

Reflection - Easter Day
09/04/2023
St Cuthbert's Anglican Church – Tweed Heads

Acts 10: 34-43	Peter testifies about Jesus God accepts all through his death and resurrection
Easter Anthem	Jesus conquers death, All made alive in Christ
Colossians 3: 1-4	Set your mind on things above
Matthew 28: 1-10	Jesus is risen from the dead and appears to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary

Introduction

Today is the great celebration of the Christian Church. Easter is the pinnacle and centerpiece of the Christian faith. In our Anglican tradition, the season of Lent, and the observance of the events associated with Holy Week, are used to prepare us for the Celebration of Easter.

Today I would like to explore the events of that first Easter, and how these events have provided, and continue to provide “Hope” for us, as Christians today.

What is Hope?

Firstly, what is hope?

Two of the definitions in the Macquarie Dictionary are:-

“To have an expectation of something desired” and “Confidence in a future event”

As we can see from these definitions “Hope” is more than just wishful thinking. “Hope” is based on confident expectation, and this is not something we generally just make up.

“Hope” and “Faith” are sometimes used interchangeably, although I think “Faith” has a more present and active sense about it, whereas “Hope” is about our expectations for the future. The writer to the Hebrews (11:1-3) uses them together well:-

¹Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

² Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. ³ By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.”

Christian “Faith” is the belief that, even though we are cut off from God by our fallen human nature, God loves us, and through Jesus we can be reconciled to God.

Christian “Hope” is that this oneness with God cannot be taken away from us. It is something we can hold onto and live into. Christian “Hope” gives our lives meaning and purpose, beyond our own selfish desires, to a place where true fulfillment can be found.

During this last week, I witnessed some very clear evidence of Christian “Hope”. I visited a lady in palliative care who was not really responsive. Her daughter was by her side. Her daughter told me of how they would sit together and share about the Christian faith and what they had learned in church, week by week. The daughter had hope for the future, even though her mother’s physical death was imminent.

When we think about the first Easter, we hear of the challenges those first followers of Jesus faced. In Matthew’s gospel today we hear how the women who went to the tomb, and experienced the risen Jesus, were overcome with “Fear” and “Great Joy”. The resurrection was not something they expected, but it was the defining event that led them to be enabled to live with great “Hope”.

“Hope” is not the absence of fear or strife in our lives, but rather, “Hope” is something to sustain us through the challenges.

Christian Hope depends on God

Christian “Hope” can only be formed when we place all of our Faith and Trust in what Jesus has done for us.

In her book, “Hope has its Reasons”, Rebecca Manly Pippert, begins with three chapters entitled, 1. The Problem with the World is Me, 2. The Lie that We’re OK, and 3. The Lie that We’re in Charge. It’s clear from this beginning that if we look only within ourselves for hope, then the hope we will find is unlikely to satisfy us. Much popular culture and writing about living well implores us to look within. We hear things like, “be true to yourself”, “you create the life you desire”. Usually this results in nothing but hollow emptiness. If we are going to find hope, real hope, we need to find it beyond ourselves.

As human beings, we are all imperfect. If hope is to come from anything, it needs to come from something greater than ourselves. The first followers of Jesus, found this hope in Jesus.

After they witnessed the resurrection, they had hope because Jesus promised that they, like him, would rise again.

We hear Jesus tell the women today:-

‘Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.’

And see Jesus, they did. And experience Jesus, they did. The rest, as they say, is history. From a backwater of the Roman Empire, Christianity spread like wildfire. The “Hope” that the first followers of Jesus experienced, enabled them to share that same hope with others, and Christianity continued to be shared.

Christian “Hope” is deeply grounded in the person of Jesus. I believe much of the hopelessness we see in our society today is a result of taking the hope Jesus offers out of the picture, and not replacing it with anything other than our own human desires.

Christian Hope - Earthly and Heavenly

Christian hope, of course, is something that is meant to be shared. Christian Hope has both earthly and heavenly components. It is not either/or, but both/and.

The spiritual side of our Christian “Hope” cannot be understated. As Christians we believe in a God who created all there is, from nothing. God is Supernatural, and that goes without saying. As Christians we believe that God sent Jesus into the World, and in the death and resurrection of Jesus we can be reconciled to God. And the Hope is that once we are reconciled, we will be a part of God’s Kingdom and live with God forever.

Christian hope though, is not just about believing something about God, so that when you die, you go to heaven.

Interestingly, heaven was not something that the first Christians dwelt much on. They were more interested in telling others about the “Good News” that Jesus offered for the here and now. They were more interested in following Jesus in their own lives. Now heaven, life after death, was of course an expectation that they had, but in Jesus, heaven had come down to earth. The new heaven and new earth described in the book of Revelation is coming, but we are part of the body of Christ now, bringing this new reality into place by our actions, here and now. In theologian Tom Wright’s Book “Surprised by Hope”, we are reminded that the role of the church is not to stop at saving

souls, but rather we must anticipate the eventual renewal of our world, by working for God's kingdom in the wider world, and bringing healing and hope in this present life.

So Christian "Hope" is about our future resurrection with Jesus, but it is also about living into it, in this world, here and now.

Conclusion

Just two days ago we commemorated the death of Jesus on Good Friday. We had a very solemn service tracing the steps of Jesus' death on the cross. If this had been the end of the story, I believe Jesus would have been smaller than a footnote in human history, a death like so many others which came with Roman occupation. But Good Friday was not the end of the Story. On the third day the Gospel writers tell us that Jesus rose from the dead. Christians down the ages have come to believe this, and it has enabled them to live with great "Hope".

In Paul's letter to the Romans (6:3-4), we hear how Christian baptism is inextricably linked to the death and resurrection of Jesus:-

"³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

Christian "Hope" gives us something to look forward to. It gives us a newness of life which surpasses anything we might find on our own.

I pray today, that as we celebrate the resurrection, we will be enabled to live with this great Hope, and we will be enabled to share this Hope, with those around us. Amen.