend to heaven the disciples must have been filled with an amazing hope, anticipating Jesus' return, the overcoming of the world and death (Acts 1:11). But the angels asked them what they were doing, why they were not getting on with what God wanted. Hebrews 11 outlines great acts of faith by heroes of the faith community. Some of these people were martyred. Yet each looked above their situation, to the future goal at the end. Through their faith they achieved it, never letting go of the hope within that the Holy Spirit implants deep with us. And like Job they, in the flesh, will greet the Messiah.

Hope then is forward looking, forward expecting, based on the reality of God's work in the past and promise for the future. [15] Not based in feeling but in the faithful, reliable character of God and our participation in that relationship. Hope gives us encouragement for the work we have to do now. For the Christian hope is not a feeling, it is expectation. Our hope is founded on Jesus. So be ready, as the apostle Peter encourages us, to **“sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you”**. (1 Peter 3:15) We are ever hopeful because the Lord is the source of hope. We carry that light that Jesus entrusts to us within.

Amen