

The Fifth Sunday of Easter
15-05-2022
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Acts 11: 1-18 Peter explains God's inclusion of Gentiles

Psalms 148 Everything on Earth shall praise God

Revelation 21:1-6 A new Heaven and a new Earth

John 13: 31-35 Jesus tells his disciples he is leaving
He tells them to Love one another.

Introduction

Today on the fifth Sunday of Easter, I would like to focus on the wonderful hope that we have as Christians, because of the Easter events.

And I would like to look at three aspects of this Hope.

Firstly, what is this Hope, as outlined in today's reading from Revelation.
Secondly, how this Hope is for everyone as we heard in today's reading from The Acts of the Apostles.
And finally, one of the ways we are called to share this Hope as outlined in today's reading from John's Gospel.

Hope – A New Heaven and a New Earth

The Book of Revelation is termed an Apocalyptic Book, and the word Apocalyptic is usually used to describe the end times. We probably don't think in general a lot about the end times, as in our modern western culture, we usually see the history of the world as something that continually unfolds.

But the worldview of the bible paints a different picture for us. The Bible begins with creation, God chooses people to be his witnesses, and then God inserts Jesus into history, and in Jesus we look forward to the New Creation.

The Revelation reading today paints such a wonderful picture of the Hope that we have as Christians:-

'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'

I think it is really very hard to imagine a world like the writer of Revelation is describing. I'm sure we would all say we would like a world like that, with no pain or troubles, but it doesn't really match up with the world we see around us. And although we are living 2000 years after the resurrection, the world would not have seemed like that, for those first followers of Jesus either. They had natural disasters, and wars, and illness, and death just like we do today. But in the resurrection of Jesus, they encountered something very different and were given a new Hope in God, which was different than anything that had ever come before. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus their world was turned upside down, in a most dramatic way, for the good of the whole world. Hope for those first Christians was real, and powerful and life changing, and it should still be for us as Christians today.

Just as they experienced the power of Jesus in their lives, we too can experience the power of Jesus in our lives and live with this Hope.

Hope – For all Humanity

In today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles we are assured that this Hope is for all Humanity. The reality of the first followers of Jesus though, is that they were Jews. They came from a particular place in the middle east, and they identified themselves as God's chosen people. Jesus himself was a Jewish man and lived by the laws and customs in which he found himself. The Jews traced their heritage back to Abraham, and right at the start of the Bible, in Genesis, chapter 12 we hear how the whole earth is to be blessed through them. Yet in the Old Testament, the Jewish scriptures, we hear of how again, and again the people of God, turn away from God and want to do their own thing. This still happens with us today, but in Jesus we know we have a way back to God. And in today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles we hear how shocked those first followers of Jesus were that the Holy Spirit had come to those who were not Jews. The Jews were waiting for a Messiah. They were waiting for someone to come to save them, but they hadn't counted on the enormity of God's provision. This Saviour, this Messiah, was not just for the Jews but for all Humanity.

It is only in Jesus that we can find Hope for our world.

Hope – To be Shared through Love

Jesus not only calls us to be people of Hope, Jesus also calls us to be people who share this Hope. Today in John 13:34-35 we hear:-

³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

The word “love” is a very multifaceted word. In the New Testament Greek there are four different words used that we translate as love. We normally associate the word “love” with romantic love, but the “love” being used here is that of commitment, and of self sacrifice, and of care. When Jesus’s followers recalled these words, they would have recalled that Jesus died on the cross for them.

Jesus is calling his followers to love one another. It’s an easy thing to say, but a hard thing to live out in practice. How do we love one another. I believe if we are to have any chance at really loving others, then we first need to experience God’s love for us in Jesus.

Let’s look at an analogy to help us.

Think about filling up a cup with water. You can fill it only so far, right? Once it has been filled to the brim, what happens when you try to add more water to it? It overflows, of course. The same is true of a sponge that, submerged in water, becomes so saturated it can no longer absorb and begins to shed what cannot swell it any further.

Can we apply this scientific truth to the human spirit? Can we imagine someone becoming so filled up, so saturated with something, that she or he can’t take in any more? Like a filled-up cup that can only overflow onto others, beginning to fill them?

We can only share this Jesus-like love, if we know this Jesus-like love.

For those who knew Jesus best, it was his love that produced their love for others. It was like water overflowing from the filled-up glass. Jesus’ love filled them up, and yet he kept on loving them, pouring more love into them, so Jesus’ love could overflow onto others.

In the same way, Jesus’ love fills us up so we can let the continuing love that God sends to us, overflow onto others.

And we are called to do this for a reason. So that others might also come to know the Hope that Jesus can bring into our lives.

Conclusion

The Christian faith is one of Hope. It is of God’s revelation to us in Jesus. This hope provides us with a firm basis on which to live our lives. If we first, know, and believe, and trust in God’s love for us, in Jesus, then we will be enabled to pass on that love.

And as we pass on God’s love, we do it so that others may in turn, see God’s love, and be enabled to have the Hope that Jesus offers. Amen.