

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

19th April 2020 – Second Sunday of Easter

I PETER 1:3-9

LIVING IN HOPE

On just this past Thursday our Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, addressed our nation once again about the Covid19 epidemic. He's done this many times recently, but this occasion, if not for the first time then at least in the strongest way yet, he spoke about what is beyond; he gave us hope. Our leaders have been very reluctant previously to give us any sort of timeline or indicators to look for as to when things will get back to 'normal', at least in some way. And, rightly so, they don't want to give us false hope. But now it seems things are moving along to the point where Mr. Morrison can name a possible time frame for when a change might occur in our restrictions. So, he said that in four weeks, if certain indicators occur, restrictions may be lifted in some way. There are still a lot of questions, like will we be allowed to meet together for worship, and will we be able to meet up again with those of you across our border? Essentially, we have questions about what our life will look like, both with the immediate easing of restrictions, and then even when we get back to the point where all restrictions are gone. What will life be like for us then; will it be similar to what it was at the beginning of February, or quite different? But still, even with these questions, knowing things may soon change for the better helps us to some degree to live in hope that we will get through what we are going through now, even though we are perhaps not quite sure what things will look like then.

Our theme for last Sunday, Easter Sunday, was, 'A New Hope'. In looking at the story of Jesus' resurrection, this new hope is what we are given; the new hope that by overcoming death and the grave Jesus not only opened the way for our relationship with God to be restored, but He also showed that God has the power to help us get through everything.

Now, in these weeks following Easter, we look at what this means for us; the ‘so what?’ of Easter. All three of our Bible readings for today look at this; in Acts Peter reminds us of the promises of God to work in the world and save His people; in the Gospel reading from John we hear the story of Thomas and the other disciples being witnesses to Jesus really being alive; and in the reading we are looking at more closely today, from 1 Peter, we read about what this faith and hope means for us in our lives. In a very short way, the whole meaning of the Easter event is summed up in one sentence from Peter here; ‘God is so good, and by raising Jesus from death, he has given us new life and a hope that lives on.’ (*1 Peter 1:3b CEV*). Because Jesus rose for us, we are not just living in hope, we are living in hope. Or, perhaps to emphasise it more; we are living in the hope we now have in Jesus.

The hope that we have in Jesus is different not only to the hope our Prime Minister gave us this week, but to any kind of earthly hope we are given. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, our earthly hopes are often desires or wishes; if this happens, then The hope we have in God is a promise, not a desire; because Jesus died and rose for us, now The hope we live in through Jesus is not a desire or a wish, but a promise and a guarantee.

The second way this new hope we live in is different from earthly hope, is that we know what it is; it is new life with God. It is new life now, and in the future. In his letter here Peter talks about how we will go through hard times in our life, and we certainly know that right now, but that God will help us through these things. But also, there is the promise that not only is God with us and helping us through things right now, but we know what the end will be. Peter writes to us; ‘God has something stored up for you in heaven, where it will never decay or be ruined or disappear.’ (*1 Peter 1:4 CEV*) Once again, many times with our earthly hopes and plans we aren’t sure exactly how things will turn out, how they will look. God makes it very plain for us throughout the Bible, and especially through Jesus; faith in Him means we

live in the new life of His hope now, and we can be sure that new life with Him forever is ours also.

It is great that we can have some hope in how we will come out of the situation we are in right now. We can be thankful for that and be thankful for our leaders and how they have led us through these times. But, even more than this, as we both look back on and move forward from the great news of Easter, we can absolutely thank God for the hope that we now live in through Him. A hope which transforms our lives each day by knowing that we are saved. A hope which reminds us that we go through nothing now without the power of our loving God being with us. A hope that guarantees to us that not only do we have this new life with Him now, but we will also have a great new life with Him one day in heaven.

We are now living in hope because we have faith; faith based in knowing that we are saved and that we are loved. Let this hope continually change and transform your life so that you share this hope with others also, and in faith allow this hope to give you strength and confidence in all you go through now, and the new life that will be yours in the future. Amen.

Prayer: Lord God, we thank you for the great and glorious hope we have in you. Help us to know it, help us to live in it. Enable our faith to grow and be strengthened by all we now go through. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY AND REFLECTION:

You are invited to look further at this reading and the themes of this day either by yourself, or with those you are with at the moment, by going through the following reflections and questions:

1. What Does Having God's Hope Mean for You

Hope is such a strong theme throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament God gives His people hope through His promises, and then again and again makes them come true. Jesus gives

people hope of a new and better life through His ministry, and then guarantees this hope to us all in His death and resurrection.

- Reflect on or discuss: what does having hope in God and His promises mean for you? How would your life be different without this hope?

2. Faith Tested by Fire

Peter talks in this reading about how our faith is ‘tested in a fire’ (verse 7). He uses the image of how gold is heated so that the impurities rise to the top and can be taken out, with only pure gold remaining. In the same way as our faith is tested it becomes stronger also. This is another theme which is often found in the New Testament.

But it is also important to note that he is not talking about our faith being tested by disasters or pandemics, or by questions of, ‘where is God in all of this?’. The type of testing referred to here is us being persecuted, mocked, or put down because of our faith.

- We are thankful that we don’t live in a nation where we are legally persecuted because of our faith. Do you though at times feel set apart from others, judged, or looked down on because of your faith?
- If so, how do you deal with these things? Share any ways this affects you, and how you deal with it, with the people with you.

3. Are We All ‘Doubting Thomas’?

The Gospel reading for today, John 20:19-31, is about the well-known story of the disciple Thomas and his scepticism when his fellow believers told him they had seen Jesus alive again. ‘I won’t believe’, said Thomas, ‘until I see and touch Him myself’. We know that Jesus did come to Thomas, who then made his confession of faith.

Since then, to be called a ‘doubting Thomas’ is to say that someone is weak in their faith; not just being able to trust in something without concrete proof. But really, even in our faith, are there times when we are like Thomas?

- Are there times when you find it hard to believe in those things which are core to our faith? What can get in the way of believing all we are told?
- Remember that Jesus didn’t condemn or judge Thomas for his doubts but came to help him to have faith. In what ways does God come to us today to help us have faith in Him?

4. A New Life Now, and Hope in the Life to Come

Through our faith in God and all He has done for us in Jesus, we have peace and joy in our lives now, and hope and confidence as we move out to the future.

- As we move on and out, how can we show what these things mean to us by how we live our lives?