

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera QLD

25th February 2025 – Second Sunday in Lent

Romans 4:18-25

HOPE THAT HELPS

Hope, like love perhaps, makes the world go round. It keeps us going in hard times. Life isn't always smooth sailing, so when things get down, or rough, or hard for us, we need hope that things will get better. And that hope quite often has an object, in particular a thing or person; someone or something we can look to and have trust in that they or it will cause things to turn around so that our hope will be justified. Not surprisingly, this is very often the theme and plot of books, movies, even songs. Things look utterly hopeless, and then the tall quiet stranger rides into town, or the Mandalorian comes along (like all Star Wars productions that really is a Western anyway), or in *The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe* we constantly hear the hope that 'Aslan is coming', or Maverick flies in to save the day. If you think about the stories, in any form, which you really like, there's a good chance that they will be about hope in overcoming adversity; a hope centred in someone or something which didn't let them down but enabled them to pull through to the brighter light and better day on the other side.

And that's no surprise, when we think about it, because we all need that encouragement, inspiration, stability, which comes from hope. I find it interesting to hear and see how people find this hope and share it today when many have moved away from any form of faith. They want to trust what is very tangible to them, rather than what isn't, but when things get hard, or you get down, what you see or experience might not give you much reason for hope. But people need hope. So, we hear and read sentiments like, 'our thoughts are with you', 'sending positive thoughts your way'. At non-Christian funerals the Lord's Prayer and Psalm 23 pop up, because really, deep down, I think that people know they need a hope which is greater than what is

around them now, but they struggle to really see sometimes what that is. So instead, we say things, and send thoughts, and recite words we might not necessarily fully accept or believe in, with the very well-meaning sentiment of, 'I hope that helps'.

Hope that helps. When we put these words together, they are often a desire, a wish, said more to share the encouragement that things will turn out well, rather than the certain knowledge that they will. Hope that helps. How different are those words when we say them on the basis of our faith in God, a faith which includes the fulfillment of all the promises He has made and kept to us, and a faith which is based on Jesus coming to die and rise again for us. Hope that helps. These words roll out differently said from the basis of our faith, don't they? And that is the hope, through our faith in God, which Paul is writing about here in Romans chapter 4. You most likely know the situation Paul is basing this on. God had promised Abraham and Sarah as many descendants as the stars in the sky and grains of sand in the desert, and many years later, when they were both well past the normal time for having children, God came and made the promise to them again. And of course, it did come true, with Sarah in her old age having a son, Isaac. It is this faith in God's promises, Paul says, which kept Abraham close to God, and saw him not just receive that gift of being the father of God's people, but also God's forgiveness and new life through Jesus' death and resurrection, something which was still many years away from happening. Faith is hope in God's promises, even when everything else seems to be against that.

But it's interesting, if we know the story of Abraham and Sarah, to read the first half of this reading, versus 18-20. Paul writes about Abraham's faith never doubting or wavering, even when he and Sarah were old and everything seemed hopeless. But if you go and read this story in Genesis, you might come away with a different impression. At one stage when Sarah failed to become pregnant after a number of years, she had Abraham sleep with her slave, Hagar, so that Hagar could bear a child for them. What could go wrong? Quite simply, everything that

could go wrong did, with eventually Hagar and her son Ishmael being put out into the wilderness for sake of family harmony. Abraham had doubts, he struggled sometimes with the hope he put his faith in, he thought it might be a good idea to try to do things his way since God's didn't seem to be working. Sound familiar?

What do we do with this then? On the basis of what we know about the story of Abraham and Sarah, how do we deal with what seems like an inconsistency in how Paul is presenting their faith and hope in God? There many different theories and takes on this, but, for me, I think this gives us even more hope, because while Abraham's faith wasn't always perfect, in fact it was at times as fickle as our own, that's not what determined how God acted, and that's not how God remembers it. The story of Abraham's faith, and that faith now being held up as an example for us of how hope is fulfilled, show us that the certainty of our hope is not based on our faith, but on the One who our faith is in.

The writer of this letter, Paul, knew very well the necessity of having hope in the face of everything which comes against us. Living in a time when the Church was violently persecuted, being in prison when he wrote many of his letters, and ultimately being executed because of his faith, Paul knew very well that hope is holding onto God's promises despite all evidence to the contrary. And while our faith, like Abraham's, even like Paul's, is not always perfect, the One in who we place our hope is strong, and constant, and reliable, and dependable for us.

Hope that helps. That's the hope we all need in our lives, isn't it? Not the hope which we might express as a well-meaning sentiment- and I do that to; it's something we say when we don't know what else to say - but hope which is a sure certainty in which we can put our faith. In our lives we need hope. We need hope in the face of personal struggles, like health concerns for ourselves or others, worries about the future or the present for us or our loved ones,

relationship struggles or breakdowns. We need hope as we look at our society, and our world, especially in the light of what we are often presented with; how did things get to this point? How do we get out of it? What is the future? What hope do we all have? We need hope as we look at our relationship with God; at our struggles, our doubts, the times we move away, the pressures of a society which is sometimes not just dismissive of our faith but openly against it. Our lives are like the basis of so many of those stories, songs, and movies; when what we experience, and see, and feel, all seems to be hopeless, we need someone in whom we can have a sure and certain hope.

We need, hope that helps. And despite the fact that as people we often look for this hope in many different ways and places, there is only One in whom we can truly find it. It is our faith in God which gives us our hope. A faith based on God keeping His promises of love and care for His people from the beginning. A faith based ultimately in the love of God in sending Jesus to die and rise again for us. Hope is the future dimension of our faith; it is what our faith in God leads to. Don't take it for granted. In all you go through, hold on to that hope. In all you think, say, and do, share that hope. And as you live your life each day, find joy, peace, strength, and certainty through your faith in God, and in the hope that helps. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

- What are some things which people, and even we ourselves, put our hope in today? Do we sometimes put our hope in things or people in ways which are unhealthy and unhelpful for us and for others?
- Are there any things or situations which make you lose hope? Any times when you feel particularly hopeless? How do you face or get through those times?
- Think about the hope, sure and certain, which we have because of our faith in God: what does that hope mean to you in your life? Can you imagine what it would be like if you didn't have it (perhaps this was true for you at some stage in your life)? How does faith in God give you a hope that helps get you through tough things which you face in your life?

Pray: thank God for the hope we have because of our faith in Him. Ask Him to help us to hold onto that hope no matter what we face in our life.

*Pastor Andrew R. Koehler
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