

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera QLD

1st December 2024 – First Sunday in Advent

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

HOPE FOR THE WORLD

Christmas is a time of hope. I'm pretty sure that if you were to walk into one of our busy shopping centres right now and say that to people passing by, from most you would get a pretty strong, 'yes absolutely' in response to that statement. A time of hope for what? That you will be able to find and buy the right present for someone? That all your plans for the Christmas celebration will come together? Hope the travel plans of yourself or your loved ones will all work out, and that they won't be disrupted by the seemingly inevitable airline strikes which happen at this time of the year? Hope that as the extended family gather around the Christmas table everyone will be happy and get on well, and that there will no comment or incident which sparks a major falling out between family members? Hope that this Christmas will be a time of pleasant experiences now and happy memories for the future? I suspect that this is what many people will be thinking of when they say that Christmas is a time of hope.

What are your hopes for this Christmas?

There are a couple of things to pick up as we consider that question for both ourselves and others. The first is that this time which the world often refers to as the 'Christmas period', we call Advent. As Christians it's the time when we remember and focus on the hope that God's people had for thousands of years that God would send a Saviour to them, to bring them all back to Him. And as we remember the hope they had in the past, we also look forward with hope to the future when this Saviour will come again to finally bring us to God.

It is also good for us to think about what is 'hope'? How would you define it? In general usage it could be a desire, or a wish, 'I hope you feel better soon'. 'I hope it all

works out well for you'. Sometimes it is based on the circumstances or the odds before us, things which make us believe the desired outcome is possible; 'given the current figures it is hoped things will turn around very shortly'. Watching the news the other night, no doubt because I was watching with this theme in my head, it seemed that the end of every news story was based around hope; it is hoped they will recover/that the perpetrators will soon be caught/that things will continue to improve. In many ways we live our lives in hope, looking to the future. Our lives need hope. Our world needs hope.

For Christians, when we speak of hope it is a bit different. For us, 'hope' is based on God's love and faithfulness. It is based on what He has done in the past, which gives us hope, or through faith, certainty, in what He will do in the future. The word 'hope' is used many times in the Bible, but other words are used also which bring the same thought. In the second reading we have for today, from 1 Thessalonians, Paul uses the words 'pray' and 'may' to express the hopes he has that God will allow him to visit this young church, that their love for each other will continue to grow, and that they will be made pure and innocent before God. By using these words to describe 'hope', especially the word, 'pray', Paul is focusing on where our hope lies, in whom it is based; not in ourselves our own actions, or on other people or circumstances around us, but in God and His love for us.

Advent is a time of hope. Hope for the world. Hope for all people. It's a time when we remember what God has done and continues to do for us. We now live in the time of Advent; the time of now but not yet which Paul refers to in our reading. It's the time when Jesus has come into the world as God had planned and promised, He has given His life for all people, and He has risen again so that as He lives we also may live. In faith we live in the hope of God's promise fulfilled.

But at the same time as we look back on the hopes which have been fulfilled in the past, we also now live in the hope of God's love and faithfulness, and look forward to

the new life we have with Him being fully fulfilled in the future. The hope *has been* fulfilled. The hope is what we are living in *now*, and the hope *will be* fulfilled in the future. That's what Paul is talking about in this reading. Because of what God has done for us in Jesus we can now pray to God trusting in His love for us and His power to do all He has promised. We can also know that our love for God and others continues to grow each day when we put our faith in Him. And we know that when we come before God our hope means that in Jesus we will be perfect and innocent before Him. We need hope, past, present, and future. And in God we find that hope.

Hope for the world. Hope for our lives. The hope we all need, and which people look for in so many different places, right now. What does this hope God brings mean for us right now?

It's the hope that brings healing. The healing which only forgiveness from Him can give us; the healing which lifts off our guilt, our disappointments with ourselves, the hurts we find it hard to live with and move through, as we do what He calls us to do and lay these on Jesus on the cross. The healing which also comes when we forgive those whom we feel we can't possibly forgive alone, so that relationships can be restored, or at least moved on from. The hope of forgiveness, both received and given, as we look to the birth of this baby who grew up to be our Saviour on the cross.

It's the hope also of knowing that God is with us in all things in our lives. The One who created the universe cares about each one of us so much that not only does He number the hairs of our heads, but He sent His Son to die for us. If God shows His love for us this much, how can there be any limits to His love? It's interesting that at this time of the year, everyone is perhaps thinking about hope a bit more than usual. But where is that hope centred? It might be in the gifts we hope to give or receive, the success of our celebrations, a relationship we hope either takes off or is rekindled. All good things, but if we place the hope of our lives in them it will fall short. It's interesting that many of the

Christmas movies which get run out each year at this time, often have some bit of ‘magic’ at the end of them that offer hope that the world will be a better place. But what is that hope based in?

At times we as people perhaps look too hard to see what is right before us. The hope the world, and each one of us, needs is to be found in this baby who will fill the manger, grow up to die on the cross, and, finally, leave the tomb empty. In Him is the hope of forgiveness. The hope of healing. The hope of purpose. The hope that this life with its fragile mortality is not the end for us, but that a new life does wait for us beyond. Advent is a time of hope; hope of remembering God’s faithfulness in the past, of living in the sure certainty of God’s love right now, and hope for the future lived eternally with Him. May we know this hope in our lives in the midst of all that is going around us right now. And we pray that in and through us God will work to lead all people to know this hope in Him also. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- What do you hope for this Christmas? Are your hopes for yourself, for others, or both? Can you identify what you base these hopes in?
- What do people place their hopes in, for a better world and a better life, both at this time of the year and at other times?
- What are some of the promises God has kept in the past which make us sure that we can base our hope in Him? Are there some which you think are particularly significant?
- What does it mean to you that, in Jesus, God brings hope for the world? In what areas of your life is this particularly important? How would your life be different without this hope?

Pray: thank God for giving hope to us in our lives, and hope to the whole world, through Jesus coming into the world. Pray that we continue to both live in and share this hope in our lives every day.

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01.12.2024*