

Hope – Advent time.

Last week our advent theme was faith and Jo spoke about the importance of Faith in our lives. Today we have lit the advent candle representing Hope.

Hope seems something of a scarcity these days. Every day we are bombarded with news of trouble. There seem to be so many things happening in this world that may give us a bleak view of the future. It's like everything is geared up to rob us of hope. Hope for mankind, hope for a peaceful life, hope for world peace, hope for the planet, hope for a long happy healthy life.

At the risk of depressing you all here are a few things we see every day that may cause us to lose hope.

- **PP Slides of war, global warming, disease, etc**

Today I want to explore what hope is. After all if the world (or shall we say Satan) is trying to rob us of hope we would do well to do something about securing hope in our lives. So let's discuss what hope is, what difference can we make in securing hope as a feature in our lives?

In general people often use the word hope to describe some longed-for, but probably unlikely event— in this instance hope is essentially wishful thinking.

- **(Birthday wish)**

Some people make birthday wishes where they wish for something that may or may not happen. Perhaps to marry a handsome man or a beautiful woman, or come into a pot of money. Some people hang the washing out in the morning **hoping** that it won't rain before they get home. There is no assurance about this. They may not have checked the weather forecast and didn't realise storm clouds were just over the horizon.

But today when we are talking about hope we are not talking about a wishful thinking kind of hope.

Another way we may think about is when people are at their lowest. We often say they have “lost hope,” as though the individual was losing their ability to hope. However, such statements say more about the *source* of their hope than the *strength* of their hope.

What sorts of things might people be hinging their hope on?

How much do we rely on the state of

- **our Health,**
- **our finances,**
- **our friendships,**
- **security,**

and other things that may provide a *ray* of hope?

- **Hope such as this is like the flame of a candle which flickers in the wind and eventual goes out.**

All these things that we may hope for can change in an instant. Placing our hope in these things is insubstantial and temporary. They probably won't last or if they seem to last for some time they never feel quite as secure as you would like and even if we have plenty of them such as money, or friends we then spend an awful lot of time worrying about them.

It can be said that there are two types of people.

- **There's the cup half empty people and**
- **the cup half full people.**

Some people naturally seem to have a hope for the future and take a positive attitude to things while others in the same circumstances see it differently with impending doom rather than opportunities to come.

- **(Both cups)**

There are many people today who are hopeless. (By that I mean they feel that they are without hope in their lives) They see awful things happening in the world

around them, or they contemplate their own inevitable death, and they are filled with despair.

There are other people who are very optimistic. They look around them and see the beauty of creation and are filled with awe. They look for the best in others and try to help their fellow man; they try to make the world a better place, and in many cases succeed. They are confident that, in spite of it all, everything will turn out all right one way or the other. This is very admirable and often encouraging. Although sometimes if we're honest they can be a bit annoying. However even for these folk, this is not necessarily a "living" hope because it is often based on unfounded optimism.

On occasions, during the most bleak and desperate of times, when people are on the edge of giving up, we urge people to realize that there is "light at the end of the tunnel". And so often there is if they will just hold on long enough.

- **(Light in tunnel slides)**

We have other phrases like "it's darkest before the dawn", "spring follows winter", Meaning things will get better when you're at your lowest point.

Ultimately though whether we survive the current storm, or if this time we make it through the night to see the sun rise in the morning, there will come a time when our experience of this world will end. Whether we have a short life or a long life, a life of ease or hardship, happiness or grief, we all have to face the reality of what comes next. We all die. Apart from divine intervention, things will NOT turn out all right. Ultimately, every person on earth will die and will face judgment; for those apart from Jesus Christ, it will not turn out well.

Thankfully, for those who have accepted Jesus as their saviour things are different.

When we are born into the family of God, we are given a living hope.

- **John 3:16–21**).

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹This is the verdict: light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

From this passage we can see that the difference for Christians is as obvious as choosing the difference between light and darkness, life and death, Hope and despair. Given a choice (and we all have this choice) it seems pretty obvious which choice we should make.

- **So to summarise so far,**
 - 1. some people are hopeless**
 - 2. some people are hopeful but they have no lasting reason to be**
 - 3. some people have a living hope, that is, a hope that is founded in the reality of the promises of God.**

So as Christians we need to grasp hold of what it truly means to have hope. For us hope has a different meaning. It is not a wishy washy dream for the future. It is a hope based on truth and the assurance of God.

- **Biblical Hope is not wishful thinking... Biblical hope is not wishful thinking or an optimistic outlook; rather, it is a confident expectation based on the certainty of God's Word that as He has anchored us in the past, so He will in the future. - David Wilkerson**

- **Romans 5:1-5 JB Phillips**

Faith means the certainty of God's love, now and hereafter

5 ¹⁻² *Since then it is by faith that we are justified, let us grasp the fact that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have confidently entered into this new relationship of grace, and here we take our stand, in happy certainty of the glorious things he has for us in the future.*

³⁻⁵ *This doesn't mean, of course, that we have only a hope of **future** joys—we can be full of joy **here and now** even in our trials and troubles. Taken in the right spirit these very things will give us patient endurance; this in turn will develop a mature character, and a character of this sort produces a steady **hope**, a hope that will never disappoint us. Already we have some experience of the love of God flooding through our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us.*

Thankfully we know that God is a God of Grace. He is a forgiving God. He wants us to have a right relationship with Him. That's why He sent Jesus. So because of this Grace which has been proven through Jesus and the numerous examples of His forgiveness we know we have reliable promises on which to base our faith. That's why we have a Hope that is secure. Our faith is built on this sure foundation of faith.

This hope we have is not just a hope for some distant future, for the day when we die and go to heaven but a hope to help us in our daily lives.

We have many promises from God that we can rely on. Here are just a couple that should fill us with hope as we follow Jesus and rely on God for our daily strength.

- **Is 41:10** So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

- **Jer 29:12+13** Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

There are many like these in the bible. These are the sorts of promises God has given us to help us cope with our daily struggles.

In addition to promises there are also many prophecies that God has given us in the bible that have already been fulfilled in the person of Jesus. These prophecies were made hundreds of years before Christ and were fulfilled when Christ the Messiah, the Saviour, came.

- **Micah 5:2**

*'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.'*

- **Isaiah 7:14**

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

- **Isaiah 9:6&7**

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,*

*establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and for ever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.*

We can be assured that because God is faithful and completely reliable and since many prophecies have been fulfilled already so the ones that are still to be completed will also come to fruition.

So although life is tough, and we all face challenges, dark times and tunnel periods, we need to be patient and endure these times grasping on to the promises God has given us. As we do this He will develop our character, mature us in our faith and develop hope within us.

And now let's discuss the hope to come. As part of advent we look not only at the coming of Jesus as a baby but also look forward to His return when he comes to fulfil the next stage of the prophecies and the promise Jesus made. He is coming again.

Jesus said he would return for us.

- **John 14:1-3**

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am

And the angels also declared a prophecy that Jesus would return.

- **Acts 1: 10&11**

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here

looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.'

With so many prophecies and promises already fulfilled we can rest assured that those still to be fulfilled will also be fulfilled.

As I have been preparing for this morning my view on hope has developed. I used to think of Hope as something we have. Something we must do, something that relies on us. But it's better than this. The hope that we have as Christians is different. This Hope is a gift from God. Our completely reliable and Faithful God has given us Hope. Satan wants to rob us of this Hope. To completely destroy us but God gives us Hope both for now and for the future. He wants to restore us not destroy us.

- **So to summarise**
- **Hope is not wishy washy wishful thinking**
- **Hope is not just about some future goal**
- **Hope is also for the here and now**
- **Hope doesn't depend on us**
- **Hope is a gift from God**
- **Hope is a reliable thing based on the assurances of a completely faithful, truthful, loving God.**

If there is one thing we have to share, one thing we have to offer the world it is Hope.

Pray